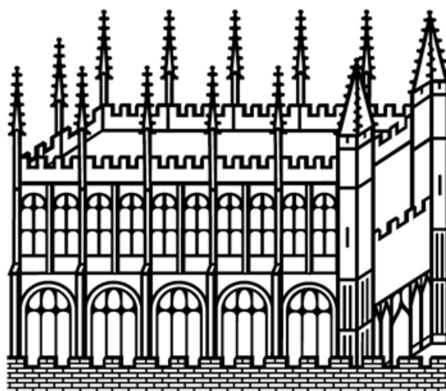

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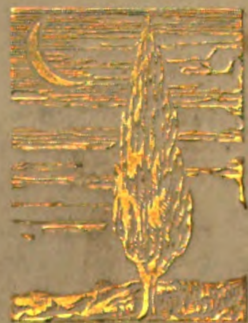

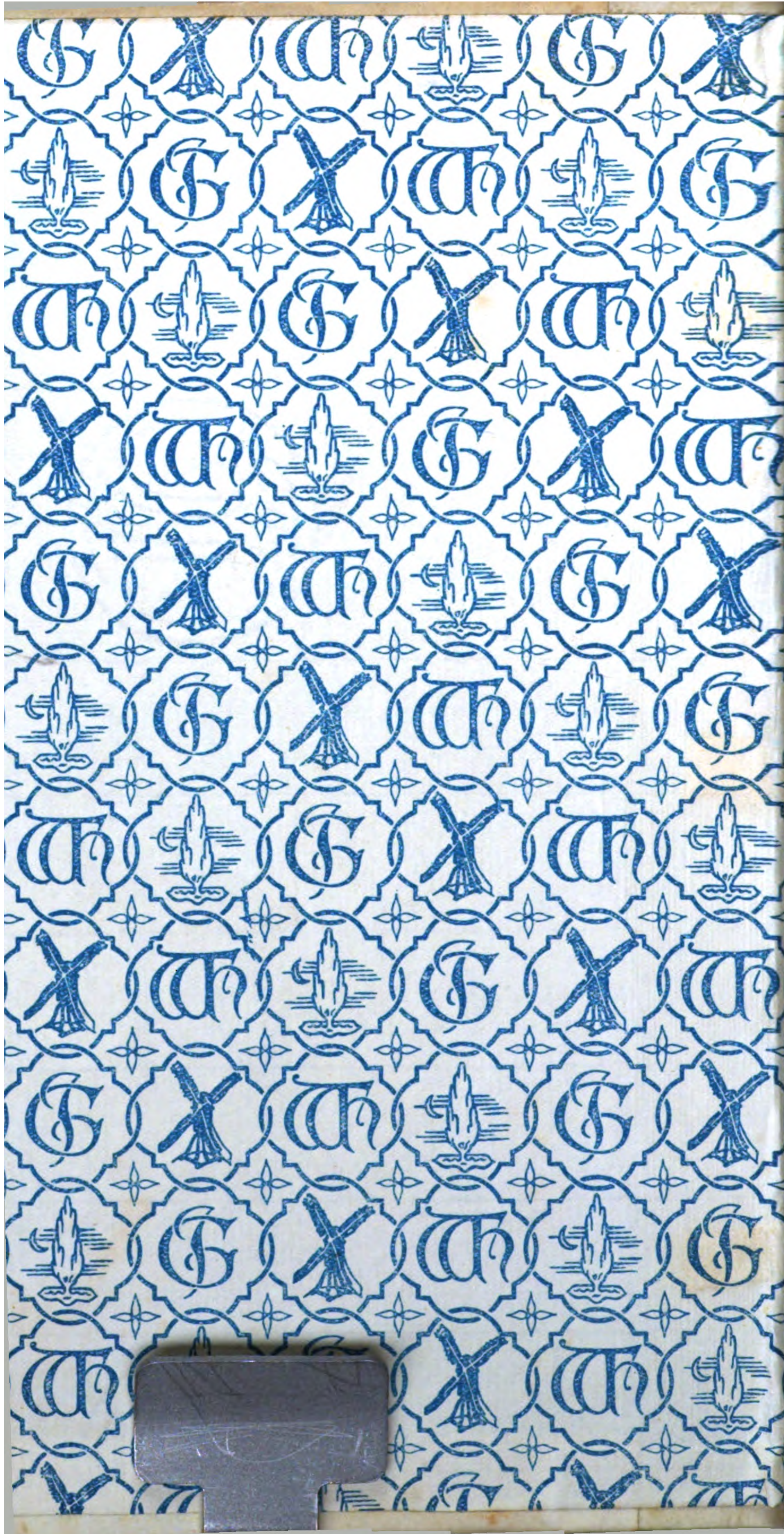

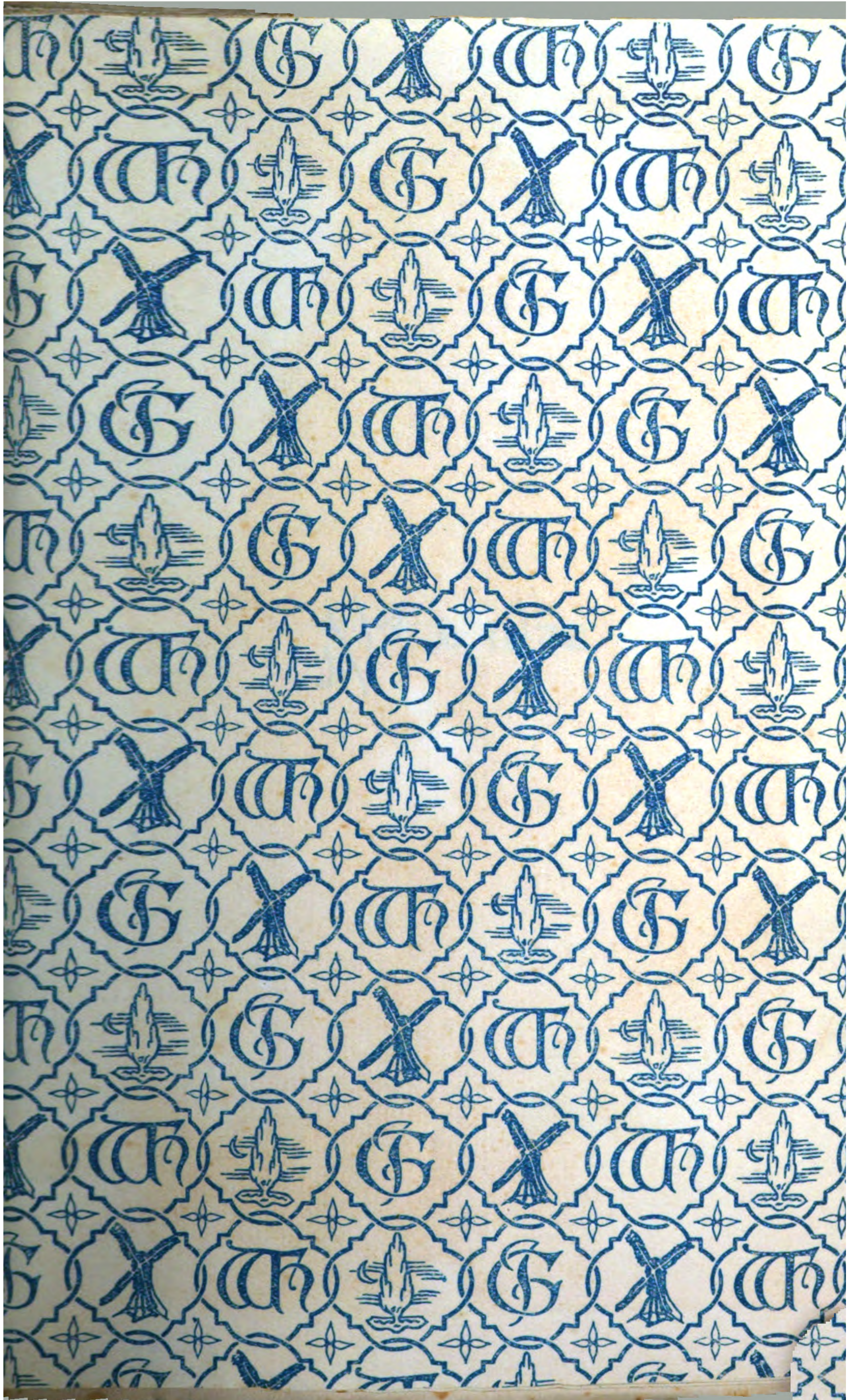

2561 d. 87/16

Printed in Great Britain by T. and A. Constable Ltd.
at the University Press, Edinburgh

THE WORKS OF

JOHN GALSWORTHY

MANATON EDITION

VOLUME XVI

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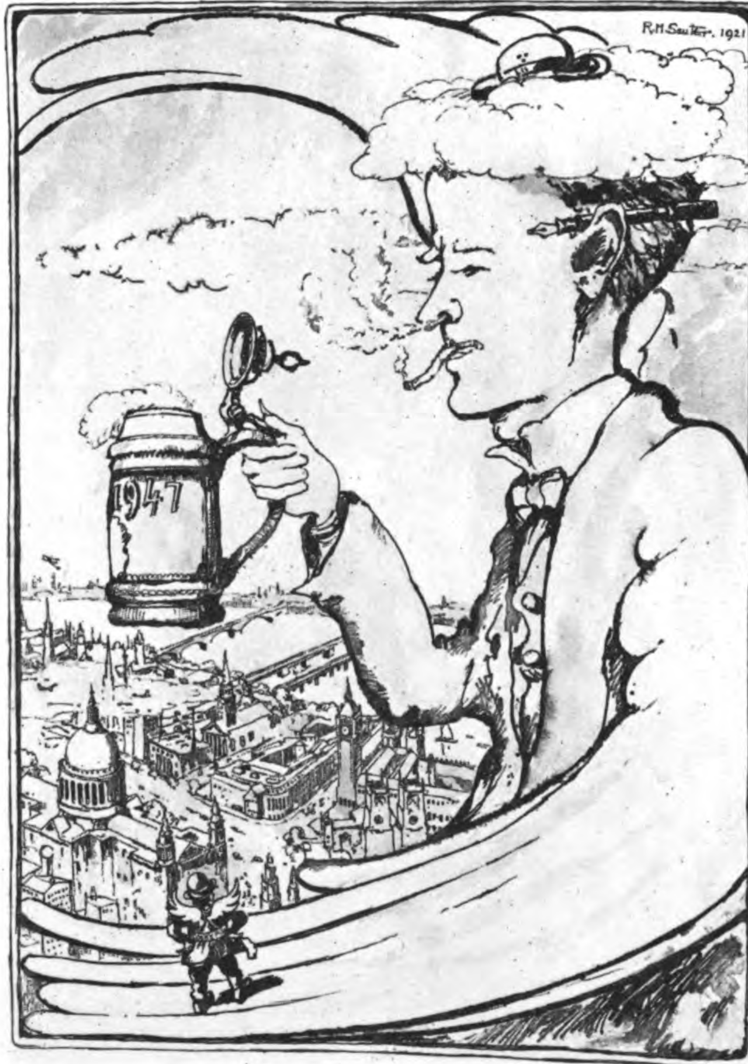

The Angel Aethereal on his official visit to the Earth in A.D. 1947.

THE BURNING SPEAR

AND OTHER SATIRES

BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD.
MCMXXIII

THE BURNING SPEAR
was first published by Messrs. Chatto & Windus
under the pen-name of 'A.R.P-M,' 1919
New Edition 1923

Reverie of a Sportsman, Passing,
were first published in
A SHEAF, 1916, Reprinted 1917

Apotheosis was first published in
A MOTLEY

The Voice of —— ! ' **Abracadabra,**
Studies of Extravagance,
were first published in
THE LITTLE MAN

Grotesques were first published in
ANOTHER SHEAF, 1919
Reprinted 1919

IN THIS VOLUME REVERIE OF A SPORTSMAN, AND PASSING ARE DEDICATED TO WILLIAM ARCHER; APOTHEOSIS TO E. V. LUCAS; THE VOICE OF— !, ABRACADABRA, AND THE STUDIES OF EXTRAVAGANCE TO H. W. NEVINSON.

GROTESQUES ARE DEDICATED TO MORLEY ROBERTS.

J. G.

PREFACE

"The Burning Spear" was a revenge of the nerves. Was it not bad enough to have to bear the dreads and strains and griefs of the war without having to read day by day the venomous or nonsensical stuff which began pouring from tongues and pens soon after the war began and never ceased till months after the war stopped? They said we couldn't do without it. But our fighting men undoubtedly despised that flood of lies and rhetoric. It discouraged far more than it inspired them. The Englishman does not like to play his games or fight his battles to a running accompaniment of insult to the enemy. The English nation is grown up, it can bear the truth. Our press and public men underestimated us. That war is war we know; but that the war spirit and the endurance which war needs can only be inspired by hymns of hate and suppressions of truth we deny. The last thing the English lose is their ironic humour. They saw through all those windy distortions and writings to the order of a spirit far beneath their own. May we never again have to listen to such braying!

The use of the satiric vein, however, is nowadays more or less of a private luxury.

The time when a writer had political power is over, in countries whose governors become less and less literate with every generation. He had political influence in Germany before the war. He may still have power in a backward country such as Russia. But in England, or any old, highly industrialised nation, his direct influence has been lost in the whirr and drive of Sport, Machinery, and Economics. His influence—other, of course, than the subtler influence of æsthetic revelation and entertainment—is confined to a mental quickening, the sort of function exercised by Shaw and Wells; or to a species of spiritual infection from positive passion, such as Kipling has sometimes displayed, or negative passion, such as may be found—elsewhere. But on the whole a writer tends more and more to become what he was in the days of the troubadours—a subject for after-dinner conversation. The idea that he should influence the conduct of practical affairs, like Milton, Voltaire, Swift, Defoe, or even Dickens, is now regarded as ridiculous. He is freely invited, indeed, to express his opinion on them, and to do him justice, is not backward in accepting that invitation. But an instance has yet to be found of anyone paying attention to what he says. It is felt that he is not a practical person.

PREFACE

The connection between the development of scientific machinery and the decline of ideals, not to say ideas, might well form the staple of a considered study. Let me commend the subject to Mr. J. L. Hammond, Mr. J. A. Hobson, or Mr. Delisle Burns. Even the most incorrigible leaders of public opinion are subordinate to still more fundamental causes, and fall weekly into their trombones. We are all in the grip of machinery, markets, and the struggle for existence, and he is powerful who floats most buoyantly upon the economic tides.

The satires, then, which form this volume, are no more to be taken seriously than any other criticism of life, types, or the times, by a modern writer. L'homme moyen sensuel—*or, as he is dubbed herein, the Angel Æthereal—ever bulks too large and immovable beside the little satirist, his dragoman.*

One is, in fine, driven more and more to the conclusion that redress of our social, economic, and political extravagances passes the skill of doctors and must be left to Nature, who—generally at the eleventh hour—administers a purge so drastic that it kills or cures. The world has an incurable habit of going on, with possibly a tendency towards improvement in human life; and the satirist, like any other specimen of mankind, fits into the slow pattern, though he can lay no flattering unction to his

soul that he is altering the regulator, or accelerating the pulses of our clock.

One feather at least, however, can be claimed for the cap of these satires. "Abracadabra" slew a tendency to Christian Science in a certain young lady.

JOHN GALSWORTHY.

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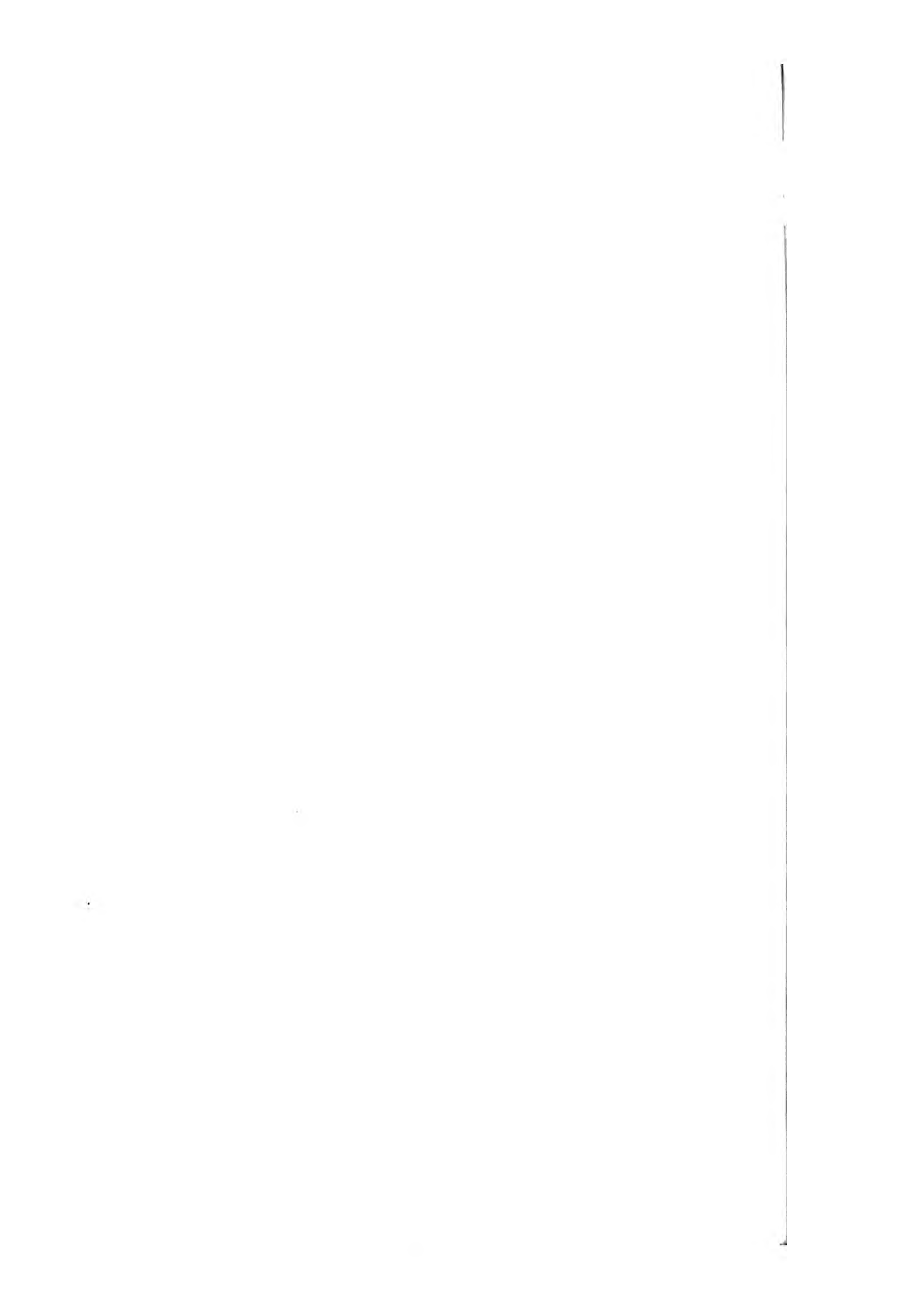
The frontispiece of this volume is a photogravure of a drawing by R. H. Sauter.



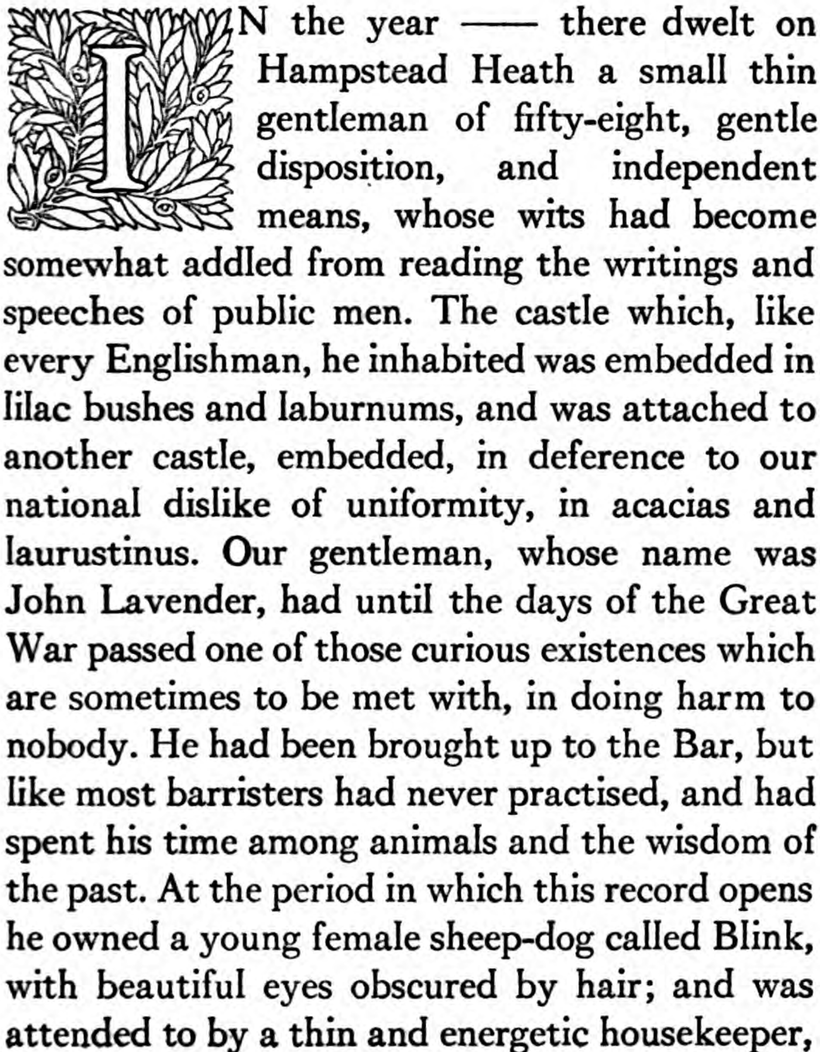
THE BURNING SPEAR

"With a heart of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning spear and a horse of air
In the wilderness I wander;
With a night of ghosts and shadows
I summoned am to tourney
Ten leagues beyond the wide world's end
For me it is no journey."

TOM O'BEDLAM.

I

THE HERO



IN the year —— there dwelt on Hampstead Heath a small thin gentleman of fifty-eight, gentle disposition, and independent means, whose wits had become somewhat addled from reading the writings and speeches of public men. The castle which, like every Englishman, he inhabited was embedded in lilac bushes and laburnums, and was attached to another castle, embedded, in deference to our national dislike of uniformity, in acacias and laurustinus. Our gentleman, whose name was John Lavender, had until the days of the Great War passed one of those curious existences which are sometimes to be met with, in doing harm to nobody. He had been brought up to the Bar, but like most barristers had never practised, and had spent his time among animals and the wisdom of the past. At the period in which this record opens he owned a young female sheep-dog called Blink, with beautiful eyes obscured by hair; and was attended to by a thin and energetic housekeeper,

in his estimation above all weakness, whose name was Marian Petty, and by her husband, his chauffeur, whose name was Joe.

It was the ambition of our hero to be, like all public men, without fear and without reproach. He drank not, abstained from fleshly intercourse, and habitually spoke the truth. His face was thin, high cheek-boned, and not unpleasing, with one loose eyebrow over which he had no control; his eyes, bright and of hazel hue, looked his fellows in the face without seeing what was in it. Though his moustache was still dark, his thick waving hair was permanently white, for his study was lined from floor to ceiling with books, pamphlets, journals, and the recorded utterances of great mouths. He was of a frugal habit, ate what was put before him without question, and if asked what he would have, invariably answered: "What is there?" without listening to the reply. For at mealtimes it was his custom to read the writings of great men.

"Joe," he would say to his chauffeur, who had a slight limp, a green wandering eye, and a red face, with a rather curved and rather redder nose, "you must read this."

And Joe would answer:

"Which one is that, sir?"

"Hummingtop; a great man, I think, Joe."

"A brainy chap, right enough, sir."

"He has done wonders for the country. Listen to this." And Mr. Lavender would read as follows: "If I had fifty sons I would give them all. If I had forty daughters they should nurse and scrub and weed and fill shells; if I had thirty country-houses they should all be hospitals; if I had twenty pens I would use them all day long; if I had ten voices they should never cease to inspire and aid my country."

"If 'e had nine lives," interrupted Joe, with a certain suddenness, "'e'd save the lot."

Mr. Lavender lowered the paper.

"I cannot bear cynicism, Joe; there is no quality so unbecoming to a gentleman."

"Me and 'im don't put in for that, sir."

"Joe," Mr. Lavender would say, "you are incorrigible. . . ."

Our gentleman, in common with all worthy of the name, had a bank-book, which, in hopes that it would disclose an unsuspected balance, he would have "made up" every time he read an utterance exhorting people to invest and save their country.

One morning at the end of May, finding there was none, he called in his housekeeper and said:

"Mrs. Petty, we are spending too much; we have again been exhorted to save. Listen! 'Every

penny diverted from prosecution of the war is one more spent in the interest of the enemies of mankind. No patriotic person, I am confident, will spend upon him or herself a stiver which could be devoted to the noble ends so near to all our hearts. Let us make every spare copper into bullets to strengthen the sinews of war!' A great speech. What can we do without?"

"The newspapers, sir."

"Don't be foolish, Mrs. Petty. From what else could we draw our inspiration and comfort in these terrible days?"

Mrs. Petty sniffed. "Well, you can't eat less than you do," she said; "but you might stop feedin' Blink out of your rations—that I do think."

"I have not found that forbidden as yet in any public utterance," returned Mr. Lavender; "but when the Earl of Betternot tells us to stop, I shall follow his example, you may depend on that. The country comes before everything."

Mrs. Petty tossed her head and murmured darkly:

"Do you suppose he's got an example, sir?"

"Mrs. Petty," replied Mr. Lavender, "that is quite unworthy of you. But, tell me, what *can* we do without?"

"I could do without Joe," responded Mrs.

Petty, "now that you're not using him as chauffeur."

"Please be serious. Joe is an institution; besides, I am thinking of offering myself to the Government as a speaker now that we may use gas."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Petty.

"I am going down about it to-morrow."

"Indeed, sir!"

"I feel my energies are not fully employed."

"No, sir?"

"By the way, there was a wonderful leader on potatoes yesterday. We must dig up the garden. Do you know what the subsoil is?"

"Brickbats and dead cats, I expect, sir."

"Ah! We shall soon improve that. Every inch of land reclaimed is a nail in the coffin of our common enemies."

And going over to a bookcase, Mr. Lavender took out the third from the top of a pile of newspapers. "Listen!" he said. "'The problem before us is the extraction of every potential ounce of food. No half measures must content us. Potatoes! Potatoes! No matter how, where, when—the prime national necessity is now the growth of potatoes. All Britons should join in raising a plant which may be our very salvation.'"

"Fudge!" murmured Mrs. Petty.

Mr. Lavender read on, and his eyes glowed.

'Ah!' he thought, 'I, too, can do my bit to save England. . . . It needs but the spark to burn away the dross of this terrible horse-sense which keeps the country back.'

"Mrs. Petty!" But Mrs. Petty was already not.

. . . .

II

The grass never grew under the feet of Mr. Lavender. No sooner had he formed his sudden resolve than he wrote to what he conceived to be the proper quarter, and, receiving no reply, went down to the centre of the official world. It was at a time of change and no small national excitement; brooms were sweeping clean, and new offices had arisen everywhere. Mr. Lavender passed bewildered among large stone buildings and small wooden buildings, not knowing where to go. He had bought no clothes since the beginning of the war, except the various Volunteer uniforms which the exigencies of a shifting situation had forced the authorities to withdraw from time to time; and his small shrunken figure struck somewhat vividly on the eye, with elbows and knees shining in the summer sunlight. Stopping at last before the only object which seemed unchanged, he said:

"Can you tell me where the Ministry is?"

The officer looked down at him.

"What for?"

"For speaking about the country."

"Ministry of Propagation? First on the right, second door on the left."

"Thank you. The Police are wonderful."

"None of that," said the officer coldly.

"I only said you were wonderful."

"I 'eard you."

"But you are. I don't know what the country would do without you. Your solid qualities, your imperturbable bonhomie, your truly British tenderness towards——"

"Pass away!" said the officer.

"I am only repeating what we all say of you," rejoined Mr. Lavender reproachfully.

"Did you 'ear me say 'Move on,'" said the officer; "or must I make you an example?"

"*You* are the example," said Mr. Lavender warmly.

"Any more names," returned the officer, "and I take you to the station." And he moved out into the traffic. Puzzled by his unfriendliness Mr. Lavender resumed his search, and, arriving at the door indicated, went in. A dark, dusty, deserted corridor led him nowhere, till he came on a little girl in a brown frock, with her hair down her back.

"Can you tell me, little one——" he said, laying his hand on her head.

"Chuck it!" said the little girl.

"No, no!" responded Mr. Lavender, deeply hurt. "Can you tell me where I can find the Minister?"

"'Ave you an appointment?"

"No; but I wrote him. He should expect me."

"Wot nyme?"

"John Lavender. Here is my card."

"I'll tyke it in. Wyte 'ere!"

'Wonderful!' mused Mr. Lavender; 'the patriotic impulse already stirring in these little hearts! What was the stanza of that patriotic poet?

> '"Lives not a babe who shall not feel the pulse
> Of Britain's need beat wild in Britain's wrist.
> And, sacrificial, in the world's convulse
> Put up its lips to be by Britain kissed."

So young to bring their lives to the service of the country!'

"Come on," said the little girl, reappearing suddenly; "'e'll see you."

Mr. Lavender entered a room which had a considerable resemblance to the office of a lawyer save for the absence of tomes. It seemed furnished almost exclusively by the Minister, who sat with knees crossed, in a pair of large round tortoise-

shell spectacles, which did not, however, veil the keenness of his eyes. He was a man with close-cropped grey hair, a broad, yellow, clean-shaven face, and thrusting grey eyes.

"Mr. Lavender," he said, in a raw, forcible voice; "sit down, will you?"

"I wrote to you," began our hero, "expressing the wish to offer myself as a speaker."

"Ah!" said the Minister. "Let's see—Lavender, Lavender. Here's your letter." And extracting a letter from a file he read it, avoiding with difficulty his tortoiseshell spectacles. "You want to stump the country? M.A., Barrister, and Fellow of the Zoological. Are you a good speaker?"

"If zeal——" began Mr. Lavender.

"That's it; spark! We're out to win this war, sir."

"Quite so," began Mr. Lavender. "If devotion——"

"You'll have to use gas," said the Minister; "and we don't pay."

"Pay!" cried Mr. Lavender with horror; "no, indeed!"

The Minister bent on him a shrewd glance. "What's your line? Anything particular, or just general patriotism? I recommend that; but you'll have to put some punch into it, you know."

"I have studied all the great orators of the

war, sir," said Mr. Lavender, "and am familiar with all the great writers on it. I should form myself on them; and if enthusiasm——"

"Quite!" said the Minister. "If you want any atrocities we can give you them. No facts and no figures; just general pat."

"I shall endeavour——" began Mr. Lavender.

"Well, good-bye," said the Minister, rising. "When do you start?"

Mr. Lavender rose too. "To-morrow," he said; "if I can get inflated."

The Minister rang a bell.

"You're on your own, mind," he said. "No facts; what they want is ginger. Yes, Mr. Japes?"

And seeing that the Minister was looking over his tortoiseshell spectacles at somebody behind him, Mr. Lavender turned and went out. In the corridor he thought, 'What terseness! How different from the days when Dickens wrote his "Circumlocution Office"! Punch!' And opening the wrong door, he found himself in the presence of six little girls in brown frocks, sitting against the walls with their thumbs in their mouths.

"Oh!" he said, "I'm afraid I've lost my way."

The eldest of the little girls withdrew a thumb. "What d'yer want?"

"The door," said Mr. Lavender.

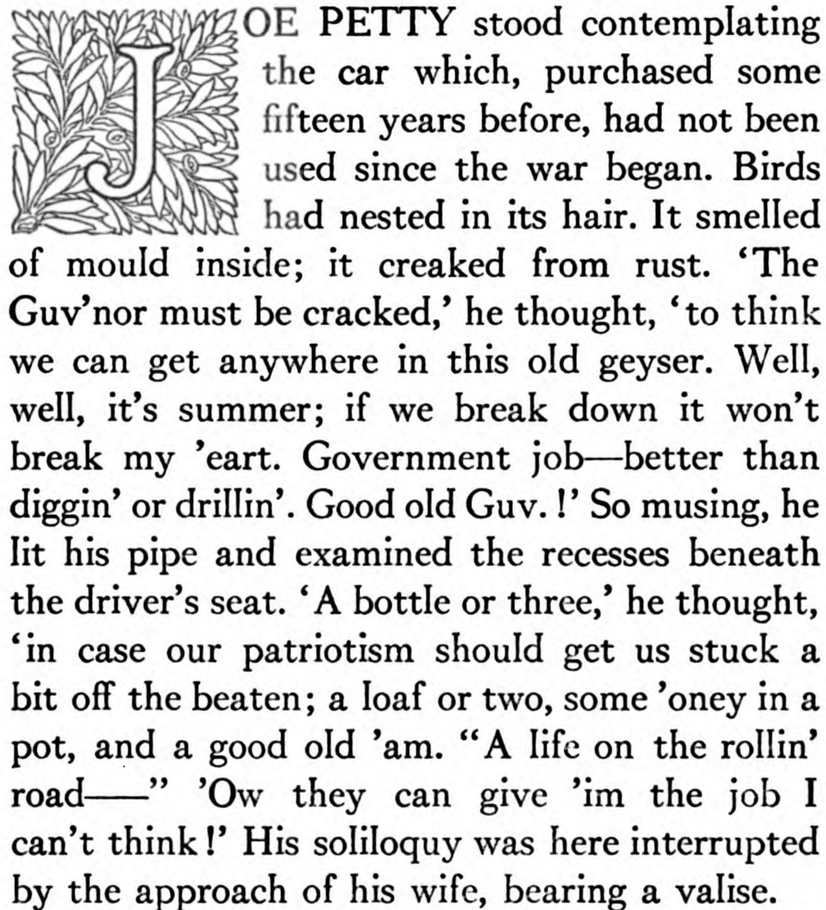
"Second on the right."

"Good-bye," said Mr. Lavender.

The little girls did not answer. And he went out thinking, 'These children are really wonderful! What devotion one sees! And yet the country is not yet fully roused!'

II

THE VALET



JOE PETTY stood contemplating the car which, purchased some fifteen years before, had not been used since the war began. Birds had nested in its hair. It smelled of mould inside; it creaked from rust. 'The Guv'nor must be cracked,' he thought, 'to think we can get anywhere in this old geyser. Well, well, it's summer; if we break down it won't break my 'eart. Government job—better than diggin' or drillin'. Good old Guv.!' So musing, he lit his pipe and examined the recesses beneath the driver's seat. 'A bottle or three,' he thought, 'in case our patriotism should get us stuck a bit off the beaten; a loaf or two, some 'oney in a pot, and a good old 'am. "A life on the rollin' road——" 'Ow they can give 'im the job I can't think!' His soliloquy was here interrupted by the approach of his wife, bearing a valise.

"Don't you wish you was comin', old girl?" he remarked to her lightly.

"I do not; I'm glad to be shut of you. Keep his feet dry. What have you got under there?"

Joe Petty winked.

"What a lumbering great thing it looks!" said Mrs. Petty, gazing upwards.

"Ah!" returned her husband thoughtfully, "we'll 'ave the population round us without advertising." And taking the heads of two small boys who had come up, he knocked them together in an absent-minded fashion.

"Well," said Mrs. Petty, "I can't waste time. Here's his extra set of teeth. Don't lose them. Have you got your own toothbrush? Use it, and behave yourself. Let me have a line. And don't let him get excited." She tapped her forehead. "Go away, you boys; shoo!"

The boys, now six in number, raised a slight cheer; for at that moment Mr. Lavender, in a broad-brimmed grey felt hat and a holland dust-coat, came out through his garden-gate carrying a pile of newspapers and pamphlets so large that his feet, legs, and hat alone were visible.

"Open the door, Joe!" he said, and stumbled into the body of the vehicle. A shrill cheer rose from the eight boys, who could see him through the further window. Taking this for an augury of success, Mr. Lavender removed his hat, and putting his head through the window, thus addressed the ten boys:

"I thank you. The occasion is one which I shall

ever remember. The Government has charged me with the great task of rousing our country in days which demand of each of us the utmost exertions. I am proud to feel that I have here, on the very threshold of my task, an audience of bright young spirits, each one of whom in this democratic country has in him perhaps the makings of a General or even of a Prime Minister. Let it be your earnest endeavour, boys——"

At this moment a piece of india-rubber rebounded from Mr. Lavender's forehead, and he recoiled into the body of the car.

"Are you right, sir?" said Joe, looking in; and without waiting for reply he started the engine. The car moved out amid a volley of stones, balls, cheers, and other missiles from the fifteen boys who pursued it with frenzy. Swaying slightly from side to side, with billowing bag, it gathered speed, and, turning a corner, took road for the country. Mr. Lavender, somewhat dazed, for the india-rubber had been hard, sat gazing through the little back window at the great city he was leaving. His lips moved, expressing unconsciously the sentiments of innumerable Lord Mayors: "Greatest City in the world, Queen of Commerce, whose full heart I can still hear beating behind me, in mingled pride and regret I leave you. With the most sacred gratitude I lay

down my office. I go to other work, whose——
Joe!"

"Sir?"

"Do you see that?"

"I see your 'ead, that's all, sir."

"We seem to be followed by a little column of dust, which keeps ever at the same distance in the middle of the road. Do you think it can be an augury?"

"No; I should think it's a dog."

"In that case, hold hard!" said Mr. Lavender, who had a weakness for dogs. Joe slackened the car's pace, and leaned his head round the corner. The column of dust approached rapidly.

"It *is* a dog," said Mr. Lavender; "it's *Blink.*"

The female sheep-dog, almost flat with the ground from speed, emerged from the dust, wild with hair and anxiety, white on the cheeks and chest and top of the head, and grey in the body and the very little tail, and passed them like a streak of lightning.

"Get on!" cried Mr. Lavender, excited; "follow her; she's trying to catch us up!"

Joe urged on the car, which responded gallantly, swaying from side to side, while the gas-bag bellied and shook; but the faster it went the faster the sheep-dog flew in front of it.

"This is dreadful!" said Mr. Lavender in anguish, leaning far out. "Blink! Blink!"

His cries were drowned in the roar of the car.

"Damn the brute!" muttered Joe; "at this rate she'll be over the edge in 'alf a mo'. Wherever does she think we are?"

"Blink! Blink!" wailed Mr. Lavender. "Get on, Joe, get on! She's gaining on us!"

"Well, I never see anything like this," said Joe; "chasin' wot's chasing you! Hi! Hi!"

Urged on by their shouts and the noise of the pursuing car, the poor dog redoubled her efforts to rejoin her master, and Mr. Lavender, Joe, and the car, which had begun to emit the most lamentable creaks and odours, redoubled theirs.

"I shall bust her up," said Joe.

"I care not!" cried Mr. Lavender. "I must recover the dog."

They flashed through the outskirts of the Garden City. "Stop her, stop her!" called Mr. Lavender to such of the astonished inhabitants as they had already left behind. "This is a nightmare, Joe!"

"It's a blinkin' day-dream," returned Joe, forcing the car to an expiring spurt.

"If she gets to that 'ill before we ketch 'er,

we're done; the old geyser can't 'alf crawl up 'ills."

"We're gaining," shrieked Mr. Lavender; "I can see her tongue."

As though it heard his voice, the car leaped forward and stopped with a sudden and most formidable jerk; the door burst open, and Mr. Lavender fell out upon his sheep-dog.

Fortunately they were in the only bed of nettles in that part of the world, and its softness and that of Blink assuaged the severity of his fall, yet it was some minutes before he regained the full measure of his faculties. He came to himself sitting on a milestone, with his dog on her hind legs between his knees, licking his face clean, and panting down his throat.

"Joe," he said; "where are you?"

The voice of Joe replied from underneath the car: "Here, sir. She's popped."

"Do you mean that our journey is arrested?"

"Ah! We're in irons. You may as well walk 'ome, sir. It ain't two miles."

"No, no!" said Mr. Lavender. "We passed the Garden City a little way back; I could go there and hold a meeting. How long will you be?"

"A day or two," said Joe.

Mr. Lavender sighed, and at this manifestation of grief his sheep-dog redoubled her efforts

to comfort him. 'Nothing becomes one more than the practice of philosophy,' he thought. 'I have always admired those great public men who in moments of national peril can still dine with a good appetite. We will sit in the car a little, for I have rather a pain, and think over a speech.' So musing, he mounted the car, followed by his dog, and sat down in considerable discomfort. 'What subject can I choose for a Garden City?' he thought, and remembering that he had with him the speech of a bishop on the subject of babies, he dived into his bundle of literature, and extracting a pamphlet began to con its periods. A sharp blow from a hammer on the bottom of the car just below where Blink was sitting caused him to pause and the dog to rise and examine her tiny tail.

'Curious,' thought Mr. Lavender dreamily, 'how Joe always does the right thing in the wrong place. He is very English.' The hammering continued, and the dog, who traced it to the omnipotence of her master, got up on the seat where she could lick his face. Mr. Lavender was compelled to stop.

"Joe," he said, leaning out and down; "must you?"

The face of Joe, very red, leaned out and up. "What's the matter now, sir?"

"I am preparing a speech; must you hammer?"

"No," returned Joe, "I needn't."

"I don't wish you to waste your time," said Mr. Lavender.

"Don't worry about that, sir," replied Joe; "there's plenty to do."

"In that case I shall be glad to finish my speech."

Mr. Lavender resumed his seat and Blink her position on the floor, with her head on his feet. The sound of his voice soon rose again in the car like the buzzing of large flies. "'If we are to win this war we must have an ever-increasing population. In town and countryside, in the palace and the slum, above all in the Garden City, we must have babies.'"

Here Blink, who had been regarding him with lustrous eyes, leaped on to his knees and licked his mouth. Again Mr. Lavender was compelled to stop.

"Down, Blink, down! I am not speaking to you. 'The future of our country depends on the little citizens born now. I especially appeal to women. It is to them we must look——'"

"Will you 'ave a glass, sir?"

Mr. Lavender saw before him a tumbler containing a yellow fluid.

"Joe," he said sadly, "you know my rule——"

"'Ere's the exception, sir."

Mr. Lavender sighed. "No, no; I must practice what I preach. I shall soon be rousing the people on the liquor question, too."

"Well, 'ere's luck," said Joe, draining the glass. "Will you 'ave a slice of 'am?"

"That would not be amiss," said Mr. Lavender, taking Joe's knife with the slice of ham upon its point. "'It is to them that we must look,'" he resumed, "'to rejuvenate the Empire and make good the losses in the firing-line.'" And he raised the knife to his mouth. No result followed, while Blink wriggled on her base and licked her lips.

"Blink!" said Mr. Lavender reproachfully. "Joe!"

"Sir!"

"When you've finished your lunch and repaired the car you will find me in the Town Hall or market-place. Take care of Blink. I'll tie her up. Have you some string?"

Having secured his dog to the handle of the door and disregarded the intensity of her gaze, Mr. Lavender walked back towards the Garden City with a pamphlet in one hand and a crutch-handled stick in the other. Restoring the ham to its nest behind his feet, Joe finished the bottle of

Bass. 'This is a bit of all right!' he thought dreamily. "Lie down, you bitch! Quiet, will you? How can I get my nap while you make that row? Lie down! That's better."

Blink was silent, gnawing at her string. The smile deepened on Joe's face, his head fell a little to one side; his mouth fell open; a fly flew into it. 'Ah!' he thought, spitting it out; 'dog's quiet now.' He slept.

III

MR. LAVENDER ADDRESSES A CROWD OF HUNS

IVE them ginger!"' thought Mr. Lavender, approaching the first houses. 'My first task, however, will be to collect them.'

"Can you tell me," he said to a dustman, "where the market-place is?"

"Ain't none."

"The Town Hall, then?"

"Likewise."

"What place is there, then," said Mr. Lavender, "where people congregate?"

"They don't."

"Do they never hold public meetings here?"

"Ah!" said the dustman mysteriously.

"I wish to address them on the subject of babies."

"Bill! Gent abaht babies. Where'd he better go?"

The man addressed, however, who carried a bag of tools, did not stop.

"You 'ear?" said the dustman, and urging his horse, passed on.

'How rude!' thought Mr. Lavender. Something cold and wet was pressed against his hand, he felt a turmoil, and saw Blink moving round and round him, curved like a horseshoe, with a bit of string dangling from her white neck. At that moment of discouragement the sight of one who believed in him gave Mr. Lavender nothing but pleasure. "How wonderful dogs are!" he murmured. The sheep-dog responded by bounds and ear-splitting barks, so that two boys and a little girl wheeling a perambulator stopped to look and listen.

'She is like Mercury,' thought Mr. Lavender; and taking advantage of her interest in his hat, which she had knocked off in her effusions, he placed his hand on her head and crumpled her ear. The dog passed into an hypnotic trance, broken by soft grumblings of pleasure. 'The most beautiful eyes in the world!' thought Mr. Lavender, replacing his hat; 'the innocence and goodness of her face are entrancing.'

In his long holland coat, with his wide-brimmed felt hat all dusty, and the crutch-handled stick in his hand, he had already arrested the attention of five boys, the little girl with the perambulator, a postman, a maid-servant, and three old ladies.

"What a beautiful dog yours is!" said one of

the old ladies; "dear creature! Are you a shepherd?"

Mr. Lavender removed his hat.

"No, madam," he said; "a public speaker."

"How foolish of me!" replied the old lady.

"Not at all, madam; the folly is mine." And Mr. Lavender bowed. "I have come here to give an address on babies."

The old lady looked at him shrewdly, and, saying something in a low voice to her companions, passed on, to halt again a little way off.

In the meantime the rumor that there was a horse down in the Clemenceau Road had spread rapidly, and more boys, several little girls, and three soldiers in blue, with red ties, had joined the group round Mr. Lavender, to whom there seemed something more than providential in this rapid assemblage. Looking round him for a platform from which to address them, he saw nothing but the low wall of the little villa garden outside which he was standing. Mounting on this, therefore, and firmly grasping the branch of a young acacia tree to steady himself, he stood upright, while Blink, on her hind legs, scratched at the wall, whining and sniffing his feet. Encouraged by the low murmur of astonishment, which swelled rapidly into a shrill cheer, Mr. Lavender removed his hat, and spoke as follows:

"Fellow Britons, at this crisis in the history of our country I make no apology for addressing myself to the gathering I see around me. Here, in the cradle of patriotism and the very heart of Movements, I may safely assume that you are aware of the importance of Man-power. At a moment when every man of a certain age and over is wanted at the front, and every woman of marriageable years is needed in hospitals, in factories, on the land, or where not, we see as never before the paramount necessity of mobilising the forces of racial progress and increasing the numbers of our population. Not a man, not a woman can be spared from the great task in which they are now engaged, of defeating the common enemy. Side by side with our American cousins, with la belle France, and the Queen of the Adriatic, we are fighting to avert the greatest menace which ever threatened civilisation. Our cruel enemies are strong and ruthless. While I have any say in this matter, no man or woman shall be withdrawn from the sacred cause of victory; better they should die to the last unit than that we should take our hands from the plough. But, ladies and gentlemen, we must never forget that in the place of every one who dies we must put two. Do not be content with ordinary measures; these are no piping times of peace. Never was

there in the history of this country such a crying need for—for twins, if I may put it picturesquely. In each family, in each home where there are no families, let there be two babies where there was one, for thus only can we triumph over the devastation of this war." At this moment the now considerable audience, which had hitherto been silent, broke into a shrill "'Ear, 'ear!" and Mr. Lavender, taking his hand from the acacia branch to silence them, fell off the wall into the garden. Seeing her master thus vanish, Blink, who had never ceased to whine and sniff his toes, leaped over and landed on his chest. Rising with difficulty, Mr. Lavender found himself in front of an elderly man with a commercial cast of countenance, who said: "You're trespassing!"

"I am aware of it," returned Mr. Lavender politely; "and I beg your pardon. It was quite inadvertent, however."

"Rubbish!" said the man.

"I fell off the wall."

"Whose wall do you think it is?" said the man.

"How should I know?" said Mr. Lavender; "I am a stranger."

"Out you go," said the man, applying his boot to Blink.

Mr. Lavender's eyes blazed. "You may insult

me," he said, "but you must not kick my dog, or I shall do you an injury."

"Try!" said the man.

"I will," responded Mr. Lavender, taking off his holland coat.

To what extremities he would have proceeded cannot be told, for at this moment the old lady who had taken him for a shepherd appeared on the garden path, tapping her forehead with a finger.

"All right!" said the owner of the garden; "take him away!"

The old lady placed her hand within Mr. Lavender's arm. "Come with me, sir," she said, "and your nice doggie."

Mr. Lavender, whose politeness to ladies was invariable, bowed, and resuming his coat accompanied her through the garden gate. "He kicked my dog," he said; "no action could be more despicable."

"Yes, yes," said the old lady soothingly. "Poor doggie!"

The crowd, who had hoped for better things, here gave vent to a prolonged jeer.

"Stop!" said Mr. Lavender; "I am going to take a collection."

"There, there!" said the old lady. "Poor man!"

"I don't know what you mean by that, madam," said Mr. Lavender, whose spirit was roused; "I shall certainly take a collection, in the interests of our population." So saying he removed his hat, and disengaging his arm from the old lady's hand, moved out into the throng, extending the hat. A boy took it from him at once, and placing it on his head, ran off, pursued by Blink, who, by barking and jumping up increased the boy's speed to one of which he could never have thought himself capable. Mr. Lavender followed, calling out "Blink!" at the top of his voice. The crowd followed Mr. Lavender, and the old lady followed the crowd. Thus they proceeded until the boy, arriving at a small piece of communal water, flung the hat into the middle of it, and, scaling the wall, made a strategic detour and became a disinterested spectator among the crowd. The hat, after skimming the surface of the pond, settled like a water-lily, crown downward, while Blink, perceiving in all this the hand of her master, stood barking at it wildly. Mr. Lavender arrived at the edge of the pond slightly in advance of the crowd.

"Good Blink!" he said. "Fetch it! Good Blink!"

Blink looked up into his face, and, with the acumen for which her breed is noted, perceiving

that he desired her to enter the water, backed away from it.

"She is not a water dog," explained Mr. Lavender to the three soldiers in blue clothes. "Good dog; fetch it!" Blink backed into the three soldiers, who, bending down, took her by head and tail, threw her into the pond, and encouraged her on with small stones pitched at the hat. Having taken the plunge, the intelligent animal waded boldly to the hat, and endeavoured by barking and making little rushes at it with her nose, to induce it to return to shore.

"She thinks it's a sheep," said Mr. Lavender; "a striking instance of hereditary instinct."

Blink, unable to persuade the hat, mounted it with her fore-paws and trod it under.

"'Ooray!" shouted the crowd.

"Give us a shilling, guv-nor, an' I'll get it for yer?"

"Thank you, my boy," said Mr. Lavender, producing a shilling.

The boy—the same boy who had thrown it in—stepped into the water and waded towards the hat. But as he approached, Blink interposed between him and the hat, growling and showing her teeth.

"Does she bite?" yelled the boy.

"Only strangers," cried Mr. Lavender. "Blink!"

Excited by her master's appeal, Blink seized the jacket of the boy, who made for the shore, while the hat rested in the centre of the pond, the cynosure of the stones with which the soldiers were endeavouring to drive it towards the bank. By this time the old lady had rejoined Mr. Lavender.

"Your nice hat!" she murmured.

"I thank you for your sympathy, madam," said Mr. Lavender, running his hand through his hair; "in moments like these one realises the deep humanity of the British people. I really believe that in no other race could you find such universal interest and anxiety to recover a hat. Say what you will, we are a great nation, who only need rousing to show our best qualities. Do you remember the words of the editor: 'In the spavined and spatch-cocked ruin to which our inhuman enemies have reduced civilisation, we of the island breed still shine with undimmed effulgence in all those qualities which mark man out from the ravening beast'?"

"But how are you going to get your hat?" asked the old lady.

"I know not," returned Mr. Lavender, still under the influence of the sentiment he had

quoted; "but if I had fifteen hats I would take them all off to the virtues which have been ascribed to the British people by all those great men who have written and spoken since the war began."

"Yes," said the old lady soothingly. "But I think you had better come under my sunshade. The sun is very strong."

"Madam," said Mr. Lavender, "you are very good, but your sunshade is too small. To deprive you of even an inch of its shade would be unworthy of anyone in public life." So saying, he recoiled from the proffered sunshade into the pond, which he had forgotten was behind him.

"Oh, dear!" said the old lady; "now you've got your feet wet!"

"It is nothing," responded Mr. Lavender gallantly. And seeing that he was already wet, he rolled up his trousers, and holding up the tails of his holland coat, turned round and proceeded towards his hat, to the frantic delight of the crowd.

'The war is a lesson to us to make little of little things,' he thought, securing the hat and wringing it out. 'My feet are wet, but—how much wetter they would be in the trenches, if feet can be wetter than wet through,' he mused

with some exactitude. "Down, Blink, down!" For Blink was plastering him with the water-marks of joy and anxiety. 'Nothing is quite so beautiful as the devotion of one's own dog,' thought Mr. Lavender, resuming the hat, and returning towards the shore. The by-now-considerable throng were watching him with every mark of acute enjoyment; and the moment appeared to Mr. Lavender auspicious for addressing them. Without, therefore, emerging from the pond, which he took for his platform, he spoke as follows:

"Circumstances over which I have no control have given me the advantage of your presence in numbers which do credit to the heart of the nation to which we all belong. In the midst of the greatest war which ever threatened the principle of Liberty, I rejoice to see so many people able to follow the free and spontaneous impulses of their inmost beings. For, while we must remember that our every hour is at the disposal of our country, we must not forget the maxim of our fathers: 'Britons never will be slaves.' Only by preserving the freedom of individual conscience, and at the same time surrendering it wholeheartedly to every call which the State makes on us, can we hope to defeat the machinations of the arch enemies of mankind."

At this moment a little stone hit him sharply on the hand.

"Who threw that stone?" said Mr. Lavender. "Let him stand out."

The culprit, no other indeed than he who had thrown the hat in, and not fetched it out for a shilling, thus menaced with discovery made use of a masterly device, and called out loudly:

"Pro-German!"

Such was the instinctive patriotism of the crowd that the cry was taken up in several quarters; and for the moment Mr. Lavender remained speechless from astonishment. The cries of "Pro-German!" increased in volume, and a stone hitting her on the nose caused Blink to utter a yelp; Mr. Lavender's eyes blazed.

"Huns!" he cried; "Huns! I am coming out."

With this prodigious threat he emerged from the pond at the very moment that a car scattered the throng, and a well-known voice said:

"Well, sir, you 'ave been goin' it!"

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender, "don't speak to me!"

"Get in."

"Never!"

"Pro-Germans!" yelled the crowd.

"Get in!" repeated Joe.

And seizing Mr. Lavender as if collaring him at

football, he knocked off his hat, propelled him into the car, banged the door, mounted, and started at full speed, with Blink leaping and barking in front of them.

Debouching from Piave Parade into Bottomley Lane, he drove up it till the crowd was but a memory before he stopped to examine the condition of his master. Mr. Lavender was hanging out of the window, looking back, and shivering violently.

"Well, sir," said Joe. "I don't think!"

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender, "that crowd ought not to be at large. They were manifestly Huns!"

"The speakin's been a bit too much for you, sir," returned Joe. "But you've got it off your chest, anyway."

Mr. Lavender regarded him for a moment in silence; then putting his hand to his throat, said hoarsely:

"No, on my chest, I think, Joe. All public speakers do. It is inseparable from that great calling."

"'Alf a mo'!" grunted Joe, diving into the recesses beneath the driving-seat. "'Ere, swig that off, sir."

Mr. Lavender raised the tumbler of fluid to his mouth, and drank it off; only from the dregs

left on his moustache did he perceive that it smelled of rum and honey.

"Joe," he said reproachfully, "you have made me break my pledge."

Joe smiled. "Well, what are they for, sir? You'll sleep at 'ome to-night."

"Never," said Mr. Lavender. "I shall sleep at High Barnet; I must address them there to-morrow on abstinence during the war."

"As you please, sir. But try and 'ave a nap while we go along." And lifting Blink into the car, where she lay drenched and exhausted by excitement, with the petal of a purple flower clinging to her black nose, he mounted to his seat and drove off. Mr. Lavender, for years unaccustomed to spirituous liquor, of which he had swallowed nearly half a pint neat, passed rapidly into a state of coma. Nor did he fully regain consciousness till he awoke in bed the next morning.

IV

FALLS INTO THE DANGERS OF A PUBLIC LIFE

T what time is my meeting?' thought Mr. Lavender vaguely, gazing at the light filtering through the Venetian blind. "Blink!"

His dog, who was lying beside his bed gnawing a bone which with some presence of mind she had brought in, raised herself and regarded him with the innocence of her species. 'She has an air of divine madness,' thought Mr. Lavender, 'which is very pleasing to me. I have a terrible headache.' And seeing a bellrope near his hand, he pulled it.

A voice said: "Yes, sir."

"I wish to see my servant, Joe Petty," said Mr. Lavender. "I shall not require any breakfast, thank you. What is the population of High Barnet?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about, sir," answered the voice, which seemed to

be that of his housekeeper; "but you can't see Joe; he's gone out with a flea in his ear. The idea of his letting you get your feet wet like that!"

"How is this?" said Mr. Lavender. "I thought you were the chambermaid of the inn at High Barnet?"

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Petty soothingly, placing a thermometer in his mouth. "Smoke that a minute, sir. Oh! look at what this dog's brought in! Fie!" And taking the bone between thumb and finger she cast it out of the window; while Blink, aware that she was considered in the wrong, and convinced that she was in the right, spread out her left paw, laid her head on her right paw, and pressed her chin hard against it. Mrs. Petty, returning from the window, stood above her master, who lay gazing up with the thermometer jutting out through the middle of his moustache.

"I thought so!" she said, removing it; "a hundred and one. No getting up for you, sir! That Joe!"

"Mrs. Petty," said Mr. Lavender rather feebly, for his head pained him excessively, "bring me the morning papers."

"No, sir. The thermometer bursts at an 'undred an' ten. I'll bring you the doctor."

Mr. Lavender was about to utter a protest when he reflected that all public men had doctors.

"About the bulletin?" he said faintly.

"What?" ejaculated Mrs. Petty, whose face seemed to Mr. Lavender to have become all cheek-bones, eyes, and shadows. "Joe never said a word about a bullet. Where, and however did you get it in?"

"I did not say 'bullet in,'" murmured Mr. Lavender, closing his eyes; "I said bulletin. They have it."

At this mysterious sentence Mrs. Petty lifted her hands, and muttering the word "Ravin'!" hastened from the room. No sooner had she gone, however, than Blink, whose memory was perfect, rose, and going to the window placed her forepaws on the sill. Seeing her bone shining on the lawn below, with that disregard of worldly consequence which she shared with all fine characters, she leaped through. The rattle of the Venetian blind disturbed Mr. Lavender from the lethargy to which he had reverted. 'Mr. John Lavender passed a good night,' he thought, 'but his condition is still critical.' And in his disordered imagination he seemed to see people outside Tube stations, standing stock-still in the middle of the traffic, reading that bulletin in the evening

papers. 'Let me see,' he mused, 'how will they run? To-morrow I shall be better, but not yet able to leave my bed; the day after to-morrow I shall have a slight relapse, and my condition will still give cause for anxiety; on the day following—— What is that noise?' For a sound like the whiffling of a wind through dry sticks combined with the creaking of a saw had impinged on his senses. It was succeeded by scratching. "Blink!" said Mr. Lavender. A heartrending whine came from outside the door. Mr. Lavender rose and opened it. His dog came in carrying her bone, and putting it down by the bed divided her attention between it and her master's legs, revealed by the nightshirt which, in deference to the great Disraeli, he had never abandoned in favour of pyjamas. Having achieved so erect a posture, Mr. Lavender, whose heated imagination had now carried him to the convalescent stage of his indisposition, felt that a change of air would do him good, and going to the window, leaned out above a lilac-tree. "Mr. John Lavender," he murmured, "has gone to his country seat to recuperate before resuming his public duties."

While he stood there his attention was distracted by a tall young lady of fine build and joyous colouring, who was watering some sweet-peas in the garden of the adjoining castle. Naturally

delicate, Mr. Lavender at once sought a jacket, and, having put it on, resumed his position at the window. He had not watched her more than two minutes before he saw that she was cultivating the soil, and, filled with admiration, he leaned still further out and said:

"My dear young madam, you are doing a great work."

Thus addressed, the young lady, who had those roving grey eyes which see everything and betoken a large nature not devoid of merry genius, looked up and smiled.

"Believe me," continued Mr. Lavender, "no task in these days is so important as the cultivation of the soil; now that we are fighting to the last man and the last dollar every woman and child in these islands should put their hands to the plough." And at that word his vision became feverishly enlarged, so that he seemed to see not merely the young lady, but quantities of young ladies, filling the whole garden.

"This," he went on, raising his voice, "is the psychological moment, the turning-point in the history of these islands. The defeat of our common enemies imposes on us the sacred duty of feeding ourselves once more. 'There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to——' Oh!" For in his desire to stir his audi-

ence, Mr. Lavender had reached out too far, and losing foothold on his polished bedroom floor, was slipping down into the lilac-bush. He was arrested by a jerk from behind; where Blink, moved by this sudden elopement of her master, had seized him by the nightshirt tails, and was staying his descent.

"Is anything up?" said the young lady.

"I have lost my balance," thickly answered Mr. Lavender, whose blood was running to his head, which was now lower than his feet. "Fortunately, my dog seems to be holding me from behind. But if someone could assist her it would be an advantage, for I fear that I am slipping."

"Hold on!" cried the young lady. And breaking through the low privet hedge which separated the domains, she vanished beneath him with a low gurgling sound.

Mr. Lavender, who dared not speak again for fear that Blink, hearing his voice, might let go to answer, remained suspended, torn with anxiety about his costume. 'If she comes in,' he thought, 'I shall die from shame. And if she doesn't, I shall die from a broken neck. What a dreadful alternative!' And he firmly grasped the most substantial lilac-boughs within his reach, listening with the ears of a hare for any sound within the room, in which he no longer was to any

appreciable extent. Then the thought of what a public man should feel in his position came to his rescue. 'We die but once,' he mused; 'rather than shock that charming lady let me seek oblivion.' And the words of his obituary notice at once began to dance before his eyes. "This great public servant honoured his country no less in his death than in his life." Then striking out vigorously with his feet he launched his body forward. The words "My goodness!" resounded above him, as all restraining influence was suddenly relaxed; Mr. Lavender slid into the lilac-bush, turned heels over head, and fell bump on the ground. He lay there at full length, conscious of everything, and especially of the faces of Blink and the young lady looking down on him from the window.

"Are you hurt?" she called.

"No," said Mr. Lavender; "that is—er—yes," he added, ever scrupulously exact.

"I'm coming down," said the young lady. "Don't move!"

With a great effort Mr. Lavender arranged his costume, and closed his eyes. 'How many lie like this, staring at the blue heavens!' he thought.

"Where has it got you?" said a voice; and he saw the young lady bending over him.

"In the dorsal region, I think," said Mr. Lav-

ender. "But I suffer more from the thought that I—that you——"

"That's all right," said the young lady; "I'm a V.A.D. It *was* a bump! Let's see if you can ——" and taking his hands she raised him to a sitting posture. "Does it work?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lavender rather faintly.

"Try and stand," said the young lady, pulling.

Mr. Lavender tried, and stood; but no sooner was he on his feet than she turned her face away. Great tears rolled down her cheeks; and she writhed and shook all over.

"Don't!" cried Mr. Lavender, much concerned. "I beg you not to cry. It's nothing, I assure you—nothing!" The young lady with an effort controlled her emotion, and turned her large grey eyes on him.

"The angelic devotion of nurses!" murmured Mr. Lavender, leaning against the wall of the house with his hand to his back. "Nothing like it has been seen since the world began."

"I shall never forget the sight!" said the young lady, choking.

Mr. Lavender, who took the noises she made for sobbing, was unutterably disturbed.

"I can't bear to see you distressed on my account," he said. "I am quite well, I assure you;

look—I can walk!" And he started forth up the garden in his nightshirt and Norfolk jacket. When he turned round she was no longer there, but sounds of uncontrollable emotion were audible from the adjoining garden. Going to the privet hedge, he looked over. She was lying gracefully on the grass, with her face smothered in her hands, and her whole body shaking. 'Poor thing!' thought Mr. Lavender. 'No doubt she is one of those whose nerves have been destroyed by the terrible sights she has seen!' But at that moment the young lady rose and ran as if demented into her castle. Mr. Lavender stayed transfixed. 'Who would not be ill for the pleasure of drinking from a cup held by her hand?' he thought. 'I am fortunate to have received injuries in trying to save her from confusion. Down, Blink, down!'

For his dog, who had once more leaped from the window, was frantically endeavouring to lick his face. Soothing her, and feeling his anatomy, Mr. Lavender became conscious that he was not alone. An old lady was standing on the garden-path which led to the front gate, holding in her hand a hat. Mr. Lavender sat down at once, and gathering his nightshirt under him, spoke as follows:

"There are circumstances, madam, which even the greatest public servants cannot foresee,

and I, who am the humblest of them, ask you to forgive me for receiving you in this costume."

"I have brought your hat back," said the old lady with a kindling eye; "they told me you lived here, and I was anxious to know that you and your dear dog were none the worse."

"Madam," replied Mr. Lavender, "I am infinitely obliged to you. Would you very kindly hang my hat up on the—er—weeping willow tree?"

At this moment a little white dog, who accompanied the old lady, began sniffing round Mr. Lavender, and Blink, wounded in her proprietary instincts, placed her paws at once on her master's shoulders, so that he fell prone. When he recovered a sitting posture neither the old lady nor the little dog was in sight, but his hat was hanging on a laurel bush. 'There seems to be something fateful about this morning,' he mused; 'I had better go in before the rest of the female population——' and recovering his feet with difficulty, he took his hat, and was about to enter the house when he saw the young lady watching him from an upper window of the adjoining castle. Thinking to relieve her anxiety, he said at once:

"My dear young lady, I earnestly beg you to believe that such a thing never happens to me, as a rule."

Her face was instantly withdrawn, and, sighing

deeply, Mr. Lavender entered the house and made his way upstairs. 'Ah!' he thought, painfully recumbent in his bed once more, 'though my bones ache and my head burns I have performed an action not unworthy of the traditions of public life. There is nothing more uplifting than to serve Youth and Beauty at the peril of one's existence. Humanity and Chivalry have ever been the leading characteristics of the British race;' and, really half-delirious now, he cried aloud: "This incident will for ever inspire those who have any sense of beauty to the fulfilment of our common task. Believe me, we shall never sheathe the sword until the cause of humanity and chivalry is safe once more."

Blink, ever uneasy about sounds which seemed to her to have no meaning, stood up on her hind legs and endeavoured to stay them by licking his face; and Mr. Lavender, who had become so stiff that he could not stir without great pain, had to content himself by moving his head feebly from side to side until his dog, having taken her fill, resumed the examination of her bone. Perceiving presently that whenever he began to talk she began to lick his face, he remained silent, with his mouth open and his eyes shut, in an almost unconscious condition, from which he was roused by a voice saying:

"He is suffering from alcoholic poisoning."

The monstrous injustice of these words restored his faculties, and seeing before him what he took to be a large concourse of people—composed in reality of Joe Petty, Mrs. Petty, and the doctor—he thus addressed them in a faint, feverish voice:

"The pressure of these times, ladies and gentlemen, brings to the fore the most pushing and obstreperous blackguards. We have amongst us persons who, under the thin disguise of patriotism, do not scruple to bring hideous charges against public men. Such but serve the blood-stained cause of our common enemies. Conscious of the purity of our private lives, we do not care what is said of us so long as we can fulfil our duty to our country. Abstinence from every form of spirituous liquor has been the watchword of all public men since this land was first threatened by the most stupendous cataclysm which ever hung over the heads of a great democracy. We have never ceased to preach the need for it, and those who say the contrary are largely Germans or persons lost to a sense of decency." So saying, he threw off all the bedclothes, and fell back with a groan.

"Easy, easy, my dear sir!" said the voice. "Have you a pain in your back?"

"I shall not submit," returned our hero, "to the ministrations of a Hun; sooner will I breathe my last."

"Turn him over," said the voice. And Mr. Lavender found himself on his face.

"Do you feel that?" said the voice.

Mr. Lavender answered faintly into his pillow:

"It is useless for you to torture me. No German hand shall wring from me a groan."

"Is there mania in his family?" asked the voice.

At this cruel insult Mr. Lavender, who was nearly smothered, made a great effort, and clearing his mouth of the pillow, said:

"Since we have no God nowadays, I call the God of my fathers to witness that there is no saner public man than I."

It was, however, his last effort, for the wriggle he had given to his spine brought on a kind of vertigo, and he relapsed into unconsciousness.

V

IS CONVICTED OF A NEW DISEASE

HOSE who were assembled round the bed of Mr. Lavender remained for a moment staring at him with their mouths open, while Blink growled faintly from underneath.

"Put your hand here," said the doctor at last. "There is a considerable swelling, an appearance of inflammation, and the legs are a curious colour. You gave him three-quarters of a tumbler of rum—how much honey?"

Thus addressed, Joe Petty, leaning his head a little to one side, answered:

"Not 'alf a pot, sir."

"Um! There are all the signs here of something quite new. He's not had a fall, has he?"

"Has he?" said Mrs. Petty severely to her husband.

"No," replied Joe.

"Singular!" said the doctor. "Turn him back again; I want to feel his head. Swollen; it may account for his curious way of talking. Well, shove

in quinine, and keep him quiet, with hot bottles to his feet. I think we have come on a new war disease. I'll send you the quinine. Good morning!"

"Wot oh!" said Joe to his wife, when they were left alone with the unconscious body of their master. "Poor old Guv.! Watch and pray!"

"However could you have given him such a thing?"

"Wet outside, wet your inside," muttered Joe sulkily, "'as always been my motto. Sorry I give 'im the honey. Who'd ha' thought the product of an 'armless insect could 'a done 'im in like this?"

"Fiddle!" said Mrs. Petty. "In my belief it's come on through reading those newspapers. If I had my way I'd burn the lot. Can I trust you to watch him while I go and get the bottles filled?"

Joe dropped his lids over his greenish eyes, and, with a whisk of her head, his wife left the room.

'Gawd 'elp us!' thought Joe, gazing at his unconscious master, and fingering his pipe; ''ow funny women are! If I was to smoke in 'ere she'd have a fit. I'll just 'ave a whiff in the window, though!' And, leaning out, he drew the curtains to behind him and lighted his pipe.

The sound of Blink gnawing her bone beneath the bed alone broke the silence.

'I could do with a pint o' bitter,' thought Joe; and, noticing the form of the weekly gardener down below, he said softly:

"'Ello, Bob!"

"'Ello?" replied the gardener.

"'Ow's yours?"

"Nicely."

"Goin' to 'ave some rain?"

"Ah!"

"What's the matter with that?"

"Good for the crops."

"Missis well?"

"So, so."

"Wish mine was."

"Wot's the matter with her?"

"Busy!" replied Joe, sinking his voice. "Never 'ave a woman permanent; that's my experience."

The gardener did not reply, but stood staring at the lilac-bush below Joe Petty's face. He was a thin man, rather like an old horse.

"Do you think we can win this war?" resumed Joe.

"Dunno," replied the gardener apathetically. "We seem to be goin' back nicely all the time."

Joe wagged his head. "You've 'it it," he said. And, jerking his head back towards the room behind him, "Guv'nor's got it now."

"What?"

"The new disease."

"What new disease?"

"Wy the Run-abaht-an-tell-'em-'ow-to-do-it."

"Ah!"

"'E's fair copped it. In bed."

"You don't say!"

"Not 'alf!" Joe sank his voice still lower. "Wot'll you bet me I don't ketch it soon?"

The gardener uttered a low gurgle.

"The cats 'ave been in that laylock," he replied, twisting off a broken branch. "I'll knock off now for a bit o' lunch."

But at that moment the sound of a voice speaking as it might be from a cavern, caused him and Joe Petty to stare at each other as if petrified.

"Wot is it?" whispered Joe at last.

The gardener jerked his head towards a window on the ground floor.

"Someone in pain," he said.

"Sounds like the Guv'nor's voice."

"Ah!" said the gardener.

"'Alf a mo'!" And, drawing in his head, Joe peered through the curtains. The bed was empty and the door open.

"Watch it! 'E's loose!" he called to the gardener, and descended the stairs at a run.

In fact, Mr. Lavender had come out of his

coma at the words, "D'you think we can win this war?" And, at once conscious that he had not read the morning papers, had got out of bed. Sallying forth just as he was he had made his way downstairs, followed by Blink. Seeing the journals lying on the chest in the hall, he took all five to where he usually went at this time of the morning, and sat down to read. Once there, the pain he was in, added to the disorder occasioned in his brain by the five leaders, caused him to give forth a summary of their contents, while Blink pressed his knees with her chin whenever the rising of his voice betokened too great absorption, as was her wont when she wanted him to feed her. Joe Petty joined the gardener in considerable embarrassment.

"Shan't I not 'alf cop it from the Missis?" he murmured. "The door's locked."

The voice of Mr. Lavender maintained its steady flow, rising and falling with the tides of his pain and his feelings. "What, then, is our duty? Is it not plain and simple? We require every man in the Army, for that is the *sine quá non* of victory. . . . We must greatly reinforce the ranks of labour in our shipyards—ships, ships, ships, always more ships; for without them we shall infallibly be defeated. We cannot too often repeat that we must see the great drama

that is being played before our eyes steadily, and we must see it whole. . . . Not a man must be taken from the cultivation of our soil, for on that depends our very existence as a nation. Without abundant labour of the right sort on the land we cannot hope to cope with the menace of the pirate submarine. We must have the long vision, and not be scuppered by the fears of those who would deplete our most vital industry. . . . In munition works," wailed Mr. Lavender's voice, as he reached the fourth leader, "we still require the maximum of effort, and a considerable reinforcement of man-power will in that direction be necessary to enable us to establish the overwhelming superiority in the air and in guns which alone can ensure the defeat of our enemies." . . . He reached the fifth in what was almost a scream. "Every man up to sixty must be mobilised; but here we would utter the most emphatic caveat. In the end this war will be won by the country whose financial position stands the strain best. The last copper bullet will be the deciding factor. Our economic strength must on no account be diminished. We cannot at this time of day afford to deplete the ranks of trade and let out the very life-blood in our veins. We must see," groaned Mr. Lavender, "the problem steadily, and see it whole."

"Poor old geyser!" said the gardener; "'e do seem bad."

"'Old me!" said Joe. "I'll get on the sill and see what I can do through the top o' the window."

He got up, and, held by the gardener, put his arm through. There was the sound of considerable disturbance, and through the barking of Blink, Mr. Lavender's voice was heard again: "Stanch in the middle of the cataclysm, unruffled by the waters of heaven and hell, let us be captains of our souls. Down, Blink, down!"

"He's out!" said Joe, rejoining the gardener. "Now for it, before my missis comes!" and he ran into the house.

Mr. Lavender was walking dazedly in the hall with the journals held out before him.

"Joe," he said, catching sight of his servant, "get the car ready. I must be in five places at once, for only thus can we defeat the greatest danger which ever threatened the future of civilisation."

"Right-o, sir," replied Joe; and, waiting till his master turned round, he seized him round the legs, and lifting that thin little body ascended the stairs, while Mr. Lavender, with the journals waving fan-like in his hands, his white hair on end, and his legs kicking, endeavoured to

turn his head to see what agency was moving him.

At the top of the stairs they came on Mrs. Petty, who, having Scotch blood in her veins, stood against the wall to let them pass, with a hot bottle in either hand. Having placed Mr. Lavender in his bed and drawn the clothes up to his eyes, Joe Petty passed the back of his hand across his brow and wrung it out.

"Phew!" he gasped; "he's artful!"

His wife, who had followed them in, was already fastening her eyes on the carpet.

"What's that?" she said, sniffing.

"That?" repeated Joe, picking up his pipe; "why, I had to run to ketch 'im, and it fell out o' me pocket."

"And lighted itself," said Mrs. Petty, darting at the floor and taking up a glowing quid which had burned a little round hole in the carpet. "You're a pretty one!"

"You can't foresee those sort o' things," said Joe.

"You can't foresee anything," replied his wife; "you might be a Government. Here! hold the clothes while I get the bottles to his feet. Well I never! If he hasn't got——" And from various parts of Mr. Lavender's body she recovered the five journals. "For putting things in the

wrong place, Joe Petty, I've never seen your like!"

"They'll keep 'im warm," said Joe.

Mr. Lavender, who, on finding himself in bed, had once more fallen into a comatose condition, stirred, and some words fell from his lips. "Five in one, and one in five."

"What does he say?" said Mrs. Petty, tucking him up.

"It's the odds against Candelabra for the Derby."

"Only faith," cried Mr. Lavender, "can multiply exceedingly."

"Here, take them away!" muttered Mrs. Petty, and dealing the journals a smart slap, she handed them to Joe.

"Faith!" repeated Mr. Lavender, and fell into a doze.

"About this new disease," said Joe. "D'you think it's ketchin'? I feel rather funny meself."

"Stuff!" returned his wife. "Clear away those papers and that bone, and go and take Blink out, and sit on a seat; it's all you're fit for. Of all the happy-go-luckys you're the worst."

"Well, I never could worry," said Joe from the doorway; "'tisn't in me. So long!"

And, dragging Blink by the collar, he withdrew.

Alone with her patient, Mrs. Petty, an enthusiast for cleanliness and fresh air, went on her knees, and, having plucked out the charred rim of the little hole in the carpet, opened the window wider to rid the room of the smell of burning. 'If it wasn't for me,' she thought, leaning out into the air, 'I don't know what'd become of them.'

A voice from a few feet away said:

"I hope he's none the worse. What does the doctor say?"

Looking round in astonishment, Mrs. Petty saw a young lady leaning out of a window on her right.

"We can't tell at present," she said, with a certain reserve; "he is going on satisfactory."

"It's not hydrophobia, is it?" asked the young lady. "You know he fell out of the window?"

"What!" ejaculated Mrs. Petty.

"Where the lilac's broken. If I can give you a hand I shall be very glad. I'm a V.A.D."

"Thank you, I'm sure," said Mrs. Petty stiffly, for the passion of jealousy, to which she was somewhat prone, was rising in her; "there is no call." And she thought, 'V.A. indeed! I know them.'

"Poor dear!" said the young lady. "He did come a bump. It was awfully funny! Is he—

er——?" And she touched her forehead, where tendrils of fair hair were blowing in the breeze.

Inexpressibly outraged by such a question concerning one for whom she had a proprietary reverence, Mrs. Petty answered acidly:

"Oh dear no! He is much wiser than some people!"

"It was only that he mentioned the last man and the last dollar, you know," said the young lady, as if to herself, "but, of course, that's no real sign." And she uttered a sudden silvery laugh.

Mrs. Petty became aware of something tickling her left ear, and turning round, found her master leaning out beside her, in his dressing-gown.

"Leave me, Mrs. Petty," he said with such dignity that she instinctively recoiled. "It may seem to you," continued Mr. Lavender, addressing the young lady, "indelicate on my part to resume my justification, but as a public man I suffer, knowing that I have committed a breach of decorum."

"Don't you think you ought to keep quiet in bed?" Mrs. Petty heard the young lady ask.

"My dear young lady," Mr. Lavender replied, "the thought of bed is abhorrent to me at a time

like this. What more ignoble fate than to die in one's bed?"

"I'm only asking you to live in it," said the young lady, while Mrs. Petty grasped her master by the skirts of his gown.

"Down, Blink, down!" said Mr. Lavender, leaning still further out.

"For pity's sake," wailed the young lady, "don't fall out again, or I shall burst."

"Ah, believe me," said Mr. Lavender in a receding voice, "I would not pain you further for the world."

Mrs. Petty, exerting all her strength, had hauled him in.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, sir," she said severely, "talking to a young lady like that in your dressing-gown?"

"Mrs. Petty," said Mr. Lavender mysteriously, "it might have been worse. I should like some tea with a little lemon in it."

Taking this for a sign of returning reason Mrs. Petty drew him gently towards the bed, and, having seen him get in, tucked him up and said:

"Now, sir, you never break your word, do you?"

"No public man——" began Mr. Lavender.

"Oh, bother! Now, promise me to stay quiet in bed while I get you that tea."

"I certainly shall," replied our hero, "for I feel rather faint."

"That's right," said Mrs. Petty. "I trust you." And, bolting the window, she whisked out of the room and locked the door behind her.

Mr. Lavender lay with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, clucking his parched tongue. 'God,' he thought, 'for one must use that word when the country is in danger—God be thanked for Beauty! But I must not allow it to unsteel my soul. Only when the cause of humanity has triumphed, and with the avenging sword and shell we have exterminated that criminal nation, only then shall I be entitled to let its gentle influence creep about my being.' And drinking off the tumbler of tea which Mrs. Petty was holding to his lips, he sank almost immediately into a deep slumber.

VI

MAKES A MISTAKE, AND MEETS A MOON-CAT

HE old lady, whose name was Sinkin, and whose interest in Mr. Lavender had become so deep, lived in a castle in Frognal; and with her lived her young nephew, a boy of forty-five, indissolubly connected with the Board of Guardians. It was entirely due to her representations that he presented himself at Mr. Lavender's on the following day, and, sending in his card, was admitted to our hero's presence.

Mr. Lavender, pale and stiff, was sitting in his study, with Blink on his feet, reading a speech.

"Excuse my getting up, sir," he said; "and pray be seated."

The nephew, who had a sleepy, hairless face and little Chinese eyes, bowed, and sitting down, stared at Mr. Lavender with a certain embarrassment.

"I have come," he said at last, "to ask you a few questions on behalf of——"

"By all means," said Mr. Lavender, perceiving at once that he was being interviewed. "I shall be most happy to give you my views. Please take a cigarette, for I believe that is usual. I myself do not smoke. If it is the human touch you want, you may like to know that I gave it up when that appeal in your contemporary flooded the trenches with cigarettes and undermined the nerves of our heroes. By setting an example of abstinence, and at the same time releasing more tobacco for our men, I felt that I was but doing my duty. Please don't mention that, though. And while we are on the personal note, which I sincerely deprecate, you might like to stroll round the room and look at the portrait of my father, behind the door, and of my mother, over the fireplace. Forgive my not accompanying you. The fact is—this is an interesting touch—I have always been rather subject to lumbago." And seeing the nephew Sinkin, who had risen to his suggestion, standing somewhat irresolutely in front of him, he added: "Perhaps you would like to look a little more closely at my eyes. Every now and then they flash with an almost uncanny insight." For by now he had quite forgotten his modesty in the identification he felt with the journal which was interviewing him. "I am fifty-eight," he added quickly; "but I do not look my years, though my

hair, still thick and full of vigour, is prematurely white—so often the case with men whose brains are continually on the stretch. The little home, far from grandiose, which forms the background to this most interesting personality is embowered in trees. Cats have made their mark on its lawns, and its owner's love of animals was sharply illustrated by the sheep-dog which lay on his feet clad in Turkish slippers. Get up, Blink!"

Blink, disturbed by the motion of her master's feet, rose and gazed long into his face.

"Look!" said Mr. Lavender, "she has the most beautiful eyes in the world."

At this remark, which appeared to him no saner than the others he had heard—so utterly did he misjudge Mr. Lavender's character—the nephew put down the notebook he had taken out of his pocket, and said:

"Has there ever been anything—er—remarkable about your family?"

"Indeed, yes," said Mr. Lavender. "Born of poor but lofty parentage in the city of Rochester, my father made his living as a publisher; my mother was a true daughter of the bards, the scion of a stock tracing its descent from the Druids; her name was originally Jones."

"Ah!" said the nephew Sinkin, writing.

"She has often told me at her knee," contin-

ued Mr. Lavender, "that there was a strong vein of patriotism in her family."

"She did not die—in—in——"

"No, indeed," interrupted Mr. Lavender; she is still living there."

"Ah!" said the nephew. "And your brothers and sisters?"

"One of my brothers," replied Mr. Lavender, with pardonable pride, "is the editor of *Cud Bits*. The other is a clergyman."

"Eccentric," murmured the nephew absently. "Tell me, Mr. Lavender, do you find your work a great strain? Does it——" and he touched the top of his head, covered with moist black hair.

Mr. Lavender sighed. "At a time like this," he said, "we must all be prepared to sacrifice our health. No public man, as you know, can call his head his own for a moment. I should count myself singularly lacking if I stopped to consider—er—such a consideration."

"Consider—er—such a consideration," repeated the nephew, jotting it down.

"He carries on," murmured Mr. Lavender, once more identifying himself with the journal, "grappling with the intricacies of this enormous problem; happy in the thought that nothing—not even reason itself—is too precious to sacrifice on the altar of his duty to his country. The pub-

lic may rest confident in the knowledge that he will so carry on till they carry him out on his shield." And aware subconsciously that the interview could go no further than that phrase, Mr. Lavender was silent, gazing up with rather startled eyes.

"I see," said the nephew; "I am very much obliged to you. Is your dog safe?" For Blink had begun to growl in a low and uneasy manner.

"The gentlest creature in the world," replied Mr. Lavender, "and the most sociable. I sometimes think," he went on in a changed voice, "that we have all gone mad, and that animals alone retain the sweet reasonableness which used to be esteemed a virtue in human society. Don't take that down," he added quickly, "we are all subject to moments of weakness. It was just an *obiter dictum.*"

"Make your mind easy," said the nephew, rising, "it does not serve my purpose. Just one thing, Mr. Lavender."

At this moment Blink, whose instinct had long been aware of some sinister purpose in this tall and heavy man, whose trousers did not smell of dogs, seeing him approach too near, bit him gently in the calf.

The nephew started back. "She's bitten me!" he said, in a hushed voice.

"My God!" ejaculated Mr. Lavender, rising, and falling back again, so stiff was he. "Is it possible? There must be some good reason. Blink!"

Blink wagged her little tail, thrust her nose into his hand, removed it, and growled again.

"She is quite well, I assure you," Mr. Lavender added hastily; "her nose is icy."

"She's bitten me," repeated the nephew, pulling up his trouser leg. "There's no mark, but she distinctly bit me."

"Treasure!" said Mr. Lavender, endeavouring to interest him in the dog. "Do you notice how dark the rims of her eyes are, and how clear the whites? Extraordinarily well bred. Blink!"

Aware that she was being talked of Blink continued to be torn between the desire to wag her tail and to growl. Unable to make up her mind, she sighed heavily and fell on her side against her master's legs.

"Wonderful with sheep, too," said Mr. Lavender; "at least, she would be if they would let her. You should see her with them on the heath. They simply can't bear her."

"You will hear from me again," said the nephew sourly.

"Thank you," said Mr. Lavender. "I shall be glad of a proof; it is always safer, I believe."

"Good morning," said the nephew.

Blink, who alone perceived the dark meaning in these words, seeing him move towards the door began to bark and run from side to side behind him, for all the world as if he had been a flock of sheep.

"Keep her off!" said the nephew anxiously. "Keep her off. I refuse to be bitten again."

"Blink!" called Mr. Lavender in some agony. Blink, whose obedience was excessive, came back to him at once, and stood growling from under her master's hand, laid on the white hair which flowed back from her collar, till the nephew's footsteps had died away. 'I cannot imagine,' thought Mr. Lavender, 'why she should have taken exception to that excellent journalist. Perhaps he did not smell quite right? One never knows.'

And with her moustachioed muzzle pressed to his chin Mr. Lavender sought for explanation in the innocent and living darkness of his dog's eyes. . . .

On leaving Mr. Lavender's the nephew forthwith returned to the castle in Frognal, and sought his aunt.

"Mad as a March hare, Aunt Rosie; and his dog bit me."

"That dear doggie?"

"They're dangerous."

"You were always funny about dogs, dear," said his aunt soothingly. "Why, even Sealey doesn't really like you." And calling to the little low white dog she quite failed to attract his attention. "Did you notice his dress? The first time I took him for a shepherd, and the second time——! What do you think ought to be done?"

"He'll have to be watched," said the nephew. "We can't have lunatics at large in Hampstead."

"But, Wilfred," said the old lady, "will our man-power stand it? Couldn't they watch each other? Or, if it would be any help, I could watch him myself. I took such a fancy to his dear dog."

"I shall take steps," said the nephew.

"No, don't do that. I'll go and call on the people next door. Their name is Scarlet. They'll know about him, no doubt. We mustn't do anything inconsiderate."

The nephew, muttering and feeling his calf, withdrew to his study. And the old lady, having put on her bonnet, set forth placidly, unaccompanied by her little white dog.

On arriving at the castle embedded in acacias and laurustinus she asked of the maid who opened: "Can I see Mrs. Scarlet?"

"No," replied the girl dispassionately; "she's dead."

"Mr. Scarlet, then?"

"No," replied the girl: "he's a major."

"Oh, dear!" said the old lady.

"Miss Isabel's at home," said the girl, who appeared, like so many people in time of war, to be of a simple, plain-spoken nature; "you'll find her in the garden." And she let the old lady out through a French window.

At the far end, under an acacia, Mrs. Sinkin could see the form of a young lady in a blue dress, lying in a hammock, with a cigarette between her lips and a yellow book in her hands. She approached her thinking, 'Dear me! how comfortable, in these days!' And, putting her head a little on one side, she said with a smile: "My name is Sinkin, I hope I'm not disturbing you."

The young lady rose with a vigorous gesture. "Oh, no! Not a bit."

"I do admire some people," said the old lady; "they seem to find time for everything."

The young lady stretched herself joyously.

"I'm taking it out before going to my new hospital. Try it," she said touching the hammock; "it's not bad. Will you have a cigarette?"

"I'm afraid I'm too old for both," said the old lady, "though I've often thought they must be delightfully soothing. I wanted to speak to you about your neighbour."

The young lady rolled her large grey eyes. "Ah!" she said, "he's perfectly sweet."

"I know," said the old lady, "and has such a dear dog. My nephew's very interested in them. You may have heard of him—Wilfred Sinkin—a very clever man; on so many Committees."

"Not really?" said the young lady.

"Oh, yes! He has one of those heads which nothing can disturb; so valuable in these days."

"And what sort of a heart?" asked the young lady, emitting a ring of smoke.

"Just as serene. I oughtn't to say so, but I think he's rather a wonderful machine."

"So long as he's not a doctor! You can't think how they get on your nerves when they're like that. I've bumped up against so many of them. They fired me at last!"

"Really? Where? I thought they only did that to the dear horses. Oh, what a pretty laugh you have! It's so pleasant to hear anyone laugh in these days."

"I thought no one did anything else! I mean, what else can you do, except die, don't you know?"

"I think that's *rather* a gloomy view," said the old lady placidly. "But about your neighbour. What is his name?"

"Lavender. But I call him Don Pickwixote."

"Dear me, do you indeed? Have you noticed anything very eccentric about him?"

"That depends on what you call eccentric. Wearing a nightshirt, for instance? I don't know what your standard is, you see."

The old lady was about to reply when a voice from the adjoining garden was heard saying:

"Blink! Don't touch that charming moon-cat!"

"Hush!" murmured the young lady; and seizing her visitor's arm, she drew her vigorously beneath the acacia tree. Sheltered from observation by those thick and delicate branches, they stooped, and applying their eyes to holes in the privet hedge, could see a very little cat, silvery-fawn in colour and far advanced in kittens, holding up its paw exactly like a dog, and gazing with sherry-coloured eyes at Mr. Lavender, who stood in the middle of his lawn, with Blink behind him.

"If you see me going to laugh," whispered the young lady, "pinch me hard."

"Moon-cat," repeated Mr. Lavender, "where have you come from? And what do you want, holding up your paw like that? What curious little noises you make, duckie." The cat, indeed, was uttering sounds rather like a duck. It came closer to Mr. Lavender, circled his legs, and

rubbed itself against Blink's chest, while its tapered tail, barred with silver, brushed her mouth.

"This is extraordinary," they heard Mr. Lavender say; "I would stroke it if I wasn't so stiff. How nice of you little moon-cat to be friendly to my play-girl! For what is there in all the world so pleasant to see as friendliness between a cat and dog!"

At those words the old lady, who was a great lover of animals, was so affected that she pinched the young lady by mistake.

"Not yet!" whispered the latter in some agony. "Listen!"

"Moon-cat," Mr. Lavender was saying, "Arcadia is in your golden eyes. You have come, no doubt, to show us how far we have strayed away from it." And too stiff to reach the cat by bending, Mr. Lavender let himself slowly down till he could sit. "Pan is dead," he said, as he arrived on the grass and crossed his feet, "and Christ is not alive. Moon-cat!"

The little cat had put its head into his hand, while Blink was thrusting her nose into his mouth.

"I'm going to sneeze!" whispered the old lady, strangely affected.

"Pull your upper lip down hard, like the Ger-

man Empress, and count nine!" murmured the young.

While the old lady was doing this Mr. Lavender had again begun to speak.

"Life is now nothing but explosions. Gentleness has vanished, and beauty is a dream. When you have your kittens, moon-cat, bring them up in amity, to love milk, dogs, and the sun."

The moon-cat, who had now reached his shoulder, brushed the tip of her tail across his loose right eyebrow, while Blink's jealous tongue avidly licked his high left cheekbone. With one hand Mr. Lavender was cuddling the cat's head, with the other twiddling Blink's forelock, and the watchers could see his eyes shining, and his white hair standing up all ruffled.

"Isn't it sweet?" murmured the old lady.

"Now pinch me!" whispered the young: "Lower, harder! Oo!"

"Ah! moon-cat," went on Mr. Lavender, "come and live with us! You shall have your kittens in the bathroom, and forget this age of blood and iron."

Both the old lady and the young were removing moisture from their eyes when the voice of Mr. Lavender, very changed, recalled them to their vigil. His face had become strained and troubled.

"Never," he was saying, "will we admit that doctrine of our common enemies. Might is not right, gentlemen; those who take the sword shall perish by the sword. With blood and iron we will ourselves stamp out this noxious breed. No stone shall be left standing, and no babe sleeping in that abandoned country. We will restore the rule of humanity, if we have to wade through rivers of blood, across mountains of iron."

"Whom is he calling gentlemen?" whispered the old lady.

But Blink, by anxiously licking Mr. Lavender's lips, had produced a silence in which the young lady did not dare reply. The sound of the little cat's purring broke the hush.

"Down, Blink, down!" said Mr. Lavender. "Watch this little moon-cat and her perfect manners! We may all learn from her how not to be crude. See the light shining through her pretty ears!"

The little cat, who had seen a bird, had left Mr. Lavender's shoulder and was now crouching and moving the tip of its tail from side to side.

"She would like a bird inside her; but let us rather go and find her some milk instead," said Mr. Lavender, and he began to rise.

"Do you know, I think he's quite sane,"

whispered the old lady, "except, perhaps, at intervals. What do you?"

"Glorious print!" cried Mr. Lavender suddenly, for a journal had fallen from his pocket, and the sight of it lying there, out of his reach, excited him. "Glorious print! I can read you even from here. 'When the enemy of mankind uses the word God he commits blasphemy! How different from us!'" And raising his eyes from the journal Mr. Lavender fastened them, as it seemed to his anxious listeners, on the tree which sheltered them. "Yes! Those unseen presences, who search out the workings of our heart, know that even the most jingo among us can say, 'I am not as they are!' Come, moon-cat!"

So murmuring, he turned and moved towards the house, clucking with his tongue, and followed by Blink.

"Did he mean *us?*" said the old lady nervously.

"No; that was one of his intervals. He's not mad; he's just crazy."

"Is there any difference, my dear?"

"Why, we're all crazy about something, you know; it's only a question of what."

"But what is *his* what?"

"He's got a message. They're in the air, you know."

"I haven't come across them," said the old lady. "I fear I live a very quiet life—except for picking over sphagnum moss."

"Oh, well! There's no hurry."

"Well, I shall tell my nephew what I've seen," said the old lady. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," responded the young; and, picking up her yellow book, she got back into the hammock and relighted her cigarette.

VII

SEES AN EDITOR AND FINDS A FARMER

OT for some days after his fall from the window did Mr. Lavender begin to regain the elasticity of body necessary to the resumption of public life. He spent the hours profitably, however, in digesting the newspapers and storing ardour. On Tuesday morning, remembering that no proof of his interview had yet been sent him, and feeling that he ought not to neglect so important a matter, he set forth to the office of the great journal from which, in the occult fashion of the faithful, he was convinced the reporter had come. While he was asking for the editor in the stony entrance, a young man who was passing looked at him attentively and said: "Ah, sir, here you are! He's waiting for you. Come up, will you?"

Mr. Lavender followed up some stairs, greatly gratified at the thought that he was expected. The young man led him through one or two swing doors into an outer office, where a young woman was typing.

"Half a moment," said the young man, and

passed through a door. Mr. Lavender heard a voice speaking, and almost directly four gentlemen, exuding laughter, issued in single file, holding notebooks in their hands.

"Now, sir," said the young man, returning.

Mr. Lavender entered a room of excellent proportions, almost luxuriously furnished, where a man with grey hair, a long upper lip, and a veiled eye, was lying back in a chair at a bureau, smoking a cigar. He rose on seeing his visitor, and held out his hand.

"Glad to see you, sir," he said. "Sit down. Do you smoke?"

Mr. Lavender shook his head, and sat down on the edge of a green leather chair. The editor, resuming his seat, crossed his legs deferentially, and sinking his chin again on his chest, began:

"About your article. My only trouble, of course, is that I'm running that stunt on British prisoners—great success! You've seen it, I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Lavender; "I read you every day."

The editor made a little movement which showed that he was flattered, and sinking his chin still further into his chest, resumed:

"It might run another week, or it might fall down to-morrow—you never can tell. But I'm

getting lots of letters. Tremendous public interest."

"Yes, yes," assented Mr. Lavender; "it's most important."

"Of course, we might run yours with it," said the editor. "But I don't know; I think it'd kill the other. Still——"

"I shouldn't like——" began Mr. Lavender.

"I don't believe in giving them more than they want, you know," resumed the editor. "I think I'll have my news editor in," and he blew into a tube. "Send me Mr. Crackamup. This thing of yours is very important, sir. Suppose we began to run it on Thursday. Yes, I should think they'll be tired of British prisoners by then."

"Don't let me——" began Mr. Lavender.

The editor's eye became unveiled for the moment. "You'll be wanting to take it somewhere else if we—— Quite! Well, I think we *could* run them together. See here, Mr. Crackamup"—Mr. Lavender saw a small man like Beethoven frowning from behind spectacles—"could we run this German prisoner stunt alongside the British, or d'you think it would kill it?"

Mr. Lavender almost rose from his chair in surprise. "Are you——" he said; "is it——"

The small man hiccoughed, and said in a raw voice:

"The letters are falling off."

"Ah!" murmured the editor, "I thought we should be through by Thursday. We'll start this new stunt Thursday. Give it all prominence, Crackamup. It'll focus fury. All to the good—all to the good. Opinion's ripe." Then for a moment he seemed to hesitate, and his chin sank back on his chest. "I don't know," he murmured; "of course it may——"

"Please," began Mr. Lavender, rising, while the small man hiccoughed again. The two motions seemed to determine the editor.

"That's all right, sir," he said, rising also; "that's quite all right. We'll say Thursday, and risk it. Thursday, Crackamup." And he held out his hand to Mr. Lavender. "Good morning, sir, good morning. Delighted to have seen you. You wouldn't put your name to it? Well, well, it doesn't matter; only *you* could have written it. The turn of phrase—immense! They'll tumble all right!" And Mr. Lavender found himself, with Mr. Crackamup, in the lobby. 'It's bewildering,' he thought, 'how quickly he settled that. And yet he had such repose. But is there some mistake?' He was about to ask his companion, but with a distant hiccough the small man had vanished. Thus deserted, Mr. Lavender was in two minds whether to ask to be readmitted, when

the four gentlemen with notebooks repassed him in single file into the editor's room.

"My name is Lavender," he said resolutely to the young woman. "Is that all right?"

"Quite," she answered, without looking up.

Mr. Lavender went out slowly, thinking, 'I may perhaps have said more in that interview than I remember. Next time I really will insist on having a proof. Or have they taken me for some other public man?' This notion was so disagreeable, however, that he dismissed it, and passed into the street.

On Thursday, the day fixed for his fresh tour of public speaking, he opened the great journal eagerly. Above the third column was the headline: "OUR VITAL DUTY: BY A GREAT PUBLIC MAN." 'That must be it,' he thought. The article, which occupied just a column of precious space, began with an appeal so moving that before he had read twenty lines Mr. Lavender had identified himself completely with the writer; and if anyone had told him that he had not uttered these sentiments, he would have given him the lie direct. Working from heat to heat the article finished in a glorious outburst with a passionate appeal to the country to starve all German prisoners. Mr. Lavender put it down in a glow of exultation. 'I shall translate words into action,'

he thought; 'I shall at once visit a rural district where German prisoners are working on the land, and see that the farmers do their duty.' And, forgetting in his excitement to eat his breakfast, he put the journal in his pocket, wrapped himself in his dust-coat and broad-brimmed hat, and went out to his car, which was drawn up, with Blink, who had not forgotten her last experience, inside.

"We will go to a rural district, Joe," he said, getting in.

"Very good, sir," answered Joe; and, unnoticed by the population, they glided into the hazy heat of the June morning.

"Well, what abaht it, sir?" said Joe, after they had proceeded for some three hours. "Here we are."

Mr. Lavender, who had been lost in the beauty of the scenes through which he was passing, awoke from reverie, and said:

'I am looking for German prisoners, Joe; if you see a farmer, you might stop."

"Any sort of farmer?" asked Joe.

"Is there more than one sort?" returned Mr. Lavender, smiling.

Joe cocked his eye. "Ain't you never lived in the country, sir?"

"Not for more than a few weeks at a time, Joe,

unless Rochester counts. Of course, I know Eastbourne very well."

"*I* know Eastbourne from the inside," said Joe discursively. "I was a waiter there once."

"An interesting life, a waiter's, Joe, I should think."

"Ah! Everything comes to 'im who waits, they say. But abaht farmers—you've got a lot to learn, sir."

"I am always conscious of that, Joe; the ramifications of public life are innumerable."

"I could give you some rummikins abaht farmers. I once travelled in breeches."

"You seem to have done a great many things, Joe."

"That's right, sir. I've been a sailor, a 'traveller,' a waiter, a scene-shifter, and a shover, and I don't know which was the cushiest job. But, talking of farmers: there's the old English type that wears Bedfords—don't you go near 'im, 'e bites. There's the modern scientific farmer, but it'll take us a week to find '*im*. And there's the small-'older, wearin' trahsers, likely as not; I don't think 'e'd be any use to you."

"What am I to do, then?" asked Mr. Lavender.

"Ah!" said Joe, "'ave lunch."

Mr. Lavender sighed, his hunger quarrelling

with his sense of duty. "I should like to have found a farmer first," he said.

"Well, sir, I'll drive up to that clump o' beeches, and you can have a look round for one while I get lunch ready."

"That will do admirably."

"There's just one thing, sir," said Joe, when his master was about to start; "don't you take any house you come across for a farm. They're mostly cottages o' gentility nowadays, in'abited by lunatics."

"I shall be very careful," said Mr. Lavender.

'This glorious land!' he thought, walking away from the beech clump, with Blink at his heels; 'how wonderful to see it being restored to its former fertility under pressure of the war! The farmer must be a happy man, indeed, working so nobly for his country, without thought of his own prosperity. How flowery those beans look already!' he mused, glancing at a field of potatoes. "Now that I am here I shall be able to combine my work on German prisoners with an effort to stimulate food production. Blink!" For Blink was lingering in a gateway. Moving back to her, Mr. Lavender saw that the sagacious animal was staring through the gate at a farmer who was standing in a field perfectly still, with his back turned, about thirty yards away.

"Have you——" Mr. Lavender began eagerly; "is it—are you employing any German prisoners, sir?"

The farmer did not seem to hear. 'He must,' thought Mr. Lavender, 'be of the old stolid English variety.'

The farmer, who was indeed attired in a bowler hat and Bedford cords, continued to gaze over his land, unconscious of Mr. Lavender's presence.

'I am asking you a question, sir," resumed the latter in a louder voice. "And however patriotically absorbed you may be in cultivating your soil, there is no necessity for rudeness."

The farmer did not move a muscle.

"Sir," began Mr. Lavender again, very patiently, "though I have always heard that the British farmer is of all men least amenable to influence and new ideas, I have never believed it, and I am persuaded that if you will but listen I shall be able to alter your whole outlook about the agricultural future of this country." For it had suddenly occurred to him that it might be a long time before he had again such an opportunity of addressing a rural audience on the growth of food, and he was loth to throw away the chance. The farmer, however, continued to stand with his back to the speaker, paying no

more heed to his voice than to the buzzing of a fly.

"You *shall* hear me," cried Mr. Lavender, unconsciously miming a voice from the past, and catching, as he thought, the sound of a titter, he flung his hand out, and exclaimed:

"Grass, gentlemen, grass is the hub of the matter. We have put our hand to the plough"—and, his imagination taking flight at those words, he went on in a voice calculated to reach the great assembly of farmers which he now saw before him with their backs turned—"and never shall we take it away till we have reduced every acre in the country to an arable condition. In the future not only must we feed ourselves, but our dogs, our horses, and our children, and restore the land to its pristine glory in the front rank of the world's premier industry. But me no buts," he went on with a winning smile, remembering that geniality is essential in addressing a country audience, "and butter me no butter, for in future we shall require to grow our margarine as well. Let us, in a word, put behind us all prejudice and pusillanimity till we see this country of ours once more blooming like one great cornfield, covered with cows. Sirs, I am no iconoclast; let us do all this without departing in any way from those great principles of Free Trade, Industrialism, and

Individual Liberty which have made our towns the largest, most crowded, and wealthiest under that sun which never sets over the British Empire. We do but need to see this great problem steadily and to see it whole, and we shall achieve this revolution in our national life without the sacrifice of a single principle or a single penny. Believe me, gentlemen, we shall yet eat our cake and have it."

Mr. Lavender paused for breath, the headlines of his great speech in to-morrow's paper dancing before his eyes: "THE CLIMACTERIC—EATS CAKE AND HAS IT—A GREAT CONCLUSION." The wind, which had risen somewhat during Mr. Lavender's speech, fluttered the farmer's garments at this moment, so that they emitted a sound like the stir which runs through an audience at a moment of strong emotion.

"Ah!" cried Mr. Lavender, "I see that I move you, gentlemen. Those have traduced you who call you unimpressionable. After all, are you not the backbone of this country up which runs the marrow which feeds the brain; and shall you not respond to an appeal at once so simple and so fundamental? I assure you, gentlemen, it needs no thought; indeed, the less you think about it the better, for to do so will but weaken your purpose and distract your attention. Your duty is to

go forward with stout hearts, firm steps, and kindling eyes; in this way alone shall we defeat our common enemies." And at those words, which he had uttered at the top of his voice, Mr. Lavender stood like a clock which has run down, rubbing his eyes. For Blink, roaming the field during the speech, and encountering the quadruped called rabbit, which she had never seen before, had backed away from it in dismay, brushed against the farmer's legs and caused his breeches to fall down, revealing the sticks on which they had been draped. When Mr. Lavender saw this he called out in a loud voice: "Sir, you have deceived me. I took you for a human being. I now perceive that you are but a selfish automaton, rooted to your own business, without a particle of patriotic sense. Farewell!"

VIII

STARVES SOME GERMANS

FTER parting with the scarecrow Mr. Lavender, who felt uncommonly hungry, was about to despair of finding any German prisoners when he saw before him a gravel-pit, and three men working therein. Clad in dungaree, and very dusty, they had a cast of countenance so unmistakably Teutonic that Mr. Lavender stood still. They paid little or no attention to him, however, but went on sadly and silently with their work, which was that of sifting gravel. Mr. Lavender sat down on a milestone opposite, and his heart contracted within him. 'They look very thin and sad,' he thought; 'I should not like to be a prisoner myself, far from my country, in the midst of a hostile population, without a woman or a dog to throw me a wag of the tail. Poor men! For, though it is necessary to hate the Germans, it seems impossible to forget that we are all human beings. This is weakness,' he added to himself, 'which no editor would tolerate for a moment. I must fight against it if I

am to fulfil my duty of rousing the population to the task of starving them. How hungry they look already—their cheeks are hollow! I must be firm. Perhaps they have wives and families at home, thinking of them at this moment. But, after all, they are Huns. What did the great writer say? "Vermin—creatures no more worthy of pity than the tiger or the rat." How true! And yet—Blink!' For his dog, seated on her haunches, was looking at him with that peculiarly steady gaze which betokened in her the desire for food. 'Yes,' mused Mr. Lavender, 'pity is the mark of the weak man. It is a vice which was at one time rampant in this country; the war has made one beneficial change at least—we are moving more and more towards the manly and unforgiving vigour of the tiger and the rat. To be brutal! This is the one lesson that the Germans can teach us, for we had almost forgotten the art. What danger we were in! Thank God, we have past masters again among us now!' A frown became fixed between his brows. 'Yes, indeed, past masters. How I venerate those good journalists and all the great crowd of witnesses who have dominated the mortal weakness, pity. "The Hun must and shall be destroyed—root and branch—hip and thigh—bag and baggage—man, woman, and babe—this is the sole duty of the great and humane British

people. Roll up, ladies and gentlemen, roll up!" Great thought—great language! And yet——'

Here Mr. Lavender broke into a gentle sweat, while the Germans went on sifting gravel in front of him, and Blink continued to look up into his face with her fixed, lustrous eyes. 'What an awful thing,' he thought, 'to be a man. If only I were just a public man and could, as they do, leave out the human and individual side of everything, how simple it would be! It is the being a man as well which is so troublesome. A man has feelings; it is wrong—wrong! There should be no connection whatever between public duty and the feelings of a man. One ought to be able to starve one's enemy without a quiver, to watch him drown without a wink. In fact, one ought to be a German. We ought all to be Germans. Blink, we ought all to be Germans, dear! I must steel myself!' And Mr. Lavender wiped his forehead, for, though a great idea had come to him, he still lacked the heroic savagery to put it into execution. 'It is my duty,' he thought, 'to cause those hungry, sad-looking men to follow me and watch me eat my lunch. It is my duty. God give me strength! For unless I make this sacrifice of my gentler nature I shall be unworthy to call myself a public man, or to be reported in the newspapers. *En avant, de Bracy!*' So musing, he rose,

and Blink with him. Crossing the road, he clenched his fists, and said in a voice which anguish made somewhat shrill:

"Are you hungry, my friends?"

The Germans stopped sifting gravel, looked up at him, and one of them nodded.

"And thirsty."

This time they all three nodded.

"Come on, then," said Mr. Lavender.

And he led the way back along the road, followed by Blink and the three Germans. Arriving at the beech clump whose great trees were already throwing shadows, denoting that it was long past noon, Mr. Lavender saw that Joe had spread food on the smooth ground, and was, indeed, just finishing his own repast.

'What is there to eat?' thought Mr. Lavender, with a sort of horror. 'For I feel as if I were about to devour a meal of human flesh.' And he looked round at the three Germans slouching up shamefacedly behind him.

"Sit down, please," he said. The three men sat down.

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender to his surprised chauffeur, "serve my lunch. Give me a large helping, and a glass of ale." And, paler than his holland dust-coat, he sat resolutely down on the bole of a beech, with Blink on her haunches be-

side him. While Joe was filling a plate with pigeon-pie and pouring out a glass of foaming Bass, Mr. Lavender stared at the three Germans and suffered the tortures of the damned. 'I will not flinch,' he thought; 'God helping me, I certainly will not flinch. Nothing shall prevent my going through with it.' And his eyes, more prominent than a hunted rabbit's, watched the approach of Joe with the plate and glass. The three men also followed the movements of the chauffeur, and it seemed to Mr. Lavender that their eyes were watering. 'Courage!' he murmured to himself, transfixing a succulent morsel with his fork and conveying it to his lips. For fully a minute he revolved the tasty mouthful, which he could not swallow, while the three men's eyes watched him with a sort of lugubrious surprise. 'If,' he thought with anguish, 'if *I* were a prisoner in Germany! Come, come! One effort, it's only the first mouthful!' and with a superhuman effort he swallowed. "Look at me!" he cried to the three Germans, "look at me! I—I—I'm going to be sick!" and putting down his plate, he rose and staggered forward. "Joe," he said in a dying voice, "feed these poor men, feed them; make them drink, feed them!" And rushing headlong to the edge of the grove, he returned what he had swallowed—to the great interest of

Blink. Then, waving away the approach of Joe, and consumed with shame and remorse at his lack of heroism, he ran and hid himself in a clump of hazel bushes, trying to sink into the earth. 'No,' he thought; 'no; I am not for public life. I have failed at the first test. Was ever so squeamish an exhibition? I have betrayed my country and the honour of public life. These Germans are now full of beer and pigeon-pie. What am I but a poltroon, unworthy to lace the shoes of the great leaders of my land? The sun has witnessed my disgrace.'

How long he stayed there lying on his face he did not know before he heard the voice of Joe saying, "Wot oh, sir!"

"Joe," replied Mr. Lavender faintly, "my body is here, but my spirit has departed."

"Ah!" said Joe, "a rum upset—that there. Swig this down, sir!" and he held out to his master a flask-cup filled with brandy. Mr. Lavender swallowed it.

"Have they gone?" he said, gasping.

"They 'ave, sir," replied Joe, "and not 'alf full neither. Where did you pick 'em up?"

"In a gravel-pit," said Mr. Lavender, "I can never forgive myself for this betrayal of my King and country. I have fed three Germans. Leave me, for I am not fit to mingle with my fellows."

"Well, I don't think!" said Joe. "Germans?"

Gazing up into his face Mr. Lavender read the unmistakable signs of uncontrolled surprise.

"Why do you look at me like that?" he said.

"Germans?" repeated Joe; "what Germans? Three blighters workin' on the road, as English as you or me. Wot are you talkin' about, sir?"

"What!" cried Mr. Lavender; "do you tell me they were not Germans?"

"Well, their names was Tompkins, 'Obson, and Brown, and they 'adn't an aitch in their 'eads."

"God be praised!" said Mr. Lavender. "I am, then, still an English gentleman. Joe, I am very hungry; is there nothing left?"

"Nothin' whatever, sir," replied Joe.

"Then take me home," said Mr. Lavender; "I care not, for my spirit has come back to me."

So saying, he rose, and supported by Joe, made his way towards the car, praising God in his heart that he had not disgraced his country.

IX

CONVERSES WITH A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

ES," said Mr. Lavender, when they had proceeded some twenty miles along the road for home, "my hunger is excessive. If we come across an hotel, Joe, pull up."

"Right-o, sir," returned Joe. "'Otels ain't what they were, but we'll find something. I've got your coupons."

Mr. Lavender, who was seated beside his chauffeur on the driving-seat, while Blink occupied in solitude the body of the car, was silent for a minute, revolving a philosophic thought.

"Do you find," he said suddenly, "that compulsory sacrifice is doing you good, Joe?"

"It's good for my thirst, sir," replied Joe. "Never was so powerful thirsty in me life as I've been since they watered beer. There's just enough in it to tickle you. That bottle o' Bass you would 'ave 'ad at lunch is the last of the old stock at 'ome, sir; an' the sight of it fair gave me the wind up. To think those blighters 'ad it! Wish *I'd*

known they was Germans—*I* wouldn't 'ave weakened at it."

"Do not, I beg," said Mr. Lavender, "remind me of that episode. I sometimes think," he went on as dreamily as his hunger would permit, "that being forced to deprive oneself awakens one's worst passions; that is, of course, speaking rather as a man than a public man. What do you think will happen, Joe, when we are no longer obliged to sacrifice ourselves?"

"Do wot we've been doin' all along—sacrifice someone else," said Joe lightly.

"Be serious, Joe," said Mr. Lavender.

"Well," returned Joe, "I don't know what'll 'appen to you, sir, but I shall go on the bust permanent."

Mr. Lavender sighed. "I do so wonder whether I shall, too," he said.

Joe looked round at him, and a gleam of compassion twinkled in his greenish eyes. "Don't you worry, sir," he said; "it's a question of constitootion. A week'd sew you up."

"A week!" said Mr. Lavender with watering lips. "I trust I may not forget myself so long as that. Public men do not go 'on the bust,' Joe, as you put it."

"Be careful, sir! I can't drive with one eye."

"How can they, indeed?" went on Mr. Lav-

ender; "they are like athletes, ever in training for their unending conflict with the national life."

"Well," answered Joe indulgently, "they 'as their own kind of intoxication, too—that's true; and the fumes is permanent; they're gassed all the time, and chloroformed the rest."

"I don't know to what you allude, Joe," said Mr. Lavender severely.

"'Aven't you never noticed, sir, that there's two worlds—the world as it is, and the world as it seems to the public man?"

"That may be," said Mr. Lavender with some excitement. "But which is the greater, which is the nobler, Joe? And what does the other matter? Surely that which flourishes in great minds, and by their utterances is made plain. Is it not better to live in a world where nobody shrinks from being starved or killed so long as they can die for their kings and countries, rather than in a world where people merely wish to live?"

"Ah!" said Joe, "we're all ready to die for our countries if we've got to. But we don't look on it, like the public speakers, as a picnic. They're a bit too light-'earted."

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender, covering his ears, and instantly uncovering them again, "this is the most horrible blasphemy I have ever listened to."

"I can do better than that, sir," answered Joe. "Shall I get on with it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lavender, clenching his hands, "a public man shrinks from nothing—not even from the gibes of his enemies."

"Well, wot abaht it, sir? Look at the things they say, and at what really is. Mind you, I'm not speakin' particular of the public men in this country—or any other country; I'm speakin' of the lot of 'em in every country. They're a sort of secret society, brought up on gas. And every now and then someone sets a match to it, and we get it in the neck. Look 'ere, sir. Dahn squats one on his backside an' writes something in 'igh words. Up pops another and says something in 'igher; an' so they go on poppin' up an' squattin' dahn till you get an atmosphere where you can't breathe; and all the time all we want is to be let alone, and 'uman kindness do the rest. All these fellers 'ave got two weaknesses—one's ideas, and the other's their own importance. They've got to be conspicuous, and without ideas they can't, so it's a vicious circle. When I see a man bein' conspicuous, I says to meself: 'Gawd 'elp us, we shall want it!' And sooner or later we always do. I'll tell you what's the curse of the world, sir; it's the gift of expressin' what ain't your real feeling. And—Lord! what a lot of us 'ave got it!"

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender, whose eyes were almost starting from his head, "your words are the knell of poetry, philosophy, and prose—especially of prose. They are the grave of history, which, as you know, is made up of the wars and intrigues which have originated in the brains of public men. If your sordid views were true, how do you suppose for one minute that in this great epic struggle we could be consoled by the thought that we are 'making history'? Has there been a single utterance of any note which has not poured the balm of those words into our ears? Think how they have sustained the widow and the orphan, and the wounded lying out in agony under the stars. 'To make history,' 'to act out the great drama'—that thought, ever kept before us, has been our comfort and their stay. And you would take it from us? Shame—shame!" repeated Mr. Lavender. "You would destroy all glamour, and be the death of every principle."

"Give me facts," said Joe stubbornly, "an' you may 'ave my principles. As to the other thing, I don't know what it is, but you may 'ave it, too. And 'ere's another thing, sir: haven't you never noticed that when a public man blows off and says something, it does 'im in? No matter what 'appens afterwards, he's got to stick to it or look a fool."

"I certainly have not," said Mr. Lavender. "I have never, or very seldom, noticed that narrowness in public men, nor have I ever seen them 'looking fools' as you rudely put it."

"Where are your eyes, sir?" answered Joe; "where *are* your eyes? I give you my word it's one or the other, though I admit they've brought camouflage to an 'igh art. But, speaking soberly, sir, if that's possible, public men are a good thing, and you can 'ave too much of it. But you began it, sir," he added soothingly, "and 'ere's your hotel. You'll feel better with something inside you."

So saying, he brought the car to a standstill before a sign which bore the words, "Royal Goat."

Mr. Lavender, deep sunk in the whirlpool of feeling which had been stirred in him by his chauffeur's cynicism, gazed at the square red-brick building with bewildered eyes.

"It's quite O.K.," said Joe; "I used to call 'ere regular when I was travellin' in breeches. Where the commercials are gathered together the tap is good," he added, laying a finger against the side of his nose. "And they've a fine brand of pickles. Here's your coupon."

Thus encouraged, Mr. Lavender descended from the car, and, accompanied by Blink, entered the hotel and sought the coffee-room.

BIBLIOTH. BODLEIANA

A maid of robust and comely appearance, with a fine free eye, divested him of his overcoat and the coupon, and pointed to a table and a pale and intellectual-looking young man in spectacles who was eating.

"Have you any more beef?" said the latter, without looking up.

"No, sir," replied the maid.

"Then bring me the ham and eggs," he added. "Here's another coupon—and anything else you've got."

Mr. Lavender, whose pangs had leaped in him at the word "beef," gazed at the bare bone of the beef-joint and sighed.

"I, too, will have some ham and a couple of poached eggs," he said.

"You can have ham, sir," replied the maid, "but there are only eggs enough for one."

"And I am the one," said the young man, looking up for the first time.

Mr. Lavender at once conceived an aversion from him; his appearance was unhealthy, and his eyes ravened from behind the spectacles beneath his high forehead.

"I have no wish to deprive you of your eggs, sir," he said, "though I have had nothing to eat all day."

"I have had nothing to eat to speak of for six

months," replied the young man; "and in a fortnight's time I shall have nothing to eat again for two years."

Mr. Lavender, who habitually spoke the truth, looked at him with a sort of horror. But the young man had again concentrated his attention on his plate. 'How deceptive are appearances,' thought Mr. Lavender; 'one would say an intellectual, not to say a spiritual type, and yet he eats like a savage, and lies like a trooper!' And the pinchings of his hunger again attacking him, he said rather acidly:

"May I ask you, sir, whether you consider it amusing to tell such untruths to a stranger?"

The young man, who had finished what was on his plate, paused, and with a faint smile said:

"I spoke figuratively. You, sir, I expect, have never been in prison."

At the word "prison" Mr. Lavender's natural kindliness reasserted itself at once. "Forgive me," he said gently; "please eat all the ham. I can easily do with bread and cheese. I am extremely sorry you have had that misfortune, and would on no account do anything which might encourage you to incur it again. If it is a question of money or anything of that sort," he went on timidly, "please command me. I abhor prisons; I

consider them inhuman; people should only be confined upon their honours."

The young man's eyes kindled behind his spectacles.

"*I* have been confined," he said, "not upon my honour, but because of my honour; to break it in."

"How is that?" cried Mr. Lavender, aghast; "to break it in?"

"Yes," said the young man, cutting a large slice of bread, "there's no other way of putting it with truth. They want me to go back on my word, to go back on my faith, and I won't. In a fortnight's time they'll gaol me again, so I *must* eat—excuse me. I shall want all my strength." And he filled his mouth too full to go on speaking.

Mr. Lavender stared at him, greatly perturbed. 'How unjustly I judged him,' he thought; and seeing that the maid had placed the end of a ham before him he began carving off what little there was left on it, and, filling a plate, placed it before the young man. The latter thanked him, and without looking up ate rapidly on. Mr. Lavender watched him with beaming eyes. 'It's lovely to see him!' he thought; 'poor fellow!'

"Where are the eggs?" said the young man suddenly.

Mr. Lavender got up and rang the bell.

"Please bring those eggs for him," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the maid. "And what are *you* going to have? There's nothing in the house now."

"Oh!" said Mr. Lavender, startled. "A cup of coffee and a slice of bread, thank you. I can always eat at any time."

The maid went away muttering to herself, and bringing the eggs, plumped them down before the young man, who ate them more hastily than words could tell.

"I mean," he said, "to do all I can in this fortnight to build up my strength. I shall eat almost continuously. They shall never break me." And, reaching out, he took the remainder of the loaf.

Mr. Lavender watched it disappear with a certain irritation which he subdued at once. 'How selfish of me,' he thought, 'even to think of eating while this young hero is still hungry.'

"Are you, then," he said, "the victim of some religious or political plot?"

"Both," replied the young man, leaning back with a sigh of repletion, and wiping his mouth. "I was released to-day, and, as I said, I shall be courtmartialled again to-day fortnight. It'll be two years this time. But they can't break me."

Mr. Lavender gasped, for at the word "courtmartialled" a dreadful doubt had assailed him.

"Are you," he stammered—"you are not—you cannot be a Conscientious Objector?"

"I can," said the young man.

Mr. Lavender half rose in horror.

"I don't approve," he ejaculated; "I do *not* approve of you."

"Of course not," said the young man with a little smile at once proud and sad; "who does? If you did I shouldn't have to eat like this, nor should I have the consciousness of spiritual loneliness to sustain me. You look on me as a moral outcast, as a leper. That is my comfort and my strength. For though I have a genuine abhorrence of war, I know full well that I could not stick this if it were not for the feeling that I must not and will not lower myself to the level of mere opportunists like you, and sink myself in the herd of men in the street."

At hearing himself thus described Mr. Lavender flushed.

"I yield to no one," he said, "in my admiration of principle. It is because of my principles that I regard you as a——"

"Shirker," put in the young man calmly. "Go on; don't mince words; we're used to them."

"Yes," said Mr. Lavender, kindling, "a shirker. Excuse me! A renegade from the camp

of Liberty, a deserter from the ranks of Humanity, if you will pardon me."

"Say a Christian, and have done with it!" said the young man.

"No," said Mr. Lavender, who had risen to his feet, "I will not go so far as that. You are not a Christian, you are a Pharisee. I abhor you."

"And I abhor you," said the young man suddenly. "I am a Christian Socialist, but I refuse to consider you my brother. And I can tell you this: Some day when through our struggle the triumph of Christian Socialism and of Peace is assured, we shall see that you firebrands and jingoes get no chance to put up your noxious heads and disturb the brotherhood of the world. We shall stamp you out. We shall do you in. We who believe in love will take jolly good care that you apostles of hate get all we've had and more—if you provoke us enough that is."

He stopped, for Mr. Lavender's figure had rigidified on the other side of the table into the semblance of one who is about to address the House of Lords.

"I can find here," he cried, "no analogy with religious persecution. This is a simple matter. The burden of defending his country falls equally on every citizen. I know not, and I care not, what promises were made to you, or in what spirit the

laws of compulsory service were passed. You will either serve or go to prison till you do. I am a plain Englishman, expressing the view of my plain countrymen."

The young man, tilting back in his chair, rapped on the table with the handle of his dinner-knife.

"Hear, hear!" he murmured.

"And let me tell you this," continued Mr. Lavender, "you have no right to put a mouthful of food between your lips so long as you are not prepared to die for it. And if the Huns came here to-morrow I would not lift a finger to save you from the fate you would undoubtedly receive."

During this colloquy their voices had grown so loud that the maid, entering in dismay, had gone into the bar and informed the company that a Conscientious Objector had eaten all the food and was "carrying on outrageous" in the coffee-room. On hearing this report those who were assembled—being four commercial travellers far gone in liquor—taking up the weapons which came nearest to hand—to wit, four syphons—formed themselves two deep and marched into the coffee-room. Aware at once from Mr. Lavender's white hair and words that he was not the Objector in question, they advanced upon the young man, who was still seated, and taking up

the four points of the compass, began squirting him unmercifully with soda-water. Blinded and dripping, the unfortunate young fellow tried desperately to elude the cordon of his persecutors, only to receive a fresh stream in his face at each attempt. Seeing him thus tormented, amid the coarse laughter of these half-drunken "travellers," Mr. Lavender suffered a moment of the most poignant struggle between his principles and his chivalry. Then, almost unconsciously grasping the ham-bone, he advanced and called out loudly:

"Stop! Do not persecute that young man. You are four and he is one. Drop it, I tell you—Huns that you are!"

The commercial fellows, however, laughed; and this infuriating Mr. Lavender, he dealt one of them a blow with the ham-bone, which, lighting on the funny point of his elbow, caused him to howl and spin round the room. One of the others promptly avenged him with a squirt of syphon in Mr. Lavender's left eye; whereon he incontinently attacked them all, whirling the ham-bone round his head like a shillelagh. And had it not been that Blink and the maid seized his coat-tails he would have done them severe injury. It was at this moment that Joe Petty, attracted by the hullabaloo, arrived in the door-

way, and running up to his master, lifted him from behind and carried him from the room, still brandishing the ham-bone and kicking out with his legs. Dumping him into the car, Joe mounted hastily and drove off. Mr. Lavender sat for two or three minutes coming to his senses before full realisation of what he had done dawned on him. Then, flinging the ham-bone from him, he sank back among the cushions, with his chin buried on his chest. 'What have I done?' he thought over and over again. 'What *have* I done? Taken up the bone for a Conscientious Objector—defended a renegade against great odds! My God! I am indeed less than a public man!'

And in this state of utter dejection, inanition, and collapse, with Blink asleep on his feet, he was driven back to Hampstead.

X

DREAMS A DREAM AND SEES A VISION

HOUGH habitually abstemious, Mr. Lavender was so very hungry that evening when he sat down to supper that he was unable to leave the lobster which Mrs. Petty had provided until it was reduced to mere integument. Since his principles prevented his lightening it with anything but ginger-beer he went to bed in some discomfort, and, tired out with the emotions of the day, soon fell into a heavy slumber, which at dawn became troubled by a dream of an extremely vivid character. He fancied himself, indeed, dressed in khaki, with a breastplate composed of newspapers containing reports of speeches which he had been charged to deliver to soldiers at the front. He was passing in a winged tank along those scenes of desolation of which he had so often read in his daily papers, and which his swollen fancy now coloured even more vividly than had those striking phrases of the past, when presently the tank turned a somersault, and shot him out into a

morass lighted up by countless star-shells whizzing round and above. In this morass were hundreds and thousands of figures sunk like himself up to the waist, and waving their arms above their heads. 'These,' thought Mr. Lavender, 'must be the soldiers I have come to speak to,' and he tore a sheet off his breastplate; but before he could speak from its columns it became thin air in his hand; and he went on tearing off sheet after sheet; hoping to find a speech which would stay solid long enough for him to deliver it. At last a little corner stayed substantial in his hand, and he called out in a loud voice: "Heroes!" But at the word the figures vanished with a wail, sinking into the mud, which was left covered with bubbles iridescent in the light of the star-shells. At this moment one of these, bursting over his head, turned into a large bright moon; and Mr. Lavender saw to his amazement that the bubbles were really butterflies, perched on the liquid moon-lit mud, fluttering their crimson wings, and peering up at him with tiny human faces. "Who are you?" he cried; "oh! who are you?" The butterflies closed their wings; and on each of their little faces came a look so sad and questioning that Mr. Lavender's tears rolled down into his breastplate of speeches. A whisper rose from them. "We are the dead." And they flew up

suddenly in swarms, and beat his face with their wings.

Mr. Lavender woke up sitting in the middle of the floor, with light shining in on him through a hole in the curtain, and Blink licking off the tears which were streaming down his face.

"Blink," he said, "I have had a horrible dream." And still conscious of that weight on his chest, as of many undelivered speeches, he was afraid to go back to bed; so, putting on some clothes, he went carefully downstairs and out of doors into the morning. He walked with his dog towards the risen sun, alone in the silvery light of Hampstead, meditating deeply on his dream. 'I have evidently,' he thought, 'not yet acquired that felicitous insensibility which is needful for successful public speaking. This is undoubtedly the secret of my dream. For the subconscious knowledge of my deficiency explains the weight on my chest and the futile tearing of sheet after sheet, which vanished as I tore them away. I lack the self-complacency necessary to the orator in any surroundings, and that golden certainty which has enchanted me in the outpourings of great men, whether in ink or speech. This is, however, a matter which I can rectify with practice.' And coming to a little may-tree in full blossom, he thus addressed it:

"Little tree, be my audience, for I see in you, tipped with the sunlight, a vision of the tranquil and beautiful world, which, according to every authority, will emerge out of this carnival of blood and iron."

And the little tree lifted up its voice and answered him with the song of a blackbird.

Mr. Lavender's heart, deeply responsive to the voice of Nature, melted within him.

"What are the realms of this earth, the dreams of statesmen, and all plots and policies," he said, "compared with the beauty of this little tree? She—or is it a he?—breathes, in her wild and simple dress, just to be lovely and loved. He harbours the blackbird, and shakes fragrance into the morning; and with her blossom catches the rain and the sun drops of heaven. I see in him the witchery of God; and of her prettiness would I make a song of redemption."

So saying he knelt down before the little tree, while Blink on her haunches, very quiet beside him, looked wiser than many dogs. A familiar gurgling sound roused him from his devotions, and turning his head he saw his young neighbour in the garb of a nurse, standing on the path behind him. 'She has dropped from heaven,' he thought: 'for all nurses are angels.' And, taking off his hat, he said:

"You surprised me at a moment of which I am not ashamed; I was communing with Beauty. And behold! Aurora is with me."

"Say, rather, Borealis," said the young lady. "I was so fed-up with hospital that I had to have a scamper before turning in. If you're going home we might go together?"

"It would, indeed, be a joy," said Mr. Lavender. "The garb of mercy becomes you."

'Do you think so?" replied the young lady, in whose cheeks a lovely flush had not deepened. "I call it hideous. Do you always come out and pray to that tree?"

"I am ashamed to say," returned Mr. Lavender, "that I do not. But I intend to do so in future, since it has brought me such a vision." And he looked with such deferential and shining eyes at his companion that she placed the back of her hand before her mouth, and her breast rose.

"I'm most fearfully sleepy," she said. "Have you had any adventures lately—you and Samjoe?"

"Samjoe?" repeated Mr. Lavender.

"Your chauffeur—I call him that. He's very like Sam Weller and Sancho Panza, don't you think, Don Pickwixote?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Lavender, bewildered; "Joe, you mean. A good fellow. He has in him the

sort of heroism which I admire more than any other."

"Which is that?" asked the young lady.

"That imperturbable humour in the face of adverse circumstances for which our soldiers are renowned."

"You are a great believer in heroics, Don Pickwixote," said the young lady.

"What would life be without them?" returned Mr. Lavender. "The war could not go on for a minute."

"You're right there," said the young lady bitterly.

"You surely," said Mr. Lavender, aghast, "cannot wish it to stop until we have destroyed our common enemies?"

"Well," said the young lady, "I'm not a Pacifist; but when you see as many people without arms and legs as I do, heroics get a bit off, don't you know." And she increased her pace until Mr. Lavender, who was not within four inches of her stature, was almost compelled to trot. "If I were a Tommy," she added, "I should want to shoot every man who uttered a phrase. Really, at this time of day, they are the limit."

"Aurora," said Mr. Lavender, "if you will permit me, who am old enough—alas!—to be your father, to call you that, you must surely be

aware that phrases are the very munitions of war, and certainly not less important than mere material explosives. Take the word 'Liberty,' for instance; would you deprive us of it?"

The young lady fixed on him those large grey eyes which had in them the roll of genius. "Dear Don Pickwixote," she said, "I would merely take it from the mouths of those who don't know what it means; and how much do you think would be left? Not enough to butter the parsnips of a Borough Council, or fill one leader in a month of Sundays. Have you not discovered, Don Pickwixote, that Liberty means the special form of tyranny which one happens to serve under; and that our form of tyranny is GAS?"

"High heaven!" cried Mr. Lavender, "that I should hear such words from so red lips!"

"I've not been a Pacifist, so far," continued the young lady, stifling a yawn, "because I hate cruelty, I hate it enough to want to be cruel to it. I want the Huns to lap their own sauce. I don't want to be revengeful, but I just can't help it."

"My dear young lady," said Mr. Lavender soothingly, "you are not—you cannot be revengeful; for every great writer and speaker tells us that revengefulness is an emotion alien to the Allies, who are merely just."

"Rats!"

At this familiar word, Blink who had been following their conversation quietly, threw up her nose and licked the young lady's hand so unexpectedly that she started and added:

"Darling!"

Mr. Lavender, who took the expression as meant for himself, coloured furiously.

"Aurora," he said in a faint voice, "the rapture in my heart prevents my taking advantage of your sweet word. Forgive me, and let us go quietly in, with the vision I have seen, for I know my place."

The young lady's composure seemed to tremble in the balance, and her lips twitched; then holding out her hand she took Mr. Lavender's and gave it a good squeeze.

"You really *are* a dear," she said. "I think you ought to be in bed. My name's Isabel, you know."

"Not to me," said Mr. Lavender. "You are the Dawn; nothing shall persuade me to the contrary. And from henceforth I swear to rise with you every morning."

"Oh, no!" cried the young lady; "please don't imagine that I sniff the matutinal as a rule. I just happened to be in a night shift."

"No matter," said Mr. Lavender; "I shall see you with the eye of faith, in your night shifts, and

draw from the vision strength to continue my public work beckoned by the fingers of the roseate future."

"Well," murmured the young lady, "so long for now; and do go back to bed. It's only about five." And waving the tips of those fingers, she ran lightly up the garden-path and disappeared into her house.

Mr. Lavender remained for a moment as if transfigured; then, entering his garden, he stood gazing up at her window, until the thought that she might appear there was too much for him, and he went in.

XI

BREAKS UP A PEACE MEETING

WHILE seated at breakfast on the morning after he had seen this vision, Mr. Lavender, who read his papers as though they had been Holy Writ, came on an announcement that a meeting would be held that evening at a chapel in Holloway under the auspices of the "Free Speakers' League," an association which his journals had often branded with a reputation for desiring Peace. On reading the names of the speakers Mr. Lavender felt at once that it would be his duty to attend. 'There will,' he thought, 'very likely be no one there to register a protest. For in this country we have pushed the doctrine of free speech to a limit which threatens the noble virtue of patriotism. This is no doubt a recrudescence of that terrible horse-sense in the British people which used to permit everybody to have his say, no matter what he said. Yet I would rather stay at home,' he mused, 'for they will do me violence, I expect; cowardice, however, would not become me, and I must go.'

He was in a state of flurry all day, thinking of his unpleasant duty towards those violent persons, and furbishing up his memory by reading such past leaders in his five journals as bore on the subject. He spoke no word of his intentions, convinced that he ran a considerable risk at the hands of the Pacifists, but too sensible of his honour to assist anyone to put that spoke in his wheel which he could not help longing for.

At six o'clock he locked Blink into his study, and arming himself with three leaders, set forth on his perilous adventure. Seven o'clock saw him hurrying along the dismal road to the chapel, at whose door he met with an unexpected check.

"Where is your ticket?" said a large man.

"I have none," replied Mr. Lavender, disconcerted; "for this is a meeting of the Free Speakers' League, and it is for that reason that I have come."

The large man looked at him attentively. "No admittance without ticket," he said.

"I protest," said Mr. Lavender. "How can you call yourself by that name and not let me in?"

The large man smiled.

"Well," he said, "you haven't the strength of a rabbit—in you go!"

Mr. Lavender found himself inside and in some indignation.

The meeting had begun, and a tall man at the pulpit end, with the face of a sorrowful bull, was addressing an audience composed almost entirely of women and old men, while his confederates sat behind him trying to look as if they were not present. At the end of a row, about half-way up the chapel, Mr. Lavender composed himself to listen, thinking, 'However eager I may be to fulfil my duty and break up this meeting, it behoves me as a fair-minded man to ascertain first what manner of meeting it is that I am breaking up.' But as the speaker progressed, in periods punctuated by applause from what, by his experience at the door, Mr. Lavender knew to be a packed audience, he grew more and more uneasy. It cannot be said that he took in what the speaker was saying, obsessed as he was by the necessity of formulating a reply, and of revolving, to the exclusion of all else, the flowers and phrases of the leaders which during the day he had almost learned by heart. But by nature polite he waited till the orator was sitting down before he arose, and, with the three leaders firmly grasped in his hand, walked deliberately up to the seated speakers. Turning his back on them, he said, in a voice to which nervousness and emotion lent shrillness:

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is now your turn, in accordance with the tradition of your society,

to listen to me. Let us not mince matters with mealy mouths. There are in our midst certain viperous persons, like that notorious gentleman who had the sulphurous impudence to have a French father—French! gentlemen; not German, ladies—mark the cunning and audacity of the fellow; like that renegade Labour leader, who has never led anything, yet, if he had his will, would lead us all into the pit of destruction; like those other high-brow emasculates who mistake their pettifogging pedantry for pearls of price, and plaster the plain issue before us with perfidious and Pacifistic platitudes. We say at once, and let them note it, we will have none of them; we will have——" Here his words were drowned by an interruption greater even than that which was fast gathering among the row of speakers behind him, and the surprised audience in front; and he could see the large man being forced from the door and up the aisle by a posse of noisy youths, till he stood with arms pinioned, struggling to turn round, just in front of Mr. Lavender. Seeing his speech thus endangered, the latter cried out at the top of his voice: "Free speech, gentlemen, free speech; I have come here expressly to see that we have nothing of the sort." At this the young men, who now filled the aisle, raised a mighty booing.

"Gentlemen," shouted Mr. Lavender, waving his leaders, "gentlemen——" But at this moment the large man was hurled into contact with what served Mr. Lavender for stomach, and the two fell in confusion. An uproar ensued of which Mr. Lavender was more than vaguely conscious, for many feet went over him. He managed, however, to creep into a corner, and, getting up, surveyed the scene. The young men who had invaded the meeting, much superior in numbers and strength to the speakers, to the large man, and the three or four other able-bodied persons who had rallied to them from among the audience, were taking every advantage of their superiority; and it went to Mr. Lavender's heart to see how they thumped and maltreated their opponents. The sight of their brutality, indeed, rendered him so furious that, forgetting all his principles and his purposes in coming to the meeting, he climbed on to a form, and folding his arms tightly on his breast, called out at the top of his voice: "Cads! Do not thus take advantage of your numbers. Cads!" Having thus defended what in his calmer moments he would have known to be the wrong, he awaited his own fate calmly. But in the hubbub his words had passed unnoticed. 'It is in moments like these,' he thought, 'that the great speaker asserts his su-

premacy, quells the storm, and secures himself a hearing.' And he began to rack his brains to remember how they did it. 'It must require the voice of an ox,' he thought, 'and the skin of an alligator. Alas! How deficient I am in public qualities!' But his self-depreciation was here cut off with the electric light. At this sheer intervention of Providence Mr. Lavender, listening to the disentangling sounds which rose in the black room, became aware that he had a chance such as he had not yet had of being heard.

"Stay, my friends!" he said; "here in darkness we can see better the true proportions of this great question of free speech. There are some who contend that in a democracy every opinion should be heard; that, just because the good sense of the majority will ever lead the country into the right paths, the minority should be accorded full and fair expression, for they cannot deflect the country's course, and because such expression acts as a healthful safety-valve. Moreover, they say there is no way of preventing the minority from speaking save that of force, which is unworthy of a majority, and the negation of what we are fighting for in this war. But *I* say, following the great leader-writers, that in a time of national danger nobody ought to say anything except what is in accord with the opinions of the

majority; for only in this way can we present a front which will seem to be united to our common enemies. I say, and since I am the majority I must be in the right, that no one who disagrees with me must say anything if we are to save the cause of freedom and humanity. I deprecate violence, but I am thoroughly determined to stand no nonsense, and shall not hesitate to suppress by every means in the power of the majority —including, if need be, Prussian measures—any whisper from those misguided and unpatriotic persons whose so-called principles induce them to assert their right to have opinions of their own. This has ever been a free country, and they shall not imperil its freedom by their volubility and self-conceit." Here Mr. Lavender paused for breath, and in the darkness a faint noise, as of a mouse scrattling at a wainscot, attracted his attention. 'Wonderful,' he thought, elated by the silence, 'that I should so have succeeded in riveting their attention as to be able to hear a mouse gnawing. I must have made a considerable impression.' And, fearing to spoil it by further speech, he set to work to grope his way round the chapel wall in the hope of coming to the door. He had gone but a little way when his outstretched hand came into contact with something warm, which shrank away with a squeal.

"Oh!" cried Mr. Lavender, while a shiver went down his spine, "what is that?"

"Me," said a stifled voice. "Who are you?"

"A public speaker, madam," answered Mr. Lavender, unutterably relieved. "Don't be alarmed."

"Ouch!" whispered the voice. "That madman!"

"I assure you, madam," replied Mr. Lavender, striving to regain contact, "I wouldn't harm you for the world. Can you tell me in what portion of the hall we are?" And crouching down he stretched out his arms and felt about him. No answer came; but he could tell that he was between two rows of chairs, and, holding to the top of one, he began to sidle along, crouching, so as not to lose touch with the chairs behind him. He had not proceeded the length of six chairs in the pitchy darkness when the light was suddenly turned up, and he found himself glaring over the backs of the chairs in front into the eyes of a young woman, who was crouching and glaring back over the same chairs.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lavender, as with a certain dignity they both rose to their full height, "I had no conception——"

Without a word, the young woman put her hand up to her back hair, sidled swiftly down the

row of chairs, ran down the aisle, and vanished. There was no one else in the chapel. Mr. Lavender, after surveying the considerable wreckage, made his way to the door and passed out into the night. 'Like a dream,' he thought; 'but I have done my duty, for no meeting was ever more completely broken up. With a clear conscience and a good appetite I can now go home.'

XII

SPEEDS UP TRANSPORT, AND SEES A DOCTOR

REATLY cheered by his success at the Peace meeting, Mr. Lavender searched his papers next morning to find a new field for his activities; nor had he to read far before he came on this paragraph:

"Every thing is dependent on transport, and we cannot sufficiently urge that this should be speeded up by every means in our power."

'How true!' he thought. And, finishing his breakfast hastily, he went out with Blink to think over what he could do to help. 'I can exhort,' he mused, 'anyone engaged in transport who is not exerting himself to the utmost. It will not be pleasant to do so, for it will certainly provoke much ill-feeling. I must not, however, be deterred by that, for it is the daily concomitant of public life, and hard words break no bones, as they say, but rather serve to thicken

the skins and sharpen the tongues of us public men, so that we are able to meet our opponents with their own weapons. I perceive before me, indeed, a liberal education in just those public qualities wherein I am conscious of being as yet deficient.' And his heart sank within him, thinking of the carts on the hills of Hampstead and the boys who drove them. 'What is lacking to them,' he mused, 'is the power of seeing this problem steadily and seeing it whole. Let me endeavour to impart this habit to all who have any connection with transport.' He had just completed this reflection when, turning a corner, he came on a large van standing stockstill at the top of an incline. The driver was leaning idly against the hind wheel filling a pipe. Mr. Lavender glanced at the near horse, and seeing that he was not distressed, he thus addressed the man:

"Do you not know, my friend, that every minute is of importance in this national crisis? If I could get you to see the question of transport steadily, and to see it whole, I feel convinced that you would not be standing there lighting your pipe when perhaps this half-hour's delay in the delivery of your goods may mean the death of one of your comrades at the front."

The man, who was wizened, weathered, and old, with but few teeth, looked up at him from

above the curved hands with which he was coaxing the flame of a match into the bowl of his pipe. His brow was wrinkled, and moisture stood at the corners of his eyes.

"I assure you," went on Mr. Lavender, "that we have none of us the right in these days to delay for a single minute the delivery of anything—not even of speeches. When I am tempted to do so, I think of our sons and brothers in the trenches, and how every shell and every word saves their lives, and I deliver."

The old man, who had finished lighting his pipe, took a long pull at it, and said hoarsely: "Go on!"

"I will," said Mr. Lavender, "for I perceive that I can effect a revolution in your outlook, so that instead of wasting the country's time by leaning against that wheel you will drive on zealously and help to win the war."

The old man looked at him, and one side of his face became drawn up in a smile, which seemed to Mr. Lavender so horrible that he said:

"Why do you look at me like that?"

"Cawn't 'elp it," said the man.

"What makes you," continued Mr. Lavender, "pause here with your job half finished? It is not the hill which keeps you back, for you are at the top, and your horses seem rested."

"Yes," said the old man, with another contortion of his face, "they're rested—leastways, one of 'em."

"Then what delays you—if not that British sluggishness which we in public life find such a terrible handicap to our efforts in conducting the war?"

"Ah!" said the old man. "But out of one you don't make two, guv'nor. Git on the offside, and you'll see it a bit steadier and a bit 'oler than you 'ave 'itherto."

Struck by his words, which were accompanied by a painful puckering of the cheeks, Mr. Lavender moved round the van looking for some defect in its machinery, and suddenly became aware that the off horse was lying on the ground, with the traces cut. It lay on its side, and did not move.

"Oh!" cried Mr. Lavender; "oh!" And going up to the horse's head he knelt down. The animal's eye was glazing.

"Oh!" he cried again, "poor horse! Don't die!" And tears dropped out of his eyes on to the horse's cheek. The eye seemed to give him a look, and became quite glazed.

"Dead!" said Mr. Lavender, in an awed whisper. "This is horrible! What a thin horse—nothing but bones!" And his gaze haunted the

ridge and furrow of the horse's carcase, while the living horse looked round and down at its dead fellow, from whose hollow face a ragged forelock drooped in the dust.

"I must go and apologise to that old man," said Mr. Lavender aloud, "for no doubt he is even more distressed than I am."

"Not 'e, guv'nor," said a voice, and looking up he saw the aged driver standing beside him; "not 'e; for of all the crool jobs I ever 'ad—drivin' that 'orse these last three months 'as been the croolest. There 'e lies, and 'e's aht of it; and that's where they'd all like to be. Speed, guv'nor—speed done 'im in, savin' 'is country's time an' 'is country's oats; that done 'im in. A good old 'orse, a willin' old 'orse, 'as broke 'is 'eart tryin' to do 'is bit on 'alf rations. There 'e lies; and I'm glad 'e does." And with the back of his hand the old fellow removed some brown moisture which was trembling on his jaw. Mr. Lavender rose from his knees.

"Dreadful!—monstrous!" he cried; "poor horse! Who is responsible for this?"

"Why," said the old driver, "the gents as sees it steady and sees it 'ole from one side o' the van, same as you."

So smitten to the heart was Mr. Lavender by those words that he covered his ears with his

hands and almost ran from the scene, nor did he stop till he had reached the shelter of his study, and was sitting in his arm-chair with Blink upon his feet. 'I will buy a go-cart,' he thought; 'Blink and I will pull our weight and save the poor horses. We can at least deliver our own milk and vegetables.'

He had not been sitting there for half-an-hour revolving the painful complexities of national life before the voice of Mrs. Petty recalled him from that sad reverie.

"Dr. Gobang to see you, sir."

At sight of the doctor who had attended him for alcoholic poisoning Mr. Lavender experienced one of those vaguely disagreeable sensations which follow on half-realised insults.

"Good-morning, sir," said the doctor; "I thought I'd just look in and make my mind easy about you. That was a nasty attack. Do you still feel your back?"

"No," said Mr. Lavender rather coldly, while Blink growled.

"Nor your head?"

"I have never felt my head," replied Mr. Lavender, still more coldly.

"I seem to remember——" began the doctor.

"Doctor," said Mr. Lavender with dignity, "surely you know that public men do not feel

their heads—it would not do. They sometimes suffer from their throats, but otherwise they have perfect health, fortunately."

The doctor smiled.

"Well, what do you think of the war?" he asked chattily.

"Be quiet, Blink," said Mr. Lavender. Then in a far-away voice, he added: "Whatever the clouds which have gathered above our heads for the moment, and whatever the blows which Fate may have in store for us, we shall not relax our efforts till we have attained our aims and hurled our enemies back. Nor shall we stop there," he went on, warming at his own words. "It is but a weak-kneed patriotism which would be content with securing the objects for which we began to fight. We shall not hesitate to sacrifice the last of our men, the last of our money, in the sacred task of achieving the complete ruin of the fiendish Power which has brought this great calamity on the world. Even if our enemies surrender we will fight on till we have dictated terms on the doorsteps of Potsdam."

The doctor, who, since Mr. Lavender began to speak, had been looking at him with strange intensity, dropped his eyes.

"Quite so," he said heartily, "quite so. Well, good-morning. I only just ran in!" And leaving

Mr. Lavender to the exultation he was evidently feeling, this singular visitor went out and closed the door. Outside the garden-gate he rejoined the nephew Sinkin.

"Well?" asked the latter.

"Sane as you or me," said the doctor. "A little pedantic in his way of expressing himself, but quite all there, really."

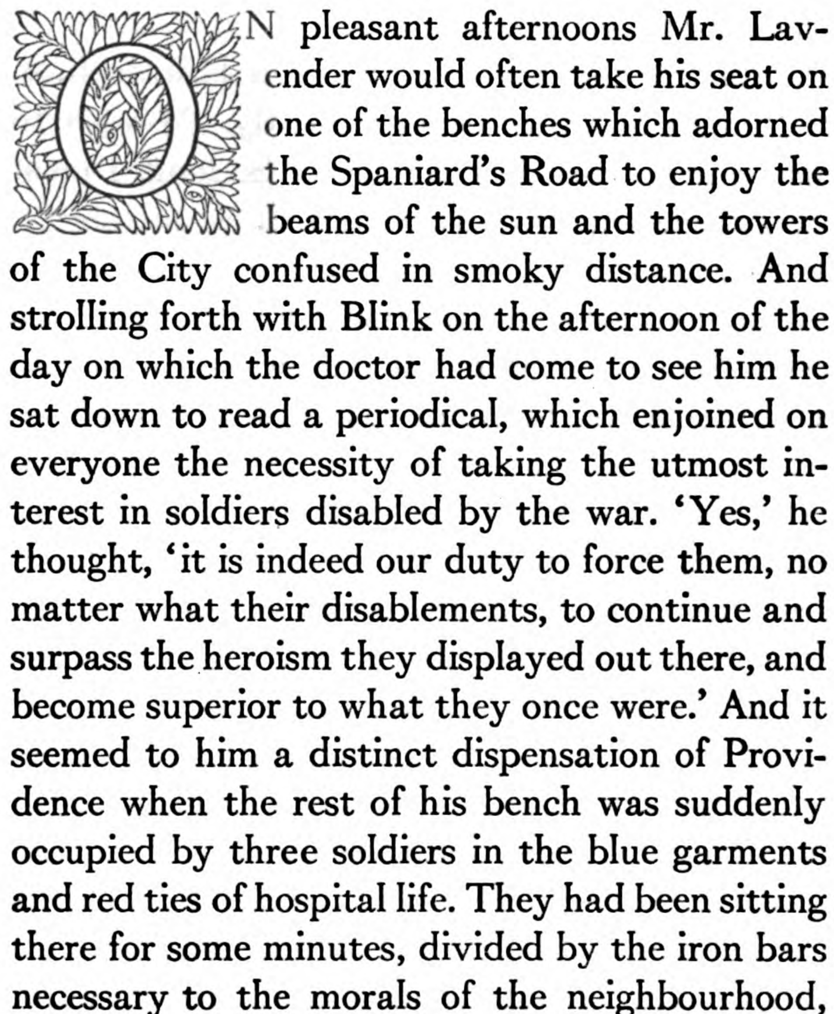
"Did his dog bite you?" muttered the nephew.

"No," said the doctor absently. "I wish to heaven everyone held his views. So long. I must be getting on." And they parted.

But Mr. Lavender, after pacing the room six times, had sat down again in his chair, with a cold feeling in the pit of his stomach, such as other men feel on mornings after a debauch.

XIII

ADDRESSES SOME SOLDIERS ON THEIR FUTURE



ON pleasant afternoons Mr. Lavender would often take his seat on one of the benches which adorned the Spaniard's Road to enjoy the beams of the sun and the towers of the City confused in smoky distance. And strolling forth with Blink on the afternoon of the day on which the doctor had come to see him he sat down to read a periodical, which enjoined on everyone the necessity of taking the utmost interest in soldiers disabled by the war. 'Yes,' he thought, 'it is indeed our duty to force them, no matter what their disablements, to continue and surpass the heroism they displayed out there, and become superior to what they once were.' And it seemed to him a distinct dispensation of Providence when the rest of his bench was suddenly occupied by three soldiers in the blue garments and red ties of hospital life. They had been sitting there for some minutes, divided by the iron bars necessary to the morals of the neighbourhood,

while Mr. Lavender cudgelled his brains for an easy and natural method of approach, before Blink supplied the necessary avenue by taking her stand before a soldier and looking up into his eye.

"Lord!" said the one thus accosted, "what a fyce! Look at her moustache! Well, cocky, 'oo are you starin' at?"

"My dog," said Mr. Lavender, perceiving his chance, "has an eye for the strange and beautiful."

"Wow!" said the soldier, whose face was bandaged, "she'll get it 'ere, won't she?"

Encouraged by the smiles of the soldier and his comrades, Mr. Lavender went on in the most natural voice he could assume.

"I'm sure you appreciate, my friends, the enormous importance of your own futures?"

The three soldiers, whose faces were all bandaged, looked as surprised as they could between them, and did not answer. Mr. Lavender went on, dropping unconsciously into the diction of the article he had been reading: "We are now at the turning-point of the ways, and not a moment is to be lost in impressing on the disabled man the paramount necessity of becoming again the captain of his soul. He who was a hero in the field must again lead us in those qualities of enter-

prise and endurance which made him the admiration of the world."

The three soldiers had turned what was visible of their faces towards Mr. Lavender, and, seeing that he had riveted their attention, he proceeded: "The apathy which hospital produces, together with the present scarcity of labour, is largely responsible for the dangerous position in which the disabled man now finds himself. Only we who have not to face his future can appreciate what that future is likely to be if he does not make the most strenuous efforts to overcome it. Boys," he added earnestly, remembering suddenly that this was the word which those who had the personal touch ever employed, "are you making those efforts? Are you equipping your minds? Are you taking advantage of your enforced leisure to place yourselves upon some path of life in which you can largely hold your own against all comers?"

He paused for a reply.

The soldiers, silent for a moment, in what seemed to Mr. Lavender to be sheer astonishment, began to fidget; then the one next him turned to his neighbour, and said:

"Are we, Alf? Are we doin' what the gentleman says?"

"I can answer that for you," returned Mr.

Lavender brightly; "for I can tell by your hospitalised faces that you are living in the present; a habit which, according to our best writers, is peculiar to the British. I assure you," he went on with a winning look, "there is no future in that. If you do not at once begin to carve fresh niches for yourselves in the temple of industrialism you will be engulfed by the returning flood, and left high and dry upon the beach of fortune."

During these last few words the half of an irritated look on the faces of the soldiers changed to fragments of an indulgent and protective expression.

"Right you are, guv'nor," said the one in the middle. "Don't you worry, we'll see you 'ome all right."

"It is you," said Mr. Lavender, "that I must see home. For that is largely the duty of us who have not had the great privilege of fighting for our country."

These words, which completed the soldier's conviction that Mr. Lavender was not quite all there, caused them to rise.

"Come on, then," said one; "we'll see each other home. We've got to be in by five. You don't have a string to your dog, I see."

"Oh no!" said Mr. Lavender, puzzled; "I am not blind."

"Balmy," said the soldier soothingly. "Come on, sir, an' we can talk abaht it on the way."

Mr. Lavender, delighted at the impression he had made, rose and walked beside them, taking insensibly the direction for home.

"What do you advise us to do, then, guv'-nor?" said one of the soldiers.

"Throw away all thought of the present," returned Mr. Lavender, with intense earnestness; "forget the past entirely, wrap yourselves wholly in the future. Do nothing which will give you immediate satisfaction. Do not consider your families, or any of those transient considerations such as pleasure, your homes, your condition of health, or your economic position; but place yourselves unreservedly in the hands of those who by hard thinking on this subject are alone in the condition to appreciate the individual circumstances of each of you. For only by becoming a flock of sheep can you be conducted into those new pastures where the grass of your future will be sweet and plentiful. Above all, continue to be the heroes which you were under the spur of your country's call, for you must remember that your country is still calling you."

"That's right," said the soldier on Mr. Lavender's left. "Puss, puss! Does your dog swot cats?"

At so irrelevant a remark Mr. Lavender looked suspiciously from left to right, but what there was of the soldiers' faces told him nothing.

"Which is your hospital?" he asked.

"Down the 'ill, on the right," returned the soldier. "Which is yours?"

"Alas! it is not a hospital that I——"

"I know," said the soldier delicately, "don't give it a name; no need. We're all friends 'ere. Do you get out much?"

"I always take an afternoon stroll," said Mr. Lavender, "when my public life permits. If you think your comrades would like me to come and lecture to them on their future I should be only too happy."

"D'you 'ear, Alf?" said the soldier. "D'you think they would?"

The soldier addressed put a finger to the sound side of his mouth and uttered a cat-call.

"I might effect a radical change in their views," continued Mr. Lavender, a little puzzled. "Let me leave you this periodical. Read it, and you will see how extremely vital all that I have been saying is. And then, perhaps, if you would send me a round robin, such as is usual in a democratic country, I could pop over almost any day after five. I sometimes feel"—and here Mr. Lavender stopped in the middle of the road, over-

come by sudden emotion—"that I have really no right to be alive when I see what you have suffered for me."

"That's all right, old bean," said the soldier on his left; "you'd 'a done the same for us but for your disabilities. We don't grudge it you."

"Boys," said Mr. Lavender, "you are men. I cannot tell you how much I admire and love you."

"Well, give it a rest, then; 'tain't good for yer. And, look 'ere! Any time they don't treat you fair in there, tip us the wink, and we'll come over and do in your 'ousekeeper."

Mr. Lavender smiled.

"My poor housekeeper!" he said. "I thank you all the same for your charming goodwill. This is where I live," he added, stopping at the gate of the little house smothered in lilac and laburnum. "Can I offer you some tea?"

The three soldiers looked at each other, and Mr. Lavender, noticing their surprise, attributed it to the word tea.

"I regret exceedingly that I am a total abstainer," he said.

The remark, completing the soldiers' judgment of his case, increased their surprise at the nature of his residence; it remained unanswered, save by a shuffling of the feet.

Mr. Lavender took off his hat.

"I consider it a great privilege," he said, "to have been allowed to converse with you. Good-bye, and God bless you!"

So saying, he opened the gate and entered his little garden, carrying his hat in his hand, and followed by Blink.

The soldiers watched him disappear within, then continued on their way down the hill in silence.

"Blimy!" said one suddenly, "some of these old civilians '*ave* come it balmy on the crumpet since the war began. Give me the trenches!"

XIV

ENDEAVOURS TO INTERN A GERMAN

GLOW with satisfaction at what he had been able to do for the wounded soldiers, Mr. Lavender sat down in his study to drink the tea which he found there. 'There is nothing in life,' he thought, 'which gives one such pleasure as friendliness and being able to do something for others. Moon-cat!'

The moon-cat, who, since Mr. Lavender had given her milk, abode in his castle, awaiting her confinement, purred loudly, regarding him with burning eyes, as was her fashion when she wanted milk. Mr. Lavender put down the saucer and continued his meditations. 'Everything is vain; the world is full of ghosts and shadows; but in friendliness and the purring of a little cat there is solidity.'

"A lady has called, sir."

Looking up, Mr. Lavender became aware of Mrs. Petty.

"How very agreeable!"

"I don't know, sir," returned his housekeeper in her decisive voice; "but she wants to see you. Name of Pullbody."

"Pullbody," repeated Mr. Lavender dreamily; "I don't seem—— Ask her in, Mrs. Petty, ask her in."

"It's on your head, sir," said Mrs. Petty, and went out.

Mr. Lavender was immediately conscious of a presence in dark green silk, with a long upper lip, a loose lower lip, and a fixed and faintly raddled air, moving stealthily towards him.

"Sit down, madam, I beg. Will you have some tea?"

The lady sat down. "Thank you, I have had tea. It was on the recommendation of your next-door neighbour, Miss Isabel Scarlet——"

"Indeed!" replied Mr. Lavender, whose heart began to beat; "command me, for I am entirely at her service."

"I have come to see you," began the lady with a peculiar sinuous smile, "as a public man and a patriot."

Mr. Lavender bowed, and the lady went on: "I am in very great trouble. The fact is, my sister's husband's sister is married to a German."

"Is it possible, madam?" murmured Mr. Lav-

ender, crossing his knees, and joining the tips of his fingers.

"Yes," resumed the lady, "and what's more, he is still at large."

Mr. Lavender, into whose mind there had instantly rushed a flood of public utterances, stood gazing at her haggard face in silent sympathy.

"You may imagine my distress, sir, and the condition of my conscience," pursued the lady, "when I tell you that my sister's husband's sister is a very old friend of mine—and, indeed, so was this German. The two are a very attached young couple, and, being childless, are quite wrapped up in each other. I have come to you, feeling it my duty to secure his internment."

Mr. Lavender, moved by the human element in her words, was about to say, "But why, madam?" when the lady continued:

"I have not myself precisely heard him speak well of his country. But the sister of a friend of mine who was having tea in their house distinctly heard him say that there were two sides to every question, and that he could not believe all that was said in the English papers."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lavender, troubled; "that is serious."

"Yes," went on the lady; "and on another oc-

casion my sister's husband himself heard him remark that a man could not help loving his country and hoping that it would win."

"But that is natural," began Mr. Lavender.

"What!" said the lady, nearly rising, "when that country is Germany?" The word revived Mr. Lavender's sense of proportion.

"True," he said, "true. I was forgetting for the moment. It is extraordinary how irresponsible one's thoughts are sometimes. Have you reason to suppose that he is dangerous?"

"I should have thought that what I have said might have convinced you," replied the lady reproachfully; "but I don't wish you to act without satisfying yourself. It is not as if you knew him, of course. I have easily been able to get up an agitation among his friends, but I should not expect an outsider—so I thought if I gave you his address you could form your own opinion."

"Yes," murmured Mr. Lavender, "yes. It is in the last degree undesirable that any man of German origin should remain free to work possible harm to our country. There is no question in this of hatred or of mere rabid patriotism," he went on in a voice growing more and more far-away; "it is largely the A.B.C. of common prudence."

"I ought to say," interrupted his visitor, "that

we all thought him, of course, an honourable man until this war, or we should not have been his friends. He is a dentist," she added, "and, I suppose, may be said to be doing useful work, which makes it difficult. I suggest that you go to him to have a tooth out."

Mr. Lavender quivered, and insensibly felt his teeth.

"Thank you," he said; "I will see if I can find one. It is certainly a matter which cannot be left to chance. We public men, madam, often have to do very hard and even inhumane things for no apparent reason. Our consciences alone support us. An impression, I am told, sometimes gets abroad that we yield to clamour. Those alone who know us realise how unfounded that aspersion is."

"This is his address," said the lady, rising, and handing him an envelope. "I shall not feel at rest until he is safely interned. You will not mention my name, of course. It is tragic to be obliged to work against one's friends in the dark. Your young neighbour spoke in enthusiastic terms of your zeal, and I am sure that in choosing you for my public man she was not pulling—er—was not making a mistake."

Mr. Lavender bowed. "I hope not, madam," he said humbly; "I try to do my duty."

The lady smiled her sinuous smile and moved towards the door, leaving on the air a faint odour of vinegar and sandalwood.

When she was gone Mr. Lavender sat down on the edge of his chair before the tea-tray and extracted his teeth, while Blink, taking them for a bone, gazed at them lustrously, and the moon-cat between his feet purred from repletion. 'There is reason in all things,' he thought, running his finger over what was left in his mouth, 'but not in patriotism, for that would prevent us from consummating the destruction of our common enemies. It behoves us public men ever to set an example. Which one can I spare, I wonder?' And he fixed upon a large rambling tooth on the left wing of his lower jaw. "It will hurt horribly, I'm afraid; and if I have an anæsthetic there will be someone else present; and not improbably I shall feel ill afterwards, and be unable to form a clear judgment. I must steel myself. Blink!"

For Blink was making tremulous advances to the teeth. 'How pleasant to be a dog!' thought Mr. Lavender, 'and know nothing of Germans and teeth. I shall be very unhappy till this is out; but Aurora recommended me, and I must not complain, but rather consider myself the most fortunate of public men.' And, ruffling his hair till it stood up all over his head, while his loose

eyebrow worked up and down, he gazed at the moon-cat.

"Moon-cat," he said suddenly, "we are but creatures of chance, unable to tell from one day to another what Fate has in store for us. My tooth is beginning to ache already. That is, perhaps, as it should be, for I shall not forget which one it is." So musing he resumed his teeth; and, going to his bookcase, sought fortitude and inspiration in the records of a Parliamentary debate on enemy aliens. . . .

It was not without considerable trepidation, however, on the following afternoon that he made his way up Welkin Street, and rang at the number on the envelope in his hand.

"Yes, sir, doctor is at home," said the maid.

Mr. Lavender's heart was about to fail him when, conjuring up the vision of Aurora, he said in a faint voice: "I wish to see him professionally." And, while the maid departed up the stairs, he waited in the narrow hall, alternately taking his hat off and putting it on again, so great was his spiritual confusion.

"Doctor will see you at once, sir."

Putting his hat on hastily, Mr. Lavender followed her upstairs, feeling at his tooth to make quite sure that he remembered which it was. His courage mounted as he came nearer to his

fate, and he marched into the room behind the maid holding his hat on firmly with one hand and his tooth in firmly with the other. There, beside a red velvet dentist's chair, he saw a youngish man dressed in a white coat, with round eyes and a domestic face, who said in good English:

"What can I do for you, my dear sir? I fear you are in bain."

"In great pain," replied Mr. Lavender faintly, "in great pain." And, indeed, he was; for the nervous crisis from which he was suffering had settled in the tooth, on which he still pressed a finger through his cheek.

"Sit down, sir, sit down," said the young man; "and perhaps it would be better if you should remove your hat. We shall not hurd you—no, no, we shall not hurd you."

At those words, which seemed to cast doubt on his courage, Mr. Lavender recovered all his presence of mind. He took off his hat, advanced resolutely to the chair, sat down in it, and, looking up, said:

"Do to me what you will; I shall not flinch, nor depart in any way from the behaviour of those whose duty it is to set an example to others."

So saying, he removed his teeth, and placing them in a bowl on the little swinging table which

he perceived on his left hand, he closed his eyes, put his finger in his mouth, and articulated: "'Ith one."

"Excuse me, sir," said the young German, "but do you wish a dooth oud?"

"'At ish my deshire," said Mr. Lavender, keeping his finger on his tooth, and his eyes closed. "'At one."

"I cannot give you gas without my anæsthedist."

"I dow," said Mr. Lavender; "be wick."

And, feeling the little cold spyglass begin to touch his gums, he clenched his hands and thought: 'This is the moment to prove that I, too, can die for a good cause. If I am not man enough to bear for my country so small a woe I can never again look Aurora in the face.'

The voice of the young dentist dragged him rudely from the depth of his resignation.

"Excuse me, but which dooth did you say?"

Mr. Lavender again inserted his finger, and opened his eyes.

The dentist shook his head. "Imbossible," he said; "that dooth is perfectly sound. The other two are rotten. But they do not ache?"

Mr. Lavender shook his head and repeated: "'At one."

"You are my first client this week, sir," said

the young German calmly, "but I cannot that dooth dake oud."

At those words Mr. Lavender experienced a sensation as if his soul were creeping back up his legs; he spoke as it reached his stomach.

"Noc?" he said.

"No," replied the young German. "It is nod the dooth which causes you the bain."

Mr. Lavender, suddenly conscious that he had no pain, took his finger out.

"Sir," he said, "I perceive that you are an honourable man. There is something sublime in your abnegation if, indeed, you have had no other client this week."

"No fear," said the young German. "Haf I, Cicely?"

Mr. Lavender became conscious for the first time of a young woman leaning up against the wall, with a pair of tweezers in her hand.

"Take it out, Otto," she said in a low voice, "if he wants it."

"No no," said Mr. Lavender sharply, resuming his teeth; "I would not for the world burden your conscience."

"My clients are all batriots," said the young dentist, "and my bractice is Kaput. We are in a bad way, sir," he added, with a smile, "but we try to do the correct ting."

Mr. Lavender saw the young woman move the tweezers in a manner which caused his blood to run a little cold.

"We must live," he heard her say.

"Young madam," he said, "I honour the impulse which makes you desire to extend your husband's practice. Indeed, I perceive you both to be so honourable that I cannot but make you a confession. My tooth is indeed sound, though, since I have been pretending that it isn't, it has caused me much discomfort. I came here largely to form an opinion of your husband's character, with a view to securing his internment."

At that word the two young people shrank together till they were standing side by side, staring at Mr. Lavender with eyes full of anxiety and wonder. Their hands, which still held the implements of dentistry, insensibly sought each other.

"Be under no apprehension," cried Mr. Lavender, much moved; "I can see that you are greatly attached, and even though your husband is a German, he is still a man, and I could never bring myself to separate him from you."

"Who are you?" said the young woman in a frightened voice, putting her arm round her husband's waist.

"Just a public man," answered Mr. Lavender.

"I came here from a sense of duty; nothing more, I assure you."

"Who put you up to it?"

"That," said Mr. Lavender, bowing as best he could from the angle he was in, "I am not at liberty to disclose. But, believe me, you have nothing to fear from this visit; I shall never do anything to distress a woman. And please charge me as if the tooth had been extracted."

The young German smiled, and shook his head.

"Sir," he said, "I am grateful to you for coming, for it shows us what danger we are in. The hardest ting to bear has been the uncertainty of our bosition, and the feeling that our friends were working behind our backs. Now we know that this is so we shall vordify our souls to bear the worst. But, tell me," he went on, "when you came here, surely you must have subbosed that to tear me away from my wife would be very bainful to her and to myself. You say now you never could do that—how was it, then, you came?"

"Ah, sir!" cried Mr. Lavender, running his hands through his hair and staring at the ceiling, "I feared this might seem inconsistent to your logical German mind. But there are many things we public men would never do if we could see

them being done. Fortunately, as a rule we cannot. Believe me, when I leave you I shall do my best to save you from a fate which I perceive to be unnecessary."

So saying, he rose from the chair, and, picking up his hat, backed towards the door.

"I will not offer you my hand," he said, "for I am acutely conscious that my position is neither dignified nor decent. I owe you a tooth that I shall not readily forget. Good-bye!"

And backing through the doorway he made his way down the stairs and out into the street, still emotionalised by the picture of the two young people holding each other by the waist. He had not, however, gone far before reason resumed its sway, and he began to see that the red velvet chair in which he had been sitting was in reality a wireless apparatus reaching to Berlin, or at least concealed a charge of dynamite to blow up some King or Prime Minister; and that the looking-glasses, of which he had noticed two at least, were surely used for signalling to Gothas or Zeppelins. This plunged him into a confusion so poignant that, rather by accident than design, he found himself again at Hampstead instead of at Scotland Yard. 'In the society of Aurora alone,' he thought, 'can I free myself from the goadings of conscience, for it was she who sent me

on that errand.' And, instead of going in, he took up a position on his lawn whence he could attract her attention by waving his arms. He had been doing this for some time, to the delight of Blink, who thought it a new game, before he saw her in her nurse's dress coming out of a French-window with her yellow book in her hand. Redoubling his efforts till he had arrested her attention, he went up to the privet hedge, and said, in a deep and melancholy voice:

"Aurora, I have failed in my duty, and the errand on which you sent me is unfulfilled. Mrs. Pullbody's sister's husband's sister's husband is still, largely speaking, at large."

"I knew he would be," replied the young lady, with her joyous smile; "that's why I put her on to you—the cat!"

At a loss to understand her meaning, Mr. Lavender, who had bent forward above the hedge in his eagerness to explain, lost his balance, and, endeavouring to save the hedge, fell over into some geranium pots.

"Dear Don Pickwixote," cried the young lady, assisting him to rise, "have you hurt your nose?"

"It is not that," said Mr. Lavender, removing some mould from his hair, and stilling the attentions of Blink; "but rather my honour, for I have

allowed my duty to my country to be overridden by the common emotion of pity!"

"Hurrah!" cried the young lady. "It'll do you ever so much good."

"Aurora!" cried Mr. Lavender aghast, walking at her side. But the young lady only uttered her enchanting laugh.

"Come and lie down in the hammock!" she said; "you're looking like a ghost. I'll cover you up with a rug, and smoke a cigarette to keep the midges off you. Tuck up your legs; that's right!"

"No!" said Mr. Lavender from the recesses of the hammock, feeling his nose, "let the bidges bide me. I deserve they should devour me alive."

"All right," said the young lady. "But have a nap, anyway!" And sitting down in a low chair, she opened her book and lit a cigarette.

Mr. Lavender remained silent, watching her with the eyes of an acolyte, and wondering whether he was in his senses to have alighted on so rare a fortune. Nor was it long before he fell into a hypnotic doze.

XV

ENCOUNTERS A PRUSSIAN

OW long Mr. Lavender had been asleep he could not of course tell before he dreamed that he was caught in a net, the meshes of which were formed of the cries of newspaper boys announcing atrocities by land and sea. He awoke looking into the eyes of Aurora, who, to still his struggles, had taken hold of his ankles.

"My goodness! You are thin!" were the first words he heard. "No wonder you're light-headed."

Mr. Lavender, whose returning chivalry struggled with unconscious delight, murmured with difficulty:

"Let me go, let me go; it is too heavenly!"

"Well, have you finished kicking?" asked the young lady.

"Yes," returned Mr. Lavender in a fainting voice—"alas!"

The young lady let go of his ankles, and,

aiding him to rise from the hammock, said: "I know what's the matter with you now—you're starving yourself. You ought to be kept on your back for three months at least, and fed on butter."

Mr. Lavender, soothing the feelings of Blink, who, at his struggles, had begun to pant deeply answered with watering lips:

"Everyone in these days must do twice as much as he ought, and eat half, for only in this way can we compass the defeat of our common enemies." The young lady's answer, which sounded like "Bosh!" was lost in Mr. Lavender's admiration of her magnificent proportions while she bent to pick up her yellow book.

"Aurora," he said, "I know not what secret you share with the goddesses; suffer me to go in and give thanks for this hour spent in your company."

And he was about to recross the privet hedge when she caught him by the coat-tail saying:

"No, Don Pickwixote, you must dine with us. I want you to meet my father. Come along!" And, linking her arm in his, she led him towards her castle. Mr. Lavender, who had indeed no option but to obey, such was the vigour of her arm, went with a sense of joy not unmingled with consternation lest the personage she spoke

of should have viewed him in the recent extravagance of his dreaming moments.

"I don't believe," said the young lady, gazing down at him, "that you weigh an ounce more than seven stone. It's appalling!"

"Not," returned Mr. Lavender, "by physical weight and force shall we win this war, for it is at bottom a question of morale. Right is ever victorious in the end, and though we have infinitely greater material resources than our foes, we should still triumph were we reduced to the last ounce, because of the inherent nobility of our cause."

"You'll be reduced to the last ounce if we don't feed you up somehow," said the young lady. "Would you like to wash your hands?"

Mr. Lavender having signified his assent, she left him alone in a place covered with linoleum. When, at length, followed by Blink, he emerged from dreamy ablutions, Mr. Lavender saw that she had changed her dress to a flowing blue garment of diaphanous character, which made her appear like an emanation of the sky. He was about to say so when he noticed a gentleman in khaki scrutinising him with lively eyes slightly injected with blood.

"Don Pickwixote," said the young lady; "my father, Major Scarlet."

Mr. Lavender's hand was grasped by one which seemed to him made of iron.

"I am honoured, sir," he said painfully, "to meet the father of my charming young neighbour."

The Major answered in a voice as clipped as his grey bottle-brush moustache: "Delighted! Dinner's ready. Come along!"

Mr. Lavender saw that he had a mouth which seemed to have a bitt in it; several hairs on a finely rounded head; and an air of efficient and truculent bonhomie tanned and wrinkled by the weather.

The table at which they became seated seemed to one accustomed to frugality to groan with flowers and china and glass; and Mr. Lavender had hardly supped his rich and steaming soup before his fancy took fire; nor did he notice that he was drinking from a green glass in which was a yellow fluid.

"I get Army rations," said the Major, holding a morsel of fillet of beef towards Blink. "Nice dog, Mr. Lavender."

"Yes," replied Mr. Lavender, ever delighted that his favourite should receive attention: "she is an angel."

"Too light," said the Major, "and a bit too narrow in front; but a nice dog. What's your view of the war?"

Before Mr. Lavender could reply he felt Aurora's foot pressing his, and heard her say:

"Don Pickwixote's views are after your own heart, Dad; he's for the complete destruction of the Hun."

"Indeed, yes," cried Mr. Lavender with shining eyes. "Right and Justice demand it. We seek to gain nothing——"

"But we'll take all we can get," said the Major. "They'll never get their Colonies back. We'll stick to *them* fast enough."

Mr. Lavender stared at him for a moment, then, remembering what he had so often read, he murmured:

"Aggrandisement is not our object; but we can never forget that so long as any territory remains in the hands of our treacherous foe the arteries of our far-flung Empire are menaced at the roots."

"Right-o," said the Major; "we've got the chance of our lives, and we're going to take it."

Mr. Lavender sat forward a little on his chair. "I shall never admit," he said, "that we are going to take anything, for that would be contrary to the principles which we are pledged to support, and to our avowed intention of seeking only the benefit of the human race; but our in-

human foes have compelled us to deprive them of the power to injure others."

"Yes," said the Major, "we must just go on killing Germans and collaring every bit of their property we can."

Mr. Lavender sat a little further foward on his chair, and the trouble in his eyes grew.

"After all's said and done," continued the Major; "it's a simple war—us or them! And in the long run it's bound to be us. We've got the cards." Mr. Lavender started, and said in a weak and wavering voice:

"We shall never sheathe the sword until——"

"The whole bag of tricks is in our hands. Might isn't Right, but Right's Might, Mr. Lavender: ha, ha!"

Mr. Lavender's eyes lighted on his glass, and he emptied it in his confusion. When he looked up again he could not see the Major very well, but could distinctly hear the truculent bonhomie of his voice.

"Every German ought to be interned; all their property ought to be confiscated; all their submarines' and Zeppelins' crews ought to be hung; all German prisoners ought to be treated as they treat our men. We ought to give 'em no quarter. We ought to bomb their towns out of existence. I draw the line at their women. Short

of that there's nothing too bad for them. I'd treat 'em like rabbits. Vermin they were, and vermin they remain."

During this speech the most astounding experience befell Mr. Lavender, so that his eyes nearly started from his head. It seemed to him, indeed, that he was seated at dinner with a Prussian, and the Major's voice had no sooner ceased its genial rasping than with a bound forward on his chair he ejaculated:

"Behold the man—the Prussian in his jackboot!" And, utterly oblivious of the fact that he was addressing Aurora's father, he went on with almost terrible incoherence: "Although you have conquered this country, sir, never shall you subdue in my breast the sentiments of liberty and generosity which make me an Englishman. I abhor you—invader of the world—trampler underfoot of the humanities—enemy of mankind—apostle of force! You have blown out the sparks of love and kindliness, and have for ever robbed the Universe. Prussian!"

The emphasis with which he spoke that word caused his chair, on the edge of which he was sitting, to tilt up under him so that he slid under the table, losing the vision of that figure in helmet and field-grey which he had been apostrophising.

"Hold up!" said a voice, while Blink joined him nervously beneath the board.

"Never!" cried Mr. Lavender. "Imprison, maltreat me—do what you will. You have subdued her body, but never will I admit that you have conquered the honour of Britain and trodden her gentle culture into the mud."

And, convinced that he would now be dragged away to be confined in some dungeon on bread and water, he clasped the leg of the dining-table with all his might, while Blink, sagaciously aware that something peculiar was occurring to her master, licked the back of his neck. He had been sitting there perhaps half a minute, with his ears stretched to catch the half-whispered sounds above, when he saw a shining object appear under the table, the head, indeed, of the Prussian squatting there to look at him.

"Go up, thou bald-head," he called out at once; "I will make no terms with the destroyer of justice and humanity."

"All right, my dear sir," replied the head. "Will you let my daughter speak to you?"

"Prussian blasphemer," responded Mr. Lavender, shifting his position so as to be further away, and clasping instead of the table leg some soft silken objects, which he was too excited to associate with Aurora, "you *have* no daughter,

for no woman would own one whose hated presence poisons this country."

"Well, well," said the Major. "How shall we get him out?"

Hearing these words, and believing them addressed to a Prussian guard, Mr. Lavender clung closer to the objects, but finding them wriggle in his clasp let go, and, bolting forward like a rabbit on his hands and knees, came into contact with the Major's head. The sound of the concussion, the Major's oaths, Mr. Lavender's moans, Blink's barking, and the peals of laughter from Aurora made up a noise which might have been heard in Portugal. The situation was not eased until Mr. Lavender crawled out, and taking up a dinner-knife, rolled his napkin round his arm, and prepared to defend himself against the German Army.

"Well, I'm damned," said the Major when he saw these preparations; "I *am* damned."

Aurora, who had been leaning against the wall from laughter, here came forward, gasping:

"Go away, Dad, and leave him to me."

"To you!" cried the Major. "He's not safe!"

"Oh yes, he is; it's only you that are exciting him. Come along!"

And taking her father by the arm she conducted him from the room. Closing the door be-

hind him, and putting her back against it, she said gently:

"Dear Don Pickwixote, all danger is past. The enemy has been repulsed, and we are alone in safety. Ha, ha, ha!"

Her voice recalled Mr. Lavender from his strange hallucination. "What?" he said weakly. "Why? Who? Where? When?"

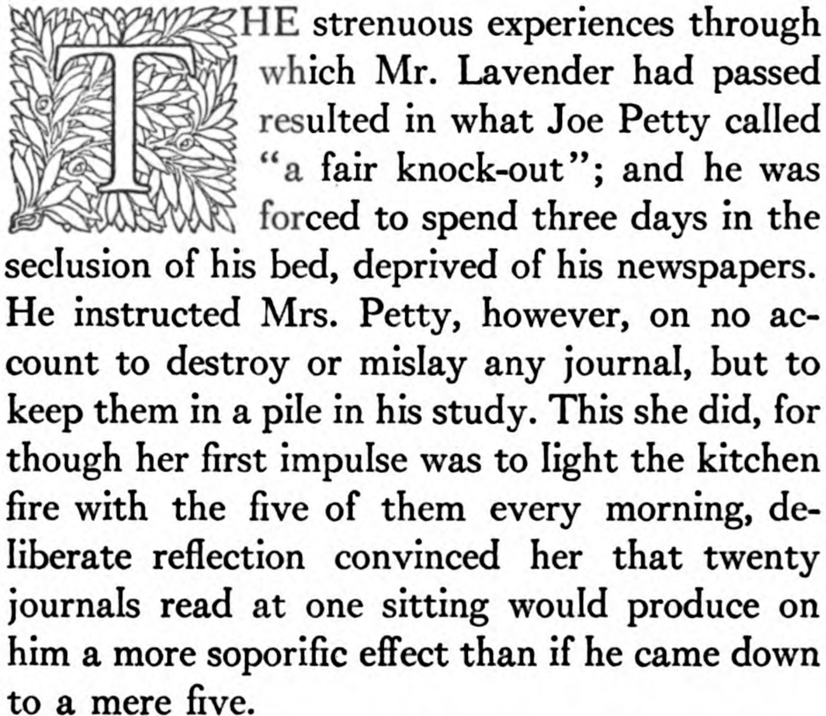
"You have been dreaming again. Let me take you home, and tuck you into bed." And taking from him the knife and napkin, she opened the French-window, and passed out on to the lawn. Mr. Lavender, who now that his reason had come back, would have followed her to the death, passed out also, accompanied by Blink, and watched by the Major, who had put his head in again at the door. Unfortunately, the spirit moved Mr. Lavender to turn round at this moment, and seeing the head he cried out in a loud voice:

"He is there! He is there! Arch enemy of mankind! Let me go and die under his jack-boot, for never over my living body shall he rule this land!" And the infatuated gentleman would certainly have rushed at his host had not Aurora stayed him by the slack of his nether garments. The Major withdrawing his head, Mr. Lavender's excitement again passed from him, and he suf-

fered himself to be led dazedly away and committed to the charge of Mrs. Petty and Joe, who did not leave him till he was in bed with a strong bromide to keep him company.

XVI

FIGHTS THE FIGHT OF FAITH



THE strenuous experiences through which Mr. Lavender had passed resulted in what Joe Petty called "a fair knock-out"; and he was forced to spend three days in the seclusion of his bed, deprived of his newspapers. He instructed Mrs. Petty, however, on no account to destroy or mislay any journal, but to keep them in a pile in his study. This she did, for though her first impulse was to light the kitchen fire with the five of them every morning, deliberate reflection convinced her that twenty journals read at one sitting would produce on him a more soporific effect than if he came down to a mere five.

Mr. Lavender passed his three days, therefore, in perfect repose, feeding Blink, staring at the ceiling, and conversing with Joe. An uneasy sense that he had been lacking in restraint caused his mind to dwell on life as seen by the monthly rather than the daily papers, and to hold with his chauffeur discussions of a somewhat philosophical character.

"As regards the government of this country, Joe," he said, on the last evening of his retirement, "who do you consider really rules? For it is largely on this that our future must depend."

"Can't say, sir," answered Joe, "unless it's Botty."

"I do not know whom or what you signify by that word," replied Mr. Lavender; "I am wondering if it is the People who rule."

"The People!" replied Joe; "the People's like a gent in a lunatic asylum, allowed to 'ave instinks but not to express 'em. One day it'll get aht, and we shall all step lively."

"It is, perhaps, Public Opinion," continued Mr. Lavender to himself, "as expressed in the Press."

"Not it," said Joe; "the nearest opinion the Press gets to expressin' is that of Mayors. 'Ave you never noticed, sir, that when the Press is 'ard up for support of an opinion that the public don't 'old, they go to the Mayors, and get 'em in two columns?"

"Mayors are most valuable public men," said Mr. Lavender.

"I've nothin' against 'em," replied Joe; "very average lot in their walk of life; but they ain't the People."

Mr. Lavender sighed. "What, then, is the People, Joe?"

"I am," replied Joe; "I've got no opinions on anything except that I want to live a quiet life—just enough beer and 'baccy, short hours, and no worry."

"If you compare that with the aspirations of Mayors you will see how sordid such a standard is," said Mr. Lavender gravely.

"Sordid it may be, sir," replied Joe; "but there's a thing abaht it you 'aven't noticed. I don't want to sacrifice nobody to satisfy my aspirations. Why? Because I've got none. That's priceless. Take the Press, take Parlyment, take Mayors—all mad on aspirations. Now it's Free Trade, now it's Imperialism; now it's Liberty in Europe; now it's Slavery in Ireland; now it's sacrifice of the last man an' the last dollar. You never can tell what aspiration 'll get 'em next. And the 'ole point of an aspiration is the sacrifice of someone else. Don't you make a mistake, sir. I defy you to make a public speech which 'asn't got that at the bottom of it."

"We are wandering from the point, Joe," returned Mr. Lavender. "Who is it that governs the country?"

"A Unseen Power," replied Joe promptly.

"How?"

"Well, sir, we're a democratic country, ain't we? Parlyment's elected by the People, and Gover'ment's elected by Parlyment. All right so far; but what 'appens? Gover'ment says 'I'm going to do this.' So long as it meets with the approval of the Unseen Power, well an' good. But what if it don't? The U.P. gets busy; in an 'undred papers there begins to appear what the U.P. calls Public Opinion, that's to say the opinion of the people that agree with the U.P. There you 'ave it, sir, only them—and it appears strong. Attacks on the Gover'ment policy, nasty things said abaht members of it that's indiscreet enough to speak aht what they think—German fathers, and other secret vices; an what's more than all, not a peep at any opinion that supports the Gover'ment. Well, that goes on day after day, playin' on the mind of Parlyment, if they've got any, and gittin' on the Gover'ment's nerves, which they've got weak, till they says: 'Look 'ere, it's no go; Public Opinion won't stand it. We shall be outed; and that'll never do, because there's no other set of fellows that can save this country.' Then they 'ave a meetin' and change their policy. And what they've never seen is that they've never seen Public Opinion at all. All they've seen is what the U.P. let 'em. Now if I was the Gover'ment, I'd 'ave it out once for all with the U.P."

"Ah!" cried Mr. Lavender, whose eyes were starting from his head, so profoundly was he agitated by what was to him a new thought.

"Yes," continued Joe, "if I was the Gover'-ment, next time it 'appened, I'd say: 'All right, old cock, do your damnedest. I ain't responsible to you. Attack, suppress, and all the rest of it. We're goin' to do what we say, all the same!' And then I'd do it. And what'd come of it? Either the U.P. would go beyond the limits of the Law—and then I'd jump on it, suppress its papers, and clap it into quod—or it'd take it lyin' down. Whichever 'appened it'd be all up with the U.P. I'd a broke its chain off my neck for good. But I ain't the Gover'ment, an' Gov-er'ment's got tender feet. I ask you, sir, wot's the good of havin' a Constitooshion, and all the bother of electing these fellows, if they can't act according to their judgment for the short term of their natural lives? The U.P. may be patriotic and estimable, and 'ave the best intentions and all that, but its outside the Constitooshion; and what's more, I'm not goin' to spend my last blood an' my last money in a democratic country to suit the tastes of any single man, or triumpher-ate, or wotever it may be made of. If the Gover'-ment's uncertain wot the country wants they can always ask it in the proper way, but they never

ought to take it on 'earsay from the papers. That's wot I think."

While he was speaking Mr. Lavender had become excited to the point of fever, for, without intending it, Joe had laid bare to him a yawning chasm between his worship of public men and his devotion to the Press. And no sooner had his chauffeur finished than he cried: "Leave me, Joe, for I must think this out."

"Right, sir," answered Joe with his smile, and taking the tea-tray from off his master, he set it where it must infallibly be knocked over, and went out.

'Can it be possible,' thought Mr. Lavender, when he was alone, 'that I am serving God and Mammon? And which is God and which is Mammon?' he added, letting his thoughts play over the countless speeches and leading articles which had formed his spiritual diet since the war began. 'Or, indeed, are they not both God or both Mammon? If what Joe says is true, and nothing is recorded save what seems good to this Unseen Power, have I not been listening to ghosts and shadows; and am I, indeed, myself anything but the unsubstantial image of a public man? For it is true that I have no knowledge of anything save what is recorded in the papers.' And perceiving that the very basis of his faith was en-

dangered, he threw off the bedclothes, and began to pace the room. 'Are we, then, all,' he thought, 'being bounded like india-rubber balls by an unseen hand; and is there no one of us strong enough to bounce into the eye of our bounder and overthrow him? My God, I am unhappy; for it is a terrible thing not to know which my God is, and whether I am a public man or an india-rubber ball.' And the more he thought the more dreadful it seemed to him, now that he perceived that all those journals, pamphlets, and reports with which his study walls were lined might not be the truth, but merely authorised versions of it.

"This," he said aloud, "is a nightmare from which I must awaken or lose all my power of action and my ability to help my country in its peril."

And sudden sweat broke out on his brow, for he perceived that he had now no means of telling even whether there *was* a peril, so strangely had Joe's words affected his powers of credulity.

'But surely,' he thought, steadying himself by gripping his washstand, 'there was, at least, a peril once. And yet, how do I know even that, for I have only been told so; and the tellers themselves were only told so by this Unseen Power; and suppose it has made a mistake or has some private ends to serve! Oh! it is terrible, and there

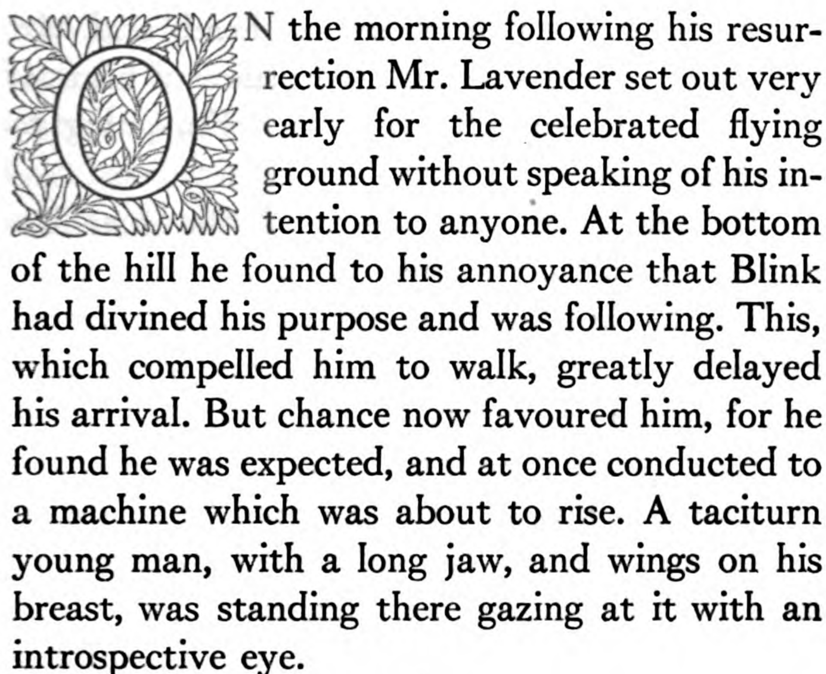
is no end to it.' And he shook the crockery in the spasms which followed the first awakenings of these religious doubts. "Where, then, am I to go," he cried, "for knowledge of the truth? For even books would seem dependent on the good opinion of this Unseen Power, and would not reach my eyes unless they were well spoken of by it."

And the more he thought the more it seemed to him that nothing could help him but to look into the eyes of this Unseen Power, so that he might see for himself whether it was the Angel of Truth or some Demon jumping on the earth. No sooner had this conviction entered his brain than he perceived how in carrying out such an enterprise he would not only be setting his own mind at rest, and re-establishing or abolishing his faith, but would be doing the greatest service which he could render to his country and to all public men. 'Thus,' he thought, 'shall I cannonise my tourney, and serve Aurora, who is the dawn of truth and beauty in the world. I am not yet worthy, however, of this adventure, which will, indeed, be far more arduous and distressing to accomplish than any which I have yet undertaken. What can I do to brighten and equip my mind and divest it of all those prejudices in which it may unconsciously have become steeped? If I

could leave the earth for a short space and commune with the clouds it might be best. I will go to Hendon and see if someone will take me up for a consideration; for on earth I can no longer be sure of anything.' And having rounded off his purpose with this lofty design, he went back to bed with his head lighter than a puff-ball.

XVII

ADDRESSES THE CLOUDS



N the morning following his resurrection Mr. Lavender set out very early for the celebrated flying ground without speaking of his intention to anyone. At the bottom of the hill he found to his annoyance that Blink had divined his purpose and was following. This, which compelled him to walk, greatly delayed his arrival. But chance now favoured him, for he found he was expected, and at once conducted to a machine which was about to rise. A taciturn young man, with a long jaw, and wings on his breast, was standing there gazing at it with an introspective eye.

"Ready, sir?" he said.

"Yes," replied Mr. Lavender, enveloped to the eyes in a garment of fur and leather. "Will you kindly hold my dog?" he added, stroking Blink with the feeling that he was parting for ever with all that was most dear to him.

An attendant having taken hold of her by the collar, Mr. Lavender was heaved into the ma-

chine, where the young airman was already seated in front of him.

"Shall I feel sick?" asked Mr. Lavender.

"Probably," said the young airman.

"That will not deter me, for the less material I become the better it will be."

The young airman turned his head, and Mr. Lavender caught the surprised yellow of his eye.

"Hold on," said the airman, "I'm going to touch her off."

Mr. Lavender held on, and the machine moved; but at this moment Blink, uttering a dismal howl, leapt forward, and, breaking from the attendant's grasp, landed in the machine against Mr. Lavender's chest.

"Stop! stop!" he cried. "My dog."

"Stuff her down," said the unmoved airman, "between your legs. She's not the first to go up, and won't be the last to come down."

Mr. Lavender stuffed her down as best he could. 'If we are to be killed,' he thought, 'it will be together. Blink!' The faithful creature, who bitterly regretted her position now that the motion had begun, looked up with a darkened eye at Mr. Lavender, who was stopping his ears against the horrible noises which had now begun. He, too, had become aware of the pit of his stomach; but this sensation soon passed away in

the excitement he felt at getting away from the earth, for they were already at the height of a house, and rising rapidly.

'It is not at all like a little bird,' he thought, 'but rather resembles a slow train on the surface of the sea, or a horse on a switchback merry-go-round. I feel, however, that my spirit will soon be free, for the earth is becoming like a board whereon a game is played by an unseen hand, and I am leaving it.' And craning his head out a little too far he felt his chin knock against his spine. Drawing it in with difficulty he concentrated his attention upon that purification of his spirit which was the object of his journey. 'I am now,' he thought, 'in the transcendent ether. It should give me an amazing power of expression such as only the greatest writers and orators attain; and, divorced as I am rapidly becoming from all sordid reality, truth will appear to me like one of those stars towards which I am undoubtedly flying though I cannot as yet see it.'

Blink, who between his legs had hitherto been unconscious of their departure from the earth, now squirmed irresistibly up till her forepaws were on her master's chest, and gazed lugubriously at the fearful prospect. Mr. Lavender clasped her convulsively. They were by now rapidly nearing a flock of heavenly sheep, which

as they approached became ever more gigantic till they were transformed into monstrous snow-fleeces intersected by wide drifts of blue.

'Can it be that we are to adventure above them?' thought Mr. Lavender. 'I hope not, for they seem to me fearful.' His alarm was soon appeased, for the machine began to take a level course a thousand feet, perhaps, below the clouds, whence little wraiths wandering out now and again dimmed Mr. Lavender's vision and moistened his brow.

Blink having retired again between her master's legs, a sense of security and exaltation was succeeding to the natural trepidation of Mr. Lavender's mood. 'I am now,' he thought, 'lifted above all petty plots and passions on the wings of the morning. Soon will great thoughts begin to jostle in my head, and I shall see the truth of all things made clear at last.'

But the thoughts did not jostle, a curious lethargy began stealing over him instead, so that his head fell back, and his mouth fell open. This might have endured until he returned to earth had not the airman stopped the engines so that they drifted ruminantly in space below the clouds. With the cessation of the noise Mr. Lavender's brain regained its activity, and he was enchanted to hear the voice of his pilot saying:

"How are you getting on, sir?"

"As regards the sensation," Mr. Lavender replied, "it is marvellous, for after the first minute or two, during which the unwonted motion causes a certain inconvenience, one grasps at once the exhilaration and joy of this great adventure. To be in motion towards the spheres, and see the earth laid out like a chess-board below you; to feel the lithe creature beneath your body responding so freely to every call of its gallant young pilot; to be filled with the scream of the engines, as of an eagle at sport; to know that at the least aberration of the intrepid airman we should be dashed into a million pieces; all this is largely to experience an experience so unforgettable that one will never—er—er—forget it."

"Gosh!" said the young airman.

"Yes," pursued Mr. Lavender, who was now unconsciously reading himself in his morning's paper, "one can only compare the emotion to that which the disembodied spirit might feel passing straight from earth to heaven. We saw at a great depth below us on a narrow white riband of road two crawling black specks, and knew that they were human beings, the same and no more than we had been before we left that great common place called Earth."

"Gum!" said the young airman, as Mr. Lav-

ender paused, "you're getting it fine, sir! Where will it appear?"

"Those great fleecy beings the clouds," went on Mr. Lavender, without taking in the interruption, "seemed to await our coming in the morning glory of their piled-up snows; and we, with the rarefied air in our lungs, felt that we must shout to them." And so carried away was Mr. Lavender by his own style that he really did begin to address the clouds: "Ghosts of the sky, who creep cold about this wide blue air, we small adventuring mortals great-hearted salute you. Humbly proud of our daring have we come to sport with you and the winds of Ouranos, and, in the rapturous corridors between you, play hide-and-seek, avoiding your glorious moisture with the dips and curves and skimming of our swallow flights—we, the little unconquerable Spirits of the Squirth!"

The surprise which Mr. Lavender felt at having uttered so peculiar a word in the middle of such a flow of poetry reduced him to sudden silence.

"Golly!" said the airman, with sudden alarm in his voice. "Hold tight!" And they began to shoot towards earth faster than they had risen.

They came down, by what seemed a miracle to Mr. Lavender, who was still contemplative, pre-

cisely where they had gone up. A little group was collected there, and as they stepped out a voice said, "I beg your pardon," in a tone so dry that it pierced even the fogged condition in which Mr. Lavender alighted. The gentleman who spoke had a dark moustache and thick white hair, and, except that he wore a monocle, and was perhaps three inches taller, bore a striking resemblance to himself.

"Thank you," he replied, "certainly."

"No," said the gentleman, "not at all—on the contrary. Who the hell are you?"

"A public man," said Mr. Lavender, surprised; "at least," he added conscientiously, "I am not quite certain."

"Well," said the gentleman, "you've jolly well stolen my stunt."

"Who, then, are you?" asked Mr. Lavender.

"I?" replied the gentleman, evidently intensely surprised that he was not known; "I—my name——"

But at this moment Mr. Lavender's attention was diverted by the sight of Blink making for the horizon, and crying out in a loud voice: "My dog!" he dropped the coat in which he was still enveloped and set off running after her at full speed, without having taken in the identity of the gentleman or disclosed his own. Blink, in-

deed, scenting another flight in the air, had made straight for the entrance of the enclosure, and finding a motor cab there with the door open had bolted into it, taking it for her master's car. Mr. Lavender sprang in after her. At the shake which this imparted to the cab, the driver, who had been dozing, turned his head.

"Want to go back, sir?" he said.

"Yes," replied Mr. Lavender, breathless; "London."

XVIII

SEES TRUTH FACE TO FACE

FEAR,' thought Mr. Lavender, as they sped towards town, 'that I have inadvertently taken a joy-ride which belonged to that distinguished person with the eye-glass. No matter, my spirit is now bright for the adventure I have in hand. If only I knew where I could find the Unseen Power—but possibly its movements may be recorded in these journals.' And taking from his pocket his morning papers, which he had not yet had time to peruse, he buried himself in their contents. He was still deeply absorbed when the cab stopped, and the driver knocked on the window. Mr. Lavender got out, followed by Blink, and was feeling in his pocket for the fare when an exclamation broke from the driver:

"Gorblimy! I've brought the wrong baby!"

And before Mr. Lavender had recovered from his surprise, he had whipped the car round and was speeding back towards the flying ground.

'How awkward!' thought Mr. Lavender, who was extremely nice in money matters; 'what shall I do now?' And he looked around him. There, as it were by a miracle, was the office of a great journal, whence obviously his distinguished colleague had set forth to the flying grounds, and to which he had been returned in error by the faithful driver.

Perceiving in all this the finger of Providence, Mr. Lavender walked in. Those who have followed his experiences so far will readily understand how no one could look on Mr. Lavender without perceiving him to be a man of extreme mark, and no surprise need be felt when he was informed that the Personage he sought was on the point of visiting Brighton to open a hospital, and might yet be overtaken at Victoria Station.

With a beating heart he took up the trail in another taxi-cab, and, arriving at Victoria, purchased tickets for himself and Blink, and inquired for the Brighton train.

"Hurry up!" replied the official. Mr. Lavender ran, searching the carriage windows for any indication of his objective. The whistle had been blown, and he was in despair, when his eye caught the label "Reserved" on a first-class window, and looking in he saw a single person evidently of the highest consequence smoking a

cigar, surrounded by papers. Without a moment's hesitation he opened the door, and, preceded by Blink, leaped in. "This carriage is reserved, sir," said the Personage, as the train moved out.

"I know," said Mr. Lavender, who had fallen on to the edge of the seat opposite; "and only the urgency of my business would have caused me to violate the sanctity of your retreat, for, believe me, I have the instincts if not the habits of a gentleman."

The Personage, who had made a move of his hand as if to bring the train to a standstill, abandoning his design, replaced his cigar, and contemplated Mr. Lavender from above it.

The latter remained silent, returning that remarkable stare, while Blink withdrew beneath the seat and pressed her chin to the ground, savouring the sensation of another new motion.

'Yes,' he thought, 'those eyes have an almost superhuman force and cunning. They are the eyes of a spider in the centre of a great web. They seem to draw me.'

"You are undoubtedly the Unseen Power, sir," he said suddenly, "and I have reached the heart of the mystery. From your own lips I shall soon know whether I am a puppet or a public man."

The Personage, who by his movements was clearly under the impression that he had to do with a lunatic, sat forward with his hands on his knees ready to rise at a moment's notice; he kept his cigar in his mouth, however, and an enforced smile on the folds of his face.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he said. "Will you have a cigar?"

"No, thank you," replied Mr. Lavender, "I must keep the eyes of my spirit clear, and come to the point. Do you rule this country or do you not? For it is largely on the answer to this that my future depends. In telling others what to do am I speaking as *my* conscience or as *your* conscience dictates; and, further, if indeed I am speaking as your conscience dictates, have you a conscience?"

The Personage, who had evidently made up his mind to humour the intruder, flipped the ash off his cigar.

"Well, sir," he said, "I don't know who the devil you may be, but my conscience is certainly as good as yours."

'That," returned Mr. Lavender with a sigh, "is a great relief, for whether you rule the country or not, you are undoubtedly the source from which I, together with the majority of my countrymen, derive our inspirations. You are the

fountain-head at which we draw and drink. And to know that your waters are pure, unstained by taint of personal prejudice and the love of power, will fortify us considerably. Am I to assume, then, that above all passion and pettiness, you are an impersonal force whose innumerable daily editions reflect nothing but abstract truth, and are in no way the servants of a preconceived and personal view of the situation?"

"You want to know too much, don't you think?" said the Personage with a smile.

"How can that be, sir?" asked Mr. Lavender: "If you are indeed the invisible king swaying the currents of national life, and turning its tides at will, it is essential that we should believe in you; and before we can believe in you must we not know all about you?"

"By Jove, sir," replied the Personage, "that strikes me as being contrary to all the rules of religion. I thought faith was the ticket."

By this answer Mr. Lavender was so impressed that he sat for a moment in silence, with his eyebrow working up and down.

"Sir," he said at last, "you have given me a new thought. If you are right, to disbelieve in you and the acts which you perform, or rather the editions which you issue, is blasphemy."

"I should think so," said the Personage,

emitting a long whiff of smoke. "Hadn't that ever occurred to you before?"

"No," replied Mr. Lavender, naïvely, "for I have never yet disbelieved anything in those journals."

The Personage coughed heartily.

"I have always regarded them," went on Mr. Lavender, "as I myself should wish to be regarded, 'without fear and without reproach.' For that is, as I understand it, the principle on which a gentleman must live, ever believing of others what he would wish believed of himself. With the exception of Germans," he added hastily.

"Naturally," returned the Personage. "And I'll defy you to find anything in them which disagrees with that formula. Everything they print refers to Germans if not directly then obliquely. Germans are the *idée fixe*, and without an *idée fixe*, as you know, there's no such thing as religion. Do you get me?"

"Yes, indeed," cried Mr. Lavender, enthused, for the whole matter now seemed to him to fall into coherence, and, what was more, to coincide with his preconceptions, so that he had no longer any doubts. "You, sir—the Unseen Power—are but the crystallised embodiment of the national sentiment in time of war; in serving you, and ful-

filling the ideas which you concrete in your journals, we public men are servants of the general animus, which in its turn serves the blind and burning instinct of Justice. This is eminently satisfactory to me, who would wish no better fate than to be a humble lackey in that house." He had no sooner, however, spoken those words than Joe Petty's remarks about Public Opinion came back to him, and he added: "But are you really the general animus, or are you only the animus of Mayors, that is the question?"

The Personage seemed to follow this thought with difficulty. "What's that?" he said.

Mr. Lavender ran his hands through his hair.

"All turns," he said, "on what is the unit of national feeling and intelligence? Is it or is it not a Mayor?"

The Personage smiled. "Well, what do you think?" he said. "Haven't you ever heard them after dinner? There's no question about it. Make your mind easy if that's your only trouble."

Mr. Lavender, greatly cheered by the genial certainty in this answer, said: "I thank you, sir. I shall go back and refute that common scoffer, that caster of doubts. I have seen the Truth face to face, and am greatly encouraged to further public effort. With many apologies I can now get out," he added, as the train stopped

at South Croydon. "Blink!" And, followed by his dog, he stepped from the train.

The Personage, who was indeed no other than the private secretary of the private secretary of It whom Mr. Lavender had designated as the Truth watched him from the window.

"Well, that *was* a treat, dear papa!" he murmured to himself, emitting a sigh of smoke after his retreating interlocutor.

XIX

IS IN PERIL OF THE STREET

N the Sunday following this interview with the Truth Mr. Lavender, who ever found the day of rest irksome to his strenuous spirit, left his house after an early supper. It had been raining all day, but the sinking sun had now emerged and struck its level light into the tree tops from a still cloudy distance. Followed by Blink, he threaded the puddled waste which lies to the west of the Spaniard's Road, nor was it long before the wild beauty of the scene infected his spirit, and he stood still to admire the world spread out. The smoke rack of misted rain was still drifting above the sunset radiance in an apple-green sky; and behind Mr. Lavender, while he gazed at those clouds symbolical of the world's unrest, a group of tall, dark pine-trees, wild and witch-like, had collected as if in audience of his cosmic mood. He formed a striking group for a painter, with the west wind flinging back his white hair, and fluttering his dark moustache along his cheeks, while

Blink, a little in front of him, pointed at the prospect and emitted barks whose vigour tossed her charming head now to this side now to that.

'How beautiful is this earth!' thought Mr. Lavender, 'and how simple to be good and happy thereon. Yet must we journey ten leagues beyond the wide world's end to find justice and liberty. There are dark powers like lions ever in the path. Yes,' he continued, turning round to the pine-trees, who were creaking slightly in the wind, 'hate and oppression, greed, lust, and ambition! There you stand malevolently regarding me. Out upon you, dark witches of evil! If I had but an axe I would lay you lower than the dust.' But the poor pine-trees paid no attention save to creak a little louder. And so incensed was Mr. Lavender by this insensibility on the part of those which his own words had made him perceive were the powers of darkness that he would very likely have barked his knuckles on them if Blink by her impatience had not induced him to resume his walk and mount on to the noble rampart of the Spaniard's Road.

Along this he wandered and down the hill with the countless ghosts and shadows of his brain, liberating the world in fancy from all the hindrances which beset the paths of public men, till dark fell, and he was compelled to turn towards

home. Closely attended by the now sobered Blink he had reached the Tube Station when he perceived in the inky wartime dusk that a woman was following him. Dimly aware that she was tall and graceful he hurried to avoid her, but before long could but note that she was walking parallel and turning her face towards him. Her gloved hand seemed to make a beckoning movement, and perceiving at once that he was the object of that predatory instinct which he knew from the many letters and protests in his journals to be one of the most distressing features of the war, he would have broken into a run if he had not been travelling up-hill; being deprived of this means of escape, his public nature prevailed, and he saw that it was his duty to confront the woman, and strike a blow at the national evil stalking beside him. But he was in a difficulty, for his natural delicacy towards women seemed to preclude him from treating her as if she were what she evidently was, while his sense of duty urged him with equal force to do so.

A whiff of delicious scent determined him. "Madam," he said, without looking in her face, which, indeed, was not visible—so great was the darkness, "it is useless to pursue one who not only has the greatest veneration for women but regards you as a public danger at a time when

all the energies of the country should be devoted to the defeat of our common enemies."

The woman, uttering a sound like a laugh, edged towards him, and Mr. Lavender edged away, so that they proceeded up the street crabwise, with Blink adhering jealously to her master's heels.

"Do you know," said Mr. Lavender, with all the delicacy in his power, "how terribly subversive of the national effort it is to employ your beauty and grace to snare and slacken the sinews of our glorious youth? The mystery of a woman's glance in times like these should be used solely to beckon our heroes on to death in the field. But you, madam, than whom no one indeed has a more mysterious glance, have turned it to ends which, in the words of a great public man, profane the temple of ou—our——"

Mr. Lavender stopped, for his delicacy would not allow him even in so vital a cause to call bodies bodies. The woman here edged so close that he bolted across her in affright, and began to slant back towards the opposite side of the street.

"Madam," he said, "you must have perceived by now that I am, alas! not privileged by age to be one of the defenders of my country; and though I am prepared to yield to you, if by so

doing I can save some young hero from his fate, I wish you to clearly understand that only my sense of duty as a public man would induce me to do any such thing." At this he turned his eyes dreadfully upon her graceful form still sidling towards him, and conscious again of that delightful scent, felt a swooning sensation which made him lean against a lamp-post. "Spare me, madam," he said in a faint voice; "for my country's sake I am ready to do anything, but I must tell you that I worship another of your sex from afar, and if you are a woman you will not seek to make me besmirch that adoration or imperil my chivalry."

So saying, he threw his arms around the lamp-post and closed his eyes, expecting every moment to be drawn away against his will into a life of vice. A well-known voice, strangled to the pitch almost of inaudibility, said in his ear:

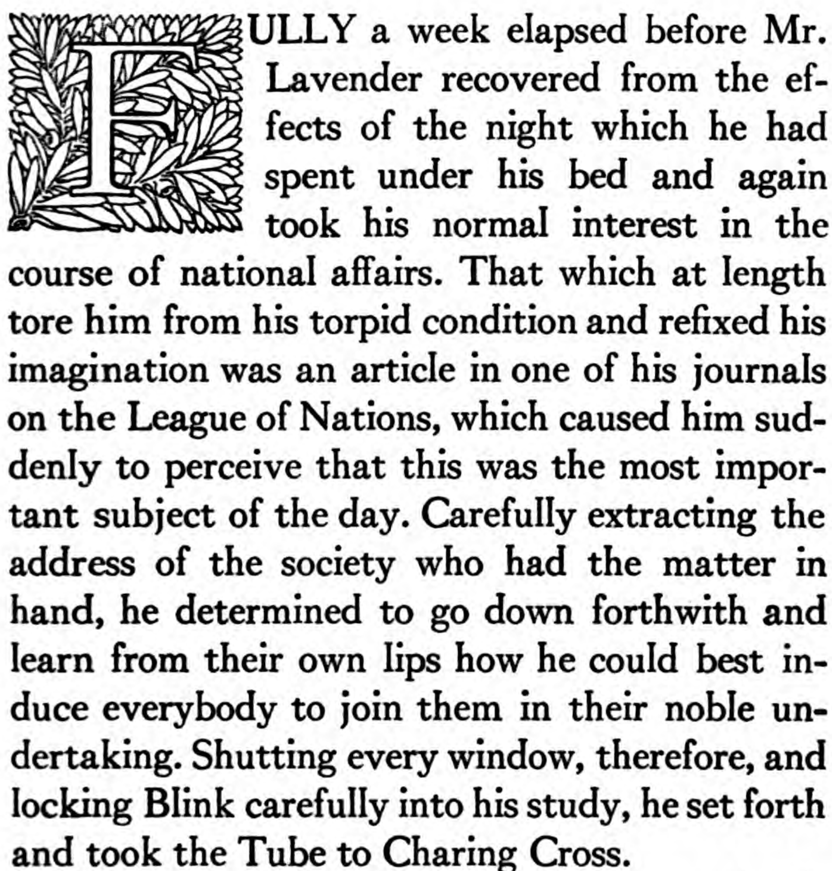
"Oh, Don Pickwixote, Don Pickwixote, you will be the death of me!"

Electrified, Mr. Lavender opened his eyes, and in the dull orange rays of the heavily shaded lamp he saw beside him no other than the writhing, choking figure of Aurora herself. Shocked beyond measure by the mistake he had made, Mr. Lavender threw up his hands and bolted past her through the gateway of his garden; nor did he cease running till he had reached his bedroom and

got under the bed, so terribly was he upset. There, in the company of Blink, he spent perhaps the most shame-stricken hours of his existence, cursing the memory of all those bishops and novelists who had caused him to believe that every woman in a dark street was a danger to the State; nor could the persuasion of Mrs. Petty or Joe induce him to come out, so that in despair they were compelled to leave him to pass the night in this penitential position, which he did without even taking out his teeth.

XX

RECEIVES A REVELATION



FULLY a week elapsed before Mr. Lavender recovered from the effects of the night which he had spent under his bed and again took his normal interest in the course of national affairs. That which at length tore him from his torpid condition and refixed his imagination was an article in one of his journals on the League of Nations, which caused him suddenly to perceive that this was the most important subject of the day. Carefully extracting the address of the society who had the matter in hand, he determined to go down forthwith and learn from their own lips how he could best induce everybody to join them in their noble undertaking. Shutting every window, therefore, and locking Blink carefully into his study, he set forth and took the Tube to Charing Cross.

Arriving at the premises indicated he made his way in lifts and corridors till he came to the name of this great world undertaking upon the door of

Room 443, and paused for a moment to recover from the astonishment he felt that the whole building at least was not occupied by the energies of such a prodigious association.

'Appearances, however, are deceptive,' he thought; 'and from a single grain of mustard-seed whole fields will flower.' He knocked on the door, therefore, and receiving the reply, "Cub id," in a female voice, he entered a room where two young ladies with bad colds were feebly tapping type-writers.

"Can I see the President?" asked Mr. Lavender.

"Dot at the bobent," said one of the young ladies. "Will the Secretary do?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Lavender, "for I seek information."

The young ladies indulged in secret confabulation, from which the perpetual word "He" alone escaped to Mr. Lavender's ears.

Then one of them slipped into an inner room, leaving behind her a powerful trail of eucalyptus. She came back almost directly, saying, "Go id."

The room which Mr. Lavender entered contained two persons, one seated at a bureau and the other pacing up and down and talking in a powerful bass voice. He paused, looked at Mr. Lavender from under bushy brows, and at once

went on walking and talking, with a sort of added zest.

'This must be He,' thought Mr. Lavender, sitting down to listen, for there was something about the gentleman which impressed him at once. He had very large red ears, and hardly a hair on his head, while his full, bearded face and prominent eyes were full of force and genius.

"It won't do a little bit, Titmarsh," he was saying, "to allow the politicians to meddle in this racket. We want men of genius, whose imaginations carry them beyond the facts of the moment. This is too big a thing for those blasted politicians. They haven't shown a sign so far of paying attention to what I've been telling them all this time. We must keep them out, Titmarsh. Machinery without mechanism, and a change of heart in the world. It's very simple. A single man of genius from each country, no pettifogging opposition, no petty prejudices."

The other gentleman, whom Mr. Lavender took for the Secretary, and who was leaning his head rather wearily on his hand, interjected: "Quite so! And whom would you choose besides yourself? In France, for instance?"

He who was walking stopped a moment, again looked at Mr. Lavender intently, and again began to speak as if he were not there.

"France?" he said. "There isn't anybody—Anatole's too old—there isn't anybody."

"America, then?" hazarded the Secretary.

"America!" replied the other; "they haven't got even half a man. There's that fellow in Germany that I used to influence; but I don't know—no, I don't think he'd be any good."

"D'Annunzio, surely——" began the Secretary.

"D'Annunzio? My God! D'Annunzio! No! There's nobody in Italy or Holland—she's as bankrupt as Spain; and there's not a cat in Austria. Russia might, perhaps, give us someone, but I can't at the moment think of him. No, Titmarsh, it's difficult."

Mr. Lavender had been growing more and more excited at each word he overheard, for a scheme of really stupendous proportions was shaping itself within him. He suddenly rose, and said: "I have an idea."

The Secretary sat up as if he had received a Faradic shock, and he who was walking up and down stood still. "The deuce you have, sir," he said.

"Yes," cried Mr. Lavender; "and in concentration and marvellous simplicity it has, I am sure, never been surpassed. It is clear to me, sir, that you, and you alone, must be this League of Nations. For if it is entirely in your hands there

will be no delay. The plan will spring full fledged from the head of Jove, and this great and beneficial change in the lot of mankind will at once become an accomplished fact. There will be no need for keeping in touch with human nature, no call for patience and all that laborious upbuilding stone by stone which is so apt to discourage mankind and imperil the fruition of great reforms. No, sir; you—you must be this League, and we will all work to the end that to-morrow at latest there may be perfected this crowning achievement of the human species."

The gentleman, who had commenced to walk again, looked furtively from Mr. Lavender to the Secretary, and said:

"By Jingo! some idea!"

"Yes," cried Mr. Lavender, entranced that his grand notion should be at once accepted; "for it is only men like you who can both soaringly conceive and immediately concrete in action; and, what is more, there will be no fear of your tiring of this job and taking up another, for you will be IT; and one cannot change oneself."

The gentleman looked at Mr. Lavender very suddenly at the words "tiring of this job," and transferred his gaze to the Secretary, who had bent his face down to his papers, and was smothering a snigger with his hand.

"Who *are* you, sir?" he said sharply.

"Merely one," returned Mr. Lavender, "who wishes to do all in his power to forward a project so fraught with beneficence to all mankind. I count myself fortunate beyond measure to have come here this morning and found the very Heart of the matter, the grain of mustard-seed."

The gentleman, who had begun to walk again, here muttered words which would have sounded like "Damned impudence" if Mr. Lavender had not been too utterly carried away by his idea to hear them.

"I shall go forth at once," he said, "and make known the good tidings that the fields are sown, the League formed. Henceforth there are no barriers between nations, and the reign of perpetual Peace is assured. It is colossal."

The gentleman abruptly raised his boot, but, seeming to think better of it, lowered it again, and turned away to the window.

Mr. Lavender, having bowed to his back, went out, and urged on by his enthusiasm, directed his steps at once towards Trafalgar Square.

Arriving at this hub of the universe he saw that Chance was on his side, for a meeting was already in progress, and a crowd of some forty persons assembled round one of the lions. Owing to his appearance Mr. Lavender was able without op-

position to climb up onto the plinth and join the speaker, a woman of uncertain years. He stood there awaiting his turn and preparing his oration, while she continued her discourse, which seemed to be a protest against any interference with British control of the freedom of the seas. A Union Jack happened to be leaning against the monument, and when she had at last finished, Mr. Lavender seized it and came forward to the edge.

"Great tidings!" he said at once, waving the flag, and without more ado plunged into an oration, which, so far as it went, must certainly be ranked among his masterpieces. "Great tidings, Friends! I have planted the grain of mustard seed; or, in common parlance, have just come from the meeting which has incepted the League of Nations; and it will be my task this morning briefly to make known to you the principles which in future must dominate the policy of the world. Since it is for the closer brotherhood of man and the reign of perpetual peace that we are struggling, we must first secure the annihilation of our common enemies. Those members of the human race whose infamies have largely placed them beyond the pale must be eliminated once for all." Loud cheers greeted this utterance, and stimulated by the sound Mr.

Lavender proceeded: "What, however, must the civilised nations do when at last they have clean sheets? In the first place, all petty prejudices and provincial aspirations must be set aside; and though the world must be firmly founded upon the principle of nationality it must also act as one great people. This, my fellow-countrymen, is no mere contradiction in terms, for though in their new solidarities each nation will be prouder of itself, and more jealous of its good name and independence than ever, that will not prevent its sacrificing its inalienable rights for the good of the whole human nation of which it is a member. Friends, let me give you a simple illustration, which in a nutshell will make the whole thing clear. We, here in Britain, are justly proud and tenacious of our sea power—in the words of the poet, 'We hold all the gates of the water.' Now it is abundantly and convincingly plain that this reinforced principle of nationality bids us to retain and increase them, while internationalism bids us give them up."

His audience, which had hitherto listened with open mouths, here closed them, and a strident voice exclaimed:

"Give it a name, gov'nor. D'you say we ought to give up Gib?"

This word pierced Mr. Lavender, standing

where he was, to the very marrow, and he fell into such confusion of spirit that his words became inaudible.

'My God!' he thought, appalled; 'is it possible that I have not got to the bottom of this question?' And, turning his back on the audience, he gazed in a sort of agony at the figure of Nelson towering into the sky above him. He was about to cry out piteously: 'Countrymen, I know not what I think. Oh! I am unhappy!' when he inadvertently stepped back over the edge of the plinth, and, still entangled in the flag, was picked up by two policemen and placed in a dazed condition and a deserted spot opposite the National Gallery.

It was while he was standing there, encircled by pigeons and forgotten by his fellow man, that there came to him a spiritual revelation. 'Strange!' he thought; 'I notice a certain inconsistency in myself, and even in my utterances. I am two men, one of whom is me and one not me; and the one which is not me is the one which causes me to fall into the arms of policemen and other troubles. The one which is me loves these pigeons, and desires to live quietly with my dog, not considering public affairs, which, indeed, seem to be suited to persons of another sort. Whence, then, comes the one

which is not me? Can it be that it is derived from the sayings and writings of others, and is but a spurious spirit only meet to be outcast? Do I, to speak in the vernacular, care any buttons whether we stick to Gibraltar or not so long as men do but live in kindness? And if that is so, have I the right to say I do? Ought I not, rather, to be true to my private self and leave the course of public affairs to those who have louder voices and no private selves?' The thought was extremely painful, for it seemed to disclose to him grave inconsistency in the recent management of his life. And, thoroughly mortified, he turned round with a view of entering the National Gallery and soothing his spirit with art, when he was arrested by the placard which covered it announcing which town had taken which sum of bonds. This lighted up such a new vista of public utility that his brain would certainly have caught fire again if one of the policemen who had conducted him across the Square had not touched him on the arm, and said:

"How are you now, sir?"

"I am pretty well, thank you, policeman," replied Mr. Lavender, "and sorry that I occasioned so much disturbance."

"Don't mention it, sir," answered the policeman; "you came a nasty crump."

"Tell me," said Mr. Lavender, suddenly looking up into his face, "do you consider that a man is justified in living a private life? For, as regards my future, it is largely on your opinion that I shall act."

The policeman, whose solid face showed traces of astonishment, answered slowly: "As a general thing, a man's private life don't bear lookin' into, as you know, sir."

"I have not lived one for some time," said Mr. Lavender.

"Well," remarked the policeman, "if you take my advice you won't try it again. I should say you 'adn't the constitution."

"I fear you do not catch my meaning," returned Mr. Lavender, whose whole body was aching from his fall; "it is my public life which tries me."

"Well, then, I should chuck it," said the policeman.

"Really?" murmured Mr. Lavender eagerly; "would you?"

"Why not?" said the policeman.

So excited was Mr. Lavender by this independent confirmation of his sudden longing that he took out half a crown.

"You will oblige me greatly," he said, "by accepting this as a token of my gratitude."

"Well, sir, I'll humour you," answered the policeman; "though it was no trouble, I'm sure; you're as light as a feather. Goin' anywhere in particular?" he added.

"Yes," said Mr. Lavender, rather faintly, "the Tube Station."

"Come along with me, then."

Mr. Lavender went along, not sorry to have the protection of that stalwart form, for his nerve was shaken, not so much by physical suffering as by the revelation he had received.

"If you'll take *my* tip, sir," said the policeman, parting from him, "you won't try no private life again; you don't look strong."

"Thank you, policeman," said Mr. Lavender musingly; "it is kind of you to take an interest in me. Good-bye!"

Safely seated in the Tube for Hampstead he continued the painful struggle of his meditations. 'If, indeed,' he thought, 'as a public man I do more harm than good, I am prepared to sacrifice all for my country's sake and retire into private life. But the policeman said that would be dangerous for me. What, then, is left? To live neither a public nor a private life!'

This thought, at once painful and heroic, began to take such hold of him that he arrived at his house in a high fever of the brain.

XXI

AND ASCENDS TO PARADISE

OW when Mr. Lavender once slept over an idea it became so strong that no power on earth could prevent his putting it into execution, and all night long he kept Blink awake by tramping up and down his bedroom and planning the details of such a retirement as would meet his unfortunate case. For at once he perceived that to retire from both his lives without making the whole world know of it would be tantamount to not retiring. 'Only by a public act,' he thought, 'of so striking a character that nobody can miss it can I bring the moral home to all public and private men.' And a hundred schemes swarmed like ants in his brain. Nor was it till the cock crew that one adequate to this final occasion occurred to him.

'It will want very careful handling,' he thought, 'for otherwise I shall be prevented, and perhaps even arrested in the middle, which will be both painful and ridiculous.' So sublime, however, was his idea that he shed many tears over it, and often

paused in his tramping to regard the unconscious Blink with streaming eyes. All the next day he went about the house and heath taking a last look at objects which had been dear, and at meal times ate and drank even less than usual, absorbed by the pathos of his coming renunciation. He determined to make his preparations for the final act during the night, when Mrs. Petty would be prevented by Joe's snoring from hearing the necessary sounds; and at supper he undertook the delicate and harrowing task of saying good-bye to his devoted housekeeper without letting her know that he was doing it.

"Mrs. Petty," he said, trifling with a morsel of cheese, "it is useless to disguise from you that I may be going on a journey, and I feel that I shall not be able to part from all the care you have bestowed on me without recording in words my heartfelt appreciation of your devotion. I shall miss it, I shall miss it terribly, if, that is, I am permitted to miss anything."

Mrs. Petty, whose mind instantly ran to his bed-socks, answered: "Don't you worry, sir; I won't forget them. But wherever are you going now?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Lavender subtly, "it is all in the air at present; but now that the lime-trees are beginning to smell a certain restlessness is upon

me, and you may see some change in my proceedings. Whatever happens to me, however, I commit my dear Blink to your care; feed her as if she were myself, and love her as if she were Joe, for it is largely on food and affection that dogs depend for happiness."

"Why, good gracious, sir," said Mrs. Petty, "you talk as if you were going for a month of Sundays. Are you thinking of Eastbourne?"

Mr. Lavender sighed deeply at that word, for the memory of a town where he had spent many happy days added to the gentle melancholy of his feelings on this last evening.

"As regards that I shall not inform you at present; for, indeed, I am by no means certain what my destination will be. Largely speaking, no pub-public man," he stammered, doubtful whether he was any longer that, "knows where he will be going to-morrow. Sufficient unto the day are the intentions in his head."

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Petty frankly, "you can't go anywhere without Joe or me, that's flat."

Mr. Lavender smiled.

"Dear Mrs. Petty," he murmured, "there are sacrifices one cannot demand even of the most faithful friends. But," he went on with calculated playfulness, "we need not consider that point

until the day after to-morrow at least, for I have much to do in the meantime."

Reassured by those words and the knowledge that Mr. Lavender's plans seldom remained the same for more than two days, Mrs. Petty tossed her head slightly and went to the door. "Well, it *is* a mystery, I'm sure," she said.

"I should like to see Joe," said Mr. Lavender, with a lingering look at his devoted housekeeper.

"The beauty!" muttered Mrs. Petty; "I'll send him," and withdrew.

Giving the morsel of cheese to Blink, who, indeed, had eaten practically the whole of this last meal, Mr. Lavender took the moon-cat on his shoulder, and abandoned himself for a moment to the caresses of his two favourites.

"Blink," he said in a voice which trembled slightly, "be good to this moon-cat while I am away; and if I am longer than you expect, darling, do not be unhappy. Perhaps some day you will rejoin me; and even if we are not destined to meet again, I would not, in the fashion of cruel men, wish to hinder your second marriage, or to stand in the way of your happy forgetfulness of me. Be as light-hearted as you can, my dear, and wear no mourning for your master."

So saying, he flung his arms round her, and

embraced her warmly, inhaling with the most poignant emotion her sheep-like odour. He was still engaged with her when the door was opened, and Joe came in.

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender resolutely, "sit down and light your pipe. You will find a bottle of pre-war port in the sideboard. Open it, and drink my health; indeed, I myself will drink it too, for it may give me courage. We have been good friends, Joe," he went on while Joe was drawing the cork, "and have participated in pleasant and sharp adventures. I have called you in at this moment, which may some day seem to you rather solemn, partly to shake your hand and partly to resume the discussion on public men which we held some days ago, if you remember."

"Ah!" said Joe, with his habitual insouciance, "when I told you that they give me the 'ump. Yes, what abaht it, sir? 'Ave they been sayin' anything particular vicious?" His face flying up just then with the cork which he was extracting encountered the expression on Mr. Lavender's visage, and he added: "Don't take wot I say to 'eart, sir; try as you like *you'll* never be a public man."

Those words, which seemed to Mr. Lavender to seal his doom, caused a faint pink flush to invade his cheeks.

"No," continued Joe, pouring out the wine; "you 'aven't got the brass in times like these. I dare say you've noticed, sir, that the times is favourable for bringing out the spots on the body politic. 'Ere's 'ealth!"

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender, raising his glass to his lips with solemnity, "I wish you a most happy and prosperous life. Let us drink to all those qualities which make you *par excellence* one of that great race, the best hearted in the world, which never thinks of to-morrow, never knows when it is beaten, and seldom loses its sense of humour."

"Ah!" returned Joe enigmatically, half-closing one of his greenish eyes, and laying the glass to one side of his reddish nose. Then, with a quick movement, he swallowed its contents and refilled it before Mr. Lavender had succeeded in absorbing more than a drop. "I don't say," he continued, "but what there's a class o' public man that's got its uses, like the little 'un that keeps us all alive, or the perfect English gentleman what did his job and told nobody nothin' abaht it. You can 'ave confidence in a man like that—that's why 'e's gone an' retired; 'e's civilised, you see, the finished article; but all this raw material, this 'get-on' or 'get-out' lot, that's come from 'oo knows where, well, I wish they'd stayed there

with their tell-you-how-to-do-it and their 'ymns of 'ate."

"Joe," said Mr. Lavender, "are you certain that therein does not speak the snob inherent in the national bosom? Are you not unconsciously paying deference to the word gentleman?"

"Why not, sir?" replied Joe, tossing off his second glass. "It'd be a fine thing for the country if we was all gentlemen—straight, an' a little bit stupid, and 'ad 'alf a thought for others." And he refilled his master's glass. "I don't measure a gentleman by 'is money, or 'is title, not even by 'is clothes—I measure 'im by whether he can stand 'avin' power in 'is 'ands without gettin' unscrupled or swollen 'eaded, an' whether 'e can do what he thinks right without payin' attention to clamour. But, mind you, 'e's got to 'ave right thoughts too, and a feelin' 'eart. 'Ere's luck, sir."

Mr. Lavender, who, absorbed in his chauffeur's sentiments, had now drunk two glasses, rose from his chair, and clutching his hair said: "I will not conceal from you, Joe, that I have always assumed every public man came up to that standard, at least."

"Crikey!" said Joe. "'Ave you really, sir? My Gawd! Got any use for the rest of this bottle?"

"No, Joe, no. I shall never have use for a bottle again."

"In that case I might as well," said Joe, pouring what remained into a tumbler and drinking it off. "Is there any other topic you'd like to mention? If I can 'ave any influence on you, I shall be very glad."

"Thank you, Joe," returned Mr. Lavender, "what I have most need of at this moment is solitude and your good wishes. And will you kindly take Blink away, and when she has had her run, place her in my bedroom, with the window closed. Good-night, Joe. Call me late to-morrow morning."

"Certainly, sir. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night, Joe. Shake hands."

When Joe was gone, accompanied by the unwilling Blink, turning her beautiful dark eyes back to the last, Mr. Lavender sat down at his bureau, and drawing a sheet of paper to him, wrote at the top of it.

"My last Will and Testament."

It was a long time before he got further, and then entirely omitted to leave anything in it, completely preoccupied by the preamble, which gradually ran as follows:

"I, John Lavender, make known to all men by these presents that the act which I contemplate is symbolical, and must in no sense be taken as implying either weariness of life or that surrender

to misfortune which is unbecoming to an English public gentleman." (Over this description of himself Mr. Lavender was obliged to pause some time hovering between the two designations, and finally combining them as the only way out of his difficulty.) "Long and painful experience has convinced me that only by retiring from the former can I retain the latter character, and only by retiring from both can I point the moral ever demanded by my countrymen. Conscious, indeed, that a mere act of private resignation would have no significance to the body politic, nor any deflecting influence on the national life, I have chosen rather to disappear in blue flame, so that every Englishman may take to heart my lesson, and learn from my strange fate how to be himself uninfluenced by the verbiage of others. At the same time, with the utmost generosity, I wish to acknowledge in full my debt towards all those great writers and speakers on the war who have exercised so intoxicating an influence on my mind." (Here followed an alphabetical list of names beginning with *B* and ending with *S*.) "I wish to be dissociated firmly from the views of my chauffeur Joe Petty, and to go to my last account with an emphatic assertion that my failure to become a perfect public gentleman is due to private idiosyncrasies rather than to any con-

viction that it is impossible, or to anything but admiration of the great men I have mentioned. If anybody should wish to paint me after I am dead, I desire that I may be represented with my face turned towards the Dawn; for it is at that moment—so symptomatic of a deep adoration which I would scorn to make the common property of gossiping tongues—that I intend to depart. If there should be anything left of me—which is less than probable considering the inflammatory character of the material I design for my pyre—I would be obliged if, without giving anybody any trouble, it could be buried in my garden, with the usual Hampstead tablet.

"'JOHN LAVENDER,
THE PUBLIC MAN, WHO DIED FOR
HIS COUNTRY'S GOOD, LIVED HERE.'

"In conclusion, I would say a word to that land I have loved and served: 'Be not extreme! Distrust the words of others. To yourself be true! As you are strong be gentle, as you are brave be modest! Beloved country, farewell!'"

Having written that final sentence he struggled long with himself before he could lay down the pen. But by this time the port he had drunk had begun to have its usual effect, and he fell into a doze, from which he was awakened five hours

later by the beams of a full moon striking in on him.

'The hour has come,' he thought, and, opening the French-window, he went out onto the lawn, where the dew lay white. The freshness in the air, the glamour of the moonlight, and the fumes of the port combined to make him feel strangely rhumantic, and if he had possessed a musical instrument he would very likely have begun to play on it. He spent some moments tracking to and fro in the dew before he settled on the centre of the lawn as the most suitable spot for the act which he contemplated, for thence he would be able to turn his last looks towards Aurora's bedroom-window without interference from foliage. Having drawn a twelve-foot circle in the dew with his toe he proceeded in the bright moonlight to the necessary accumulation of his funeral pile, conveying from his study, book by book, journal by journal, pamphlet by pamphlet, the hoarded treasures of the last four years; and as he carefully placed each one, building up at once a firm and cunning structure, he gave a little groan, thinking of the intoxications of the past, and all the glorious thoughts embodied in that literature. Underneath, in the heart of the pile, he reserved a space for the most inflammable material, which he selected from a special file of

a special journal, and round the circumference of the lofty and tapering mound he carefully deposited the two hundred and four war numbers of a certain weekly, so that a ring of flame might lick well up the sides and permeate the more solid matter on which he would be sitting. For two hours he worked in the waning moonlight, till he had completed this weird and heroic erection; and just before the dawn, sat down by the light of the candle with which he meant to apply the finishing touch, to compose that interview with himself whereby he intended to convey to the world the message of his act.

"I found him," he began, in the words of the interviewer, "sitting upon a journalistic pile of lovely leaves of thought, which in the dawning of a new day glowed with a certain restrained flamboyance, as though the passion stored within those exotic pages gave itself willingly to the *éclaircissement* of the situation, and of his lineaments on which suffering had already set their stamp.

"'I should like,' I said, approaching as near as I could, for the sparks, like little fireflies on a Riviera evening, were playing profoundly round my trousers, 'I should like to hear from your own lips the reasons which have caused you to resign.'

" 'Certainly,' he replied, with the courtesy which I have always found characteristic of him in moments which would try the suavity of more ordinary men; and with the utmost calm and clarity he began to tell me the inner workings of his mind, while the growing dawn-light irradiated his wasted and expressive features, and the flames slowly roasted his left boot.

" 'Yes,' he said quietly, and his eyes turned inwards, 'I have at last seen the problem clearly, and seen it whole. It is largely because of this that I have elected to seek the seclusion of another world. What that world contains for me I know not, though so many public men have tried to tell me; but it has never been my way to recoil from the Unknown, and I am ready for my journey beyond the wide world's end.'

"I was greatly struck by the large-hearted way in which he spoke those words, and I interrupted him to ask whether he did not think that there was something fundamental in the British character which would leap as one man at such an act of daring sacrifice and great adventure.

" 'As regards that,' he replied fearlessly, while in the light of the ever-brightening dawn I could see the suspender on his right leg gradually charring, so that he must already have been in great pain, 'as regards that, it is largely the proneness

of the modern British to leap to verbal extremity which is inducing me to afford them this object-lesson in restraint and commonsense. Ouch!'

"This momentary ejaculation seemed to escape him in spite of all his iron control; and the smell of burning flesh brought home to me as nothing else, perhaps, could have done the tortures he must have been suffering.

"'I feel,' he went on very gravely, 'that extravagance of word and conduct is fatal to my country, and having so profoundly experienced its effects upon myself, I am now endeavouring by a shining example to supply a remedy for a disease which is corroding the vitals and impairing the sanity of my countrymen and making them a race of second-hand spiritual drunkards. Ouch!'

"I confess that at this moment the tears started to my eyes, for a more sublime show than the spectacle of this devoted man slowly roasting himself to death before my eyes for the good of his country I had seldom seen. It had a strange, an appalling interest, and for nothing on earth could I have torn my gaze away. I now realised to the full for the first time the will-power and heroism of the human species, and I rejoiced with a glorious new feeling that I was of the same breed as this man, made of such stern stuff that not even a tear rolled down his cheeks to quench

the flames that leaped around him ever higher and higher. And the dawn came up in the eastern sky; and I knew that a great day was preparing for mankind; and with my eyes fixed upon him as he turned blacker and blacker I let my heart loose in a great thanksgiving that I had lived to see this moment. It was then that he cried out in a loud voice:

"'I call Aurora to witness that I have died without a falter, grasping a burning spear to tilt at the malpractice which has sent me mad!' And I saw that he held in his fast-consuming hand a long roll of journals sharpened to a point of burning flame.

"'Aurora!' he cried again, and with that enigmatic word on his lips was incinerated in the vast and towering belch of the devouring element.

"It was among the most inspiring sights I have ever witnessed."

When Mr. Lavender had completed that record, whose actuality and wealth of moving detail had greatly affected him, and marked it "For the Press—Immediate," he felt very cold. It was, in fact, that hour of dawn when a shiver goes through the world; and, almost with pleasurable anticipation he took up his lighted candle and stole shivering out of his pile, rising ghostly to the height of some five feet in the middle of the dim

lawn whereon a faint green tinge was coming with the return of daylight. Having reached it, he walked round it twice, and readjusted four volumes of the history of the war as stepping-stones to the top; then lowering the candle, whose flame burned steadily in the stillness, he knelt down in the grey dew and set fire to an article in a Sunday paper. Then, sighing deeply, he returned to his little ladder and, with some difficulty preserving his balance, mounted to the top, and sat down with his legs towards the house and his eyes fixed on Aurora's bedroom-window. He had been there perhaps ten minutes before he realised that nothing was happening below him, and, climbing down again, proceeded to the aperture where he had inserted the burning print. There, by the now considerable daylight, he saw that the flame had gone out at the words "The Stage is now set for the last act of this colossal world drama." And convinced that Providence had intended that heartening sentence to revive his somewhat drooping courage, he thought, 'I, too, shall be making history this morning,' and relighting the journal, went on his hands and knees and began manfully to blow the flames. . . .

Now the young lady in the adjoining castle, who had got out of bed, happened, as she sometimes did, to go to the window for a look at the

sun rising over Parliament Hill. Attracted by the smell of burning paper she saw Mr. Lavender in this act of blowing up the flames.

'What on earth is the poor dear doing now?' she thought. 'This is really the limit!' And slipping on her slippers and blue dressing-gown she ensconced herself behind the curtain to await developments.

Mr. Lavender had now backed away from the flames at which he had been blowing, and remained on his hands and knees, apparently assuring himself that they had really obtained hold. He then rose, and to her intense surprise began climbing up onto the pile. She watched him at first with an amused astonishment, so ludicrous was his light little figure, crowned by stivered-up white hair, and the expression of eager melancholy on his thin, high-cheekboned face upturned towards her window. Then, to her dismay, she saw that the flame had really caught, and, suddenly persuaded that he had some crazy intention of injuring himself with the view, perhaps, of attracting her attention, she ran out of her room and down the stairs, and emerging from the back door just as she was, circled her garden, so that she might enter Mr. Lavender's garden from behind him, ready for any eventuality. She arrived within arm's reach of him without his having

heard her, for Blink, whose anxious face as she watched her master wasting, could be discerned at the bedroom-window, was whining, and Mr. Lavender himself had now broken into a strange and lamentable chantey, which in combination with the creeping flutter of the flames in the weekly journals encircling the base of the funeral pyre, wellnigh made her blood curdle.

"Aurora," sang Mr. Lavender, in that most dolorous voice,

> "Aurora, my heart I bring,
> For I know well it will not burn,
> Oh! when the leaves puff out in Spring
> And when the leaves in Autumn turn
> Think, think of me!
> Aurora, I pass away!
> Upon my horse of air I ride;
> Here let my grizzled ashes stay,
> But take, ah! take my heart inside!
> Aurora! Aurora!"

At this moment, just as a fit of the most uncontrollable laughter was about to seize her, she saw a flame which had just consumed the word Horatio reach Mr. Lavender's right calf.

"Oh!" he cried out in desperate tones, stretching up his arms to the sky. "Now is my hour come! Sweet sky, open and let me see her face! Behold! I behold her with the eyes of faith. It is enough. Courage, brother; let me now consume in silence!" So saying, he folded his arms

tightly across his breast and closed his lips. The flame rising to the bottom of the weekly which had indeed been upside down, here nipped him vigorously, so that with a wholly unconscious movement he threw up his little legs, and, losing his balance, fell backwards into the arms of Aurora, watchfully outstretched to receive him. Uplifted there, close to that soft blue bosom away from the reek of the flame, he conceived that he was consumed and had passed already from his night of ghosts and shadows into the arms of the morning, and through his swooning lips came forth the words:

"I am in Paradise."

1918.

REVERIE OF A SPORTSMAN

SET out one morning in late August, with some potted grouse sandwiches in one pocket and a magazine in the other, for a tramp towards Causdon. I had not been in that particular part of the moor since I used to go snipe-shooting there as a boy—my first introduction, by the way, to sport. It was a very lovely day, almost too hot; and I never saw the carpet of the moor more exquisite—heather, fern, the silvery white cotton grass, dark peat turves, and green bog-moss, all more than customarily clear in hue under a very blue sky. I walked till two o'clock, then sat down in a little scoop of valley by a thread of stream, which took its rise from an awkward-looking bog at the top. It was wonderfully quiet. A heron rose below me and flapped away; and while I was eating my potted grouse I heard the harsh cheep of a snipe, and caught sight of the twisting bird vanishing against the line of sky above the bog. 'That must have been one of the bogs we used to shoot,' I thought; and having finished my snack of lunch,

I rolled myself a cigarette, opened the magazine, and idly turned its pages. I had no serious intention of reading—the calm and silence were too seductive, but my attention became riveted by an exciting story of some man-eating lions, and I read on till I had followed the adventure to the death of the two ferocious brutes, and found my cigarette actually burning my fingers. Crushing it out against the dampish roots of the heather, I lay back with my eyes fixed on the sky, thinking of nothing.

Suddenly I became conscious that between me and that sky a leash of snipe high up were flighting and twisting and gradually coming lower; I appeared, indeed, to have a sort of attraction for them. They would dash towards each other, seem to exchange ideas, and rush away again, like flies that waltz together for hours in the centre of a room. They came lower and lower over me, and I could almost swear I heard them whisper to each other with their long bills. Presently I absolutely caught what they were saying: "Look at him! The ferocious brute! Oh, look at him!"

Amazed at such an extraordinary violation of all the laws of Nature, I began to rub my ears, when I distinctly heard the "Go-back, go-back" of an old cock grouse, and, turning my head

cautiously, saw him perched on a heathery knob within twenty yards of where I lay. Now, I knew very well that efforts to introduce grouse on Dartmoor had been unsuccessful, since for some reason connected with the quality of the heather, the nature of the soil, or the over-mild dampness of the air, this king of game birds had unfortunately refused to become domiciled there; so that I could hardly credit my senses. But suddenly I heard him also: "Look at him! Go back! The ferocious brute! Go back!" He seemed to be speaking to something just below; and there, sure enough, was the first hare I had ever seen out on the full of the moor. I have always thought a hare a jolly beast, and not infrequently felt sorry when I rolled one over; it has a way of crying like a child if not killed outright. I confess then that in hearing it, too, whisper: "Look at him! The ferocious brute! Oh, look at him!" I experienced the sensation which comes over one when one has not been quite fairly treated. Just at that moment, with a warm stirring of the air, there pitched within six yards of me a magnificent old black-cock—the very spit of that splendid fellow I shot last season at Balnagie, whose tail my wife now wears in her hat. He was accompanied by four grey-hens, who, settling in a semicircle, began at once: "Look at him! Look at

him! The ferocious brute! Oh, look at him!" At that moment I say with candour that I regretted the many times I have spared grey-hens with the sportsmanlike desire to encourage their breed.

For several bewildered minutes after that I could not turn my eyes without seeing some bird or other alight close by me; more and more grouse, and black game, pheasants, partridges—not only the excellent English bird, but the very sporting Hungarian variety—and that unsatisfactory red-legged Frenchman which runs any distance rather than get up and give you a decent shot at him. There were woodcock too, those twisting delights of the sportsman's heart, whose tiny wing-feather trophies have always given me a distinct sensation of achievement when pinned in the side of my shooting-cap; wood-pigeons too, very shy and difficult, owing to the thickness of their breast-feathers—and, after all, only coming under the heading "sundry"; wild duck, with their snaky dark heads, that I have shot chiefly in Canada, lurking among rushes in twilight at flighting time—a delightful sport, exciting, as the darkness grows; excellent eating too, with red pepper and sliced oranges in oil! Certain other sundries kept coming also; landrails, a plump, delicious little bird; green and golden plover; even one of those queer little

creatures, moorhens, that always amuse one by their quick, quiet movements, plaintive note, and quaint curiosity, though not really, of course, fit to shoot, with their niggling flight and fishy flavour! Ptarmigan, too, a bird I admire very much, but have only once or twice succeeded in bringing down, shy and scarce as it is in Scotland. And, side by side, the alpha and omega of the birds to be shot in these islands, a capercailzie and a quail. I well remember shooting the latter in a turnip-field in Lincolnshire—a scrap of a bird, the only one I ever saw in England. Apart from the pleasurable sensation at its rarity, I recollect feeling that it was almost a mercy to put the little thing out of its loneliness. It ate very well. There, too, was that loon or northern diver that I shot with a rifle off Denman Island as it swam about fifty yards from the shore. Handsome plumage; I still have the mat it made. One bird only seemed to refuse to alight, remaining up there in the sky, and uttering continually that trilling cry which makes it perhaps the most spiritual of all birds that can be eaten—I mean, of course, the curlew. I certainly never shot one. They fly, as a rule, very high and seem to have a more than natural distrust of the human being. This curlew—ah! and a blue rock (I have always despised pigeon-shooting)—were the only two

winged creatures that one can shoot for sport in this country that did not come and sit round me.

There must have been, I should say, as many hundred altogether as I have killed in my time—a tremendous number. They sat in a sort of ring, moving their beaks from side to side, just as I have seen penguins doing on the films that explorers bring back from the Antartic; and all the time repeating to each other those amazing words: "Look at him! The ferocious brute! Oh, look at him!"

Then, to my increased astonishment, I saw behind the circles of the birds a number of other animals besides the hare. At least five kinds of deer—the red, the fallow, the roe, the common deer, whose name I've forgotten, which one finds in Vancouver Island, and the South African spring bok, that swarm in from the Karoo at certain seasons, among which I had that happy week once in Namaqualand, shooting them from horseback after a gallop to cut them off—very good eating as camp fare goes, and making nice rugs if you sew their skins together. There, too, was the hyena I missed, probably not altogether; but he got off, to my chagrin—queer-looking brute! Rabbits of course had come—hundreds and hundreds of them. If—like everybody else—I've done such a lot of it, I can't honestly say I've

ever cared much for shooting rabbits, though the effect is neat enough when you get them just right and they turn head over heels—and anyway, the prolific little brutes have to be kept down. There, too, actually was my wild ostrich—the one I galloped so hard after, letting off my Winchester at half a mile, only to see him vanish over the horizon. Next him was the bear whose lair I came across at the Nanaimo Lakes. How I did lurk about to get that fellow! And, by Jove! close to him, two cougars. I never got a shot at them, never even saw one of the brutes all the time I was camping in Vancouver Island, where they lie flat along the branches over your head, waiting to get a chance at deer, sheep, dog, pig, or anything handy. But they had come now sure enough, glaring at me with their greenish cats' eyes—powerful-looking creatures! And next them sat a little meerkat—not much larger than a weasel—without its head! Ah yes!—that trial shot, as we trekked out from Rous' farm, and I wanted to try the little new rifle I had borrowed. It was sitting over its hole fully seventy yards from the wagon, quite unconscious of danger. I just took aim and pulled; and there it was, without its head, fallen across its hole. I remember well how pleased our "boys" were. And I too! Not a bad little rifle, that!

Outside the ring of beasts I could see foxes moving, not mixing with the stationary creatures, as if afraid of suggesting that I had shot them, instead of being present at their deaths in the proper fashion. One, quite a cub, kept limping round on three legs—the one, no doubt, whose pad was given me, out cubbing, as a boy. I put that wretched pad in my hat-box, and forgot it, so that I was compelled to throw the whole stinking show away. There were quite a lot of grown foxes; it certainly showed delicacy on their part, not sitting down with the others. There was really a tremendous crowd of creatures altogether by this time! I should think every beast and bird I ever shot, or even had a chance of killing, must have been there, and all whispering: "Look at him! The ferocious brute! Oh, look at him!"

Animal lover, as every true sportsman is, those words hurt me. If there is one thing on which we sportsmen pride ourselves, and legitimately, it is a humane feeling towards all furred and feathered creatures—and, as every one knows, we are foremost in all efforts to diminish their unnecessary sufferings.

The corroboree about me which they were obviously holding became, as I grew used to their manner of talking, increasingly audible.

But it was the quail's words that I first distinguished.

"He certainly ate me," he said; "said I was good, too!"

"I do not believe"—this was the first hare speaking—"that he shot me for that reason; he did shoot me, and I was jugged, but he wouldn't touch me. And the same day he shot eleven brace of partridges, didn't he?" Twenty-two partridges assented. "And he only ate two of you all told—that proves he didn't want us for food."

The hare's words had given me relief, for I somehow disliked intensely the gluttonous notion conveyed by the quail that I shot merely in order to devour the result. Any one with the faintest instincts of a sportsman will bear me out in this.

When the hare had spoken there was a murmur all round. I could not at first make out its significance, till I heard one of the cougars say: "We kill only when we want to eat"; and the bear, who, I noticed, was a lady, added: "No bear kills anything she cannot devour"; and, quite clear, I caught the quacking words of a wild duck. "We eat every worm we catch, and we'd eat more if we could get them."

Then again from the whole throng came that

shivering whisper: "Look at him! The ferocious brute! Oh, look at him!"

In spite of their numbers, they seemed afraid of me, seemed actually to hold me in a kind of horror—me, an animal lover, and without a gun! I felt it bitterly. 'How is it,' I thought, 'that not one of them seems to have an inkling of what it means to be a sportsman, not one of them seems to comprehend the instinct which makes one love sport just for the—er—danger of it?' The hare spoke again.

"Foxes," it murmured, "kill for the love of killing. Man is a kind of fox." A violent dissent at once rose from the foxes, till one of them, who seemed the eldest, said: "We certainly kill as much as we can, but we should always carry it all off and eat it if man gave us time—the ferocious brutes!" You cannot expect much of foxes, but it struck me as especially foxy that he should put the wanton character of his destructiveness off on man, especially when he must have known how carefully we preserve the fox, in the best interests of sport. A pheasant ejaculated shrilly: "He killed sixty of us one day to his own gun, and went off that same evening without eating even a wing!" And again came that shivering whisper: "Look at him! The ferocious brute! Oh, look at him!" It was too absurd! As if they

could not realise that a sportsman shoots almost entirely for the mouths of others! But I checked myself, remembering that altruism is a purely human attribute. "They get a big price for us!" said a woodcock, "especially if they shoot us early. *I* fetched several shillings." Really, the ignorance of these birds! As if modern sportsmen knew anything of what happens after a day's shooting! All that is left to the butler and the keeper. Beaters, of course, and cartridges must be paid for, to say nothing of the sin of waste. "I would not think them so much worse than foxes," said a rabbit, "if they didn't often hurt you, so that you take hours dying. I was seven hours dying in great agony, and one of my brothers was twelve. Weren't you, brother?" A second rabbit nodded. "But perhaps that's better than trapping," he said. "Remember mother!" "Ah!" a partridge muttered, "foxes at all events do bite your head off clean. But men often break your wing, or your leg, and leave you!" And again that shivering whisper rose: "Look at him! The ferocious brute! Oh, look at him!"

By this time the whole thing was so getting on my nerves that if I could have risen I should have rushed at them, but a weight as of lead seemed to bind me to the ground, and all I could do was to thank God that they did not seem to know of my

condition, for, though there were no man-eaters among them, I could not tell what they might do if they realised that I was helpless—the sentiments of chivalry and generosity being confined to man, as we all know.

"Yes," said the capercailzie slowly, "I am a shy bird, and was often shot at before this one got me; and though I'm strong, my size is so against me that I always took a pellet or two away with me; and what can you do then? Those ferocious brutes take the shot out of their faces and hands when they shoot each other by mistake—I've seen 'em; but we have no chance to do that." A snipe said shrilly: "What I object to is that he doesn't eat us till he's had too much already. I come in on toast at the fifth course; it hurts one's feelings."

"Ferocious brute, killing everything he sees."

I felt my blood fairly boil, and longed to cry out: "You beasts! You know that we don't kill everything we see! We leave that to cockneys, and foreigners." But just as I had no power of movement, so I seemed to have no power of speech. And suddenly a little voice, high up over me, piped down: "They never shoot us larks." I have always loved the lark; how grateful I felt to that little creature—till it added: "They do worse; they take and shut us up in little traps of

wire till we pine away! Ferocious brutes!" In all my life I think I never was more disappointed! The second cougar spoke: "He once passed within spring of me. What do you say, friends; shall we go for him?" The shivering answer came from all: "Go for him! Ferocious brute! Oh, go for him!" And I heard the sound of hundreds of soft wings and pads ruffling and shuffling. And, knowing that I had no power to move an inch, I shut my eyes. Lying there motionless, as a beetle that shams dead, I felt them creeping, creeping, till all round me and over me was the sound of nostrils sniffing; and every second I expected to feel the nip of teeth and beaks in the fleshy parts of me. But nothing came, and with an effort I reopened my eyes. There they were, hideously close, with an expression on their faces that I could not read; a sort of wry look, every nose and beak turned a little to one side. And suddenly I heard the old fox saying: "It's impossible, with a smell like that; we could never eat him!" From every one of them came a sort of sniff or sneeze as of disgust, and as they began to back away I distinctly heard the hyena mutter: "He's not wholesome—not wholesome—the ferocious brute!"

The relief of that moment was swamped by my natural indignation that these impudent birds

and beasts should presume to think that I, a British sportsman, would not be good to eat. Then that beastly hyena added: "If we killed him, you know, and buried him for a few days, he might be tolerable."

An old cock grouse called out at once: "Go back! Let us hang him! *We* are always well hung. They like us a little decayed—ferocious brutes! Go back!" And once more I felt, from the stir and shuffle, that my fate hung in the balance; and I shut my eyes again, lest they might be tempted to begin on them. Then, to my infinite relief, I heard the cougar—have we not always been told that they were the friends of man?—mutter: "Pah! It's clear we could never eat him fresh, and what we do not eat at once we do not touch!"

All the birds cried out in chorus: "No! That would be crow's work." And again I felt that I was saved. Then, to my horror, that infernal loon shrieked: "Kill him and have him stuffed—specimen of Ferocious Brute! Or fix his skin on a tree, and look at it—as he did with me!"

For a full minute I could feel the currents of opinion swaying over me, at this infamous proposal; then the old black cock, the one whose tail is in my wife's hat, said sharply: "Specimen! He's not good enough!" And once more, for all

my indignation at that gratuitous insult, I breathed freely.

"Come!" said the lady bear quietly: "Let us dribble on him a little, and go. The ferocious brute is not worth more!" And, during what seemed to me an eternity, one by one they came up, deposited on me a little saliva, looking into my eyes the while with a sort of horror and contempt, then vanished on the moor. The last to come up was the little meerkat without its head. It stood there; it could neither look at me nor drop saliva, but somehow it contrived to say: "I forgive you, ferocious brute; but I was very happy!" Then it, too, withdrew. And from all around, out of invisible presences in the air and the heather, came once more the shivering whisper: "Look at him! The ferocious brute! Oh, look at him!"

I sat up. There was a trilling sound in my ears. Above me in the blue a curlew was passing, uttering its cry. Ah! Thank Heaven!—I had been asleep! My day-dream had been caused by the potted grouse, and the pressure of the *Review*, which had lain, face downwards, on my chest, open at the page where I had been reading about the man-eating lions, and the death of those ferocious brutes. It shows what tricks of disproportion little things will play with

the mind when it is not under reasonable control.

And, to get the unwholesome taste of it all out of my mouth, I at once jumped up and started for home at a round pace.

1915.

PASSING

WAS standing on the Bridge before dawn of the summer morning; heat-mist down on the water, and the bright face of Big Ben up there, disjoint, set as it were in sky—so dark it was.

I had been there some time, seeking what air there might be in the town, staring vaguely down the broadway of blackness between the misted lights of the river banks, thinking idle thoughts, dreaming perhaps a little, when suddenly I became conscious of something on the parapet. It seemed to be perching there, a thin, grey shape, without face or limbs; and, peering at it, I sidled along, till I found that I was getting no nearer! Startled, I said:

"What is that? Who is it?"

Only a faint sigh answered.

I called again: "Who are you?"

A soft voice replied: "Don't be alarmed, sir, I am the Plumage Bill."

Its shape had grown no clearer; but in sheer amazement I went on speaking as though it were a being.

"What are you doing out here? Why aren't you in there?" And I pointed to Big Ben.

The voice answered again: "They have no time for me, sir. I am resting a moment before I pass."

"But," I said, "you 'pass' in there, not out here!"

I could have sworn I heard it laugh, much as a dying child will laugh if you show it a jumping toy: "Oh! no, sir! It is here we pass into nothing and the summer night."

And, as it spoke, around me came the most extraordinary beating and vibration in the air, a kind of white-grey wonder of invisible wings wheeling and hovering. The whole of dark space seemed full of millions of these invisible wings, so that I stood utterly bewildered. Then from out of that noiseless swirl rose suddenly hundreds of thousands of tiny voices as of birds too young to fly, calling, crying, calling. And, flinging up my hands, I pressed them against the drums of my ears till I thought I should break them in; but still I heard the hundreds of thousands of shrill little voices crying, and crying. "Hush!" I called out: "For heaven's sake, hush!" But on they went, feeble and shrill amid that invisible swirl of winged mothers trying to reach and feed them; then, just when I thought I could bear it no

longer, the mist on the water curled over and broke like a wave, something sighed out "Farewell!" and the thin grey shape was no longer there.

All was still once more. The Bridge stretched empty. Big Ben glowed in the sky. I drew a long breath and turned to look down at the water. There, on the parapet, was that thin grey shape again!

"Not gone?" I cried.

A voice answered: "Sir, I have only just come. I am the Bill of the Worn-out Horses."

"What!" I cried; "had they no time even for you?"

And, as I spoke, I heard the sound of thousands of hoofs, and saw, passing me slowly on the dark air, the gaunt shapes of horses. From side to side, up, down—horses dragging worn feet, halting, passing—their heads lower than their hoofs.

And I cried out: "For Christ's sake, pass!"

The voice answered: "We pass, sir. Farewell!"

With a sound of plunging the water rose black through the mist to the level of the Bridge, fell again, and all was once more still.

'I'm haunted!' I thought; and crossed to the other side. There, again, before me on the parapet was a grey shape that said: "I am the Bill of the Slaughtered Beasts."

And, on the instant, there came at me in the air, as though I were the centre of a wheel, a million spokes of beasts, great beasts and little, snorting, writhing, quivering, with a sound of the gurgling of blood. And in terror I cried: "Pass!"

The voice answered: "We pass, sir. Farewell."

And the river ran by below, swollen to the height of a hill—all red.

I began to run, crying out: "Enough!"

But still there on the parapet before me was the thin grey shape, and its voice said: "I am the Bill of the Caged Wild Songbirds."

And from the darkness above came the flutter of myriads of tiny hearts maddened with terror, and a sound of thousands on thousands of little wings struggling, beating, struggling against cage wires. That sound came slanting down to the water like a swallow dipping, and passed—invisible as wind.

On either parapet, before me, behind, were many, many thin grey shapes, like rows of penguins. They sighed and waved, moving this way and that, as though saying farewell, then one by one dived and passed into the dark water below. And the whole air was alive with the sobbing of men and women, of children, and the cries of pain and terror from beasts and birds. And just

as I thought that I, too, would leap down into the water and escape, the dawn broke . . .

I rubbed my eyes. Nothing there, save the river running quiet and full, with a grey sheen on it; that bright clock joined once more to earth by its tower; and the sky flecked from pole to pole with tiny white clouds. A breeze fanned my face. Beside me on the Bridge a gentleman in top hat and black coat was stretching himself, and breathing deeply. I turned to him.

"Did you see them, sir?"

"See what?"

"The Bills."

"What Bills?"

"The Bills of Suffering! There, on the parapet; thin grey things, passing into nothing and the summer night?"

He looked at me, and I saw he thought I was demented. Then, with a smile on his pleasant red face, he pointed to the Clock Tower, and said:

"Bills! I get enough of them in there!"

"Didn't you even hear them?"

He answered coldly:

"My dear Sir, I am a matter-of-fact and hard-worked man, with no time to 'see' things; I have seen and heard nothing. I came out here for a breath of air after sitting there all night!" And

pounding with his clenched fist at the air, he added:

"We have just had a glorious scrap!"

Understanding then that I must have dreamed, I begged his pardon and moved towards home, passing the Clock Tower.

1914.

APOTHEOSIS

"AH! now that's good!" said the bald man in the stalls, and the misanthropic man beside him hiccoughed. "Ha, ha!" roared the stout man with the eyeglass.

"I *say*," remarked the fourth man naively.

On the stage of the "Paradise," an elephant had been turned on its back and enclosed in a plush frame.

"Look at his eye!" laughed the bald man: "Ha, ha!"

All four looked. The inverted elephant's tiny eye—the only moving thing in that grey mass—travelled in a quest among the audience, then fixed a stoic gleam on his forelegs raised in the air like pillars. A world to itself, that eye—a little wild world apart—in all this theatre, domed with gold, starred with lamps, thronged with faces turned all in one direction.

"Ha, ha! Look at his eye!" The elephant's eye had travelled round again, and the naive man murmured:

"I say, it's awfully funny!"

"Most intelligent animals!" the stout man said, adjusting his eyeglass.

"Do you suppose," asked the naive man "that it's done by kindness?"

The bald man squeezed his opera hat.

"Impossible to tell!" he said. "Look at the beggar's trunk!"

The elephant, tired of hanging his trunk towards the audience, had curled it on his chest.

"Like a bloated caterpillar!" murmured the misanthropic man.

Two anxious-looking Persian cats, and two red-breasted parrots with thin gilt chains fastened to their legs appeared from different quarters, and perched one on each foot of the inverted elephant.

"Pretty smart that!" the bald man said.

After one furtive moment, the cats and parrots had begun to leap from foot to foot; the upturned elephant rolled his little eye, and writhed his trunk.

"Now, I call that wonderful!" the bald man cried; "so intelligent!"

"I knew a cat once," complained the misanthropic man, "as intelligent as a human bein'!"

"Come, come!" said the stout man.

"What price that!" the bald man eagerly interrupted.

The elephant had raised his trunk with a par-

rot on its tip, and slowly held it out to the audience.

"Not bad!" the stout man cried. "Ha, ha!"

"Any cats almost," insisted the misanthrope, "are as intelligent as human bein's!"

"What!" the stout man said, "d'you tell me a lot of cats would appreciate a thing like this—d'you tell me a lot of cats would see anything funny in that elephant?"

The bald man broke in: "I admire the training; shows what can be done with determination—wants a strong will to get cats and parrots to work together."

"Yes, by Jove!" the stout man said. "I like a good animal show. I'm fond of animals myself. Some people don't seem to care a kick about 'em. Funny-looking beast on his back—an elephant!"

"Do you think he likes it?" mused the naive man.

The cats and parrots had vanished now, and a single little kitten, faintly mewing, came and curled itself up in the great beast's mouth.

"I say!" the misanthrope remarked with sudden interest, "how jolly natural! What a little ripper, eh?" and he too applauded.

The elephant's tiny eye seemed to inquire the meaning of that cheer.

"So much for the intelligence of cats!" the

stout man said. "Where'd you have got your baby to go fooling round in an elephant's mouth?"

"That proves nothing," the misanthrope replied; "all I meant about cats was, that people are fools, mostly!"

The showman now removed the kitten, and standing on the elephant's chest, blew kisses to the audience. Then, summoning the trunk to him, he placed a lighted cigarette in its tip.

"Bravo!" the bald man cried; "now that's what I call really clever! Bravo!"

"I tell you what," the stout man said: "I've been watching him—and he don't *like* it."

"Don't like what?" the misanthrope enquired.

"Very few animals can stand smoke," the stout man said. "I had a pony once, though, that would snuff it up like fun."

The elephant replaced the cigarette between the showman's lips; a shiver ran through his huge frame.

"Look at his eye now!" the bald man said. "It's really damn funny, isn't it?"

"Well!" yawned the misanthrope. "I've had about enough of this footy elephant!"

And as if in accordance with that sentiment, the showman began a little hastily unloosening the bands of the plush frame; and suddenly the creature trumpeted.

"He's asking to be let up," the stout man wheezed; "I don't care what you say, I call it doosid good. It's all so natural. Some fellows," he added in an irritated voice, "don't care a curse for animals!"

"Looks to me as if he'd turned sulky," the bald man said. "See his eye now!"

"Yes!" the stout man answered, "that's where animals will fail; they've got no sense of humour. See that elephant's eye; for all it's deuced clever, it's got no sense of humour!"

And that little eye—that round wild little world apart, with its quick, mournful roll, seemed answering: "Alas! no sense of humour!"

"I can't help wondering whether they like it," the naive man murmured, as though loth to harbour doubts about a sight he had so much enjoyed.

"Like it? Of course they like it! They're most intelligent!" said the stout man, dropping his eyeglass, as the curtain fell. "A show of this sort is what I call the apoth—apotheosis of intelligence. It's not everyone can appreciate it, or every animal can stand it. There's pigs now, he added, staring absently around him with his eyeglass, "and donkeys—! What price them!"

1903.

THE VOICE OF ——!

HE proprietor of "The Paradise" had said freely that she would "knock them." Broad, full-coloured, and with the clear, swimming eye of an imaginative man, he was trusted when he spoke thus of his new "turns." There was the feeling that he had once more discovered a good thing.

And on the afternoon of the new star's dress rehearsal it was noticed that he came down to watch her, smoking his cigar calmly in the front row of the stalls. When she had finished and withdrawn, the *chef d'orchestre*, while folding up his score, felt something tickling his ear.

"Bensoni, this is hot goods!"

Turning that dim, lined face of his, whose moustache was always coming out of wax, Signor Bensoni answered: "A bit of all right, boss!"

"If they hug her real big to-night, send round to my room."

"I will."

Evening came, and under the gilt-starred dome the house was packed. Rows and rows of serious

seekers for amusement; and all the customary crowd of those who "drop in"—old clients with hair and without hair, in evening clothes, or straight from their offices or race-course; bare-necked ladies sitting; ladies who never sat, but under large hats stood looking into the distance, or moved with alacrity in no particular direction, and halted swiftly with a gentle humming; lounging and high-collared youths, furtively or boldly staring, and unconsciously tightening their lips; distinguished goatee-bearded foreigners wandering without rest. And always round the doorways the huge attendants, in their long, closely buttoned coats.

The little Peruvian bears had danced. The Volpo troupe in claret-coloured tights had gone once more without mishap through their hair-breadth tumbles. The Mulligatawny quartet had contributed their "unparalleled plate spray." "Donks, the human ass," had brayed. Signor Bensoni had conducted to its close his "Pot-pourriture" which afforded so many men an opportunity to stretch their legs. Arsenico had swallowed many things with conspicuous impunity. "Great and Small Scratch" had scratched. "Frâulein Tizi, the charming female vocalist," had suddenly removed his stays. There had been no minute dull; yet over the whole performance

had hung that advent of the new star, that sense of waiting for a greater moment.

She came at last—in black and her own whiteness, "La Bellissima," straight from Brazil; tall, with raven-dark hair, and her beautiful face as pale as ivory. Tranquilly smiling with eyes only, she seemed to draw the gaze of all into those dark wells of dancing life; and, holding out her arms, that seemed fairer and rounder than the arms of women, she said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I will dance for you de latest Gollywog Brazilian caterpillar crawl."

Then, in lime-light streaming down on her from the centre of the gallery, she moved back to the corner of the stage. Those who were wandering stood still; every face craned forward. For, sidelong, with a mouth widened till it nearly reached her ears, her legs straddling, and her stomach writhing, she was moving incomparably across the stage. Her face, twisted on her neck, at an alarming angle, was distorted to a strange, inimitable hideousness. She reached the wings, and turned. A voice cried out: "*Épatant!*" Her arms, those round white arms, seemed yellow and skinny now, her obviously slender hips had achieved miraculous importance; each movement of her whole frame was attuned to a perfect harmony of ugliness. Twice she went thus marvel-

lously up and down, in the ever-deepening hush. Then the music stopped, the lime-light ceased to flow, and she stood once more tranquil and upright, beautiful, with her smiling eyes. A roar of enthusiasm broke, salvo after salvo—clapping and "Bravos," and comments flying from mouth to mouth.

"Rippin'!" "Bizarre—I say—how bizarre!" "Of the most chic!" "*Wunderschön!*" "Bully!"

Raising her arms again for silence, she said quite simply: "Good! I will now, ladies and gentlemen, sing you the latest Patagonian Squaw Squall. I sing you first, however, few bars of 'Che farò' old-fashion, to show you my natural tones—so you will see." And in a deep, sweet voice she began at once: "Che farò senz' Euridice"; while through the whole house ran a shuffle of preparation for the future. Then all was suddenly still; for from her lips, remarkably enlarged, was issuing a superb cacophony. Like the screeching of parrots, and miauling of tiger-cats fighting in a forest, it forced attention from even the least musical.

Before the first verse was ended, the uncontrollable applause had drowned her; and she stood, not bowing, smiling with her lips now—her pretty lips. Then raising a slender forefinger, she began the second verse. Even more strangely

harsh and dissonant, from lips more monstrously disfigured, the great sound came. And, as though in tune with that crescendo, the lime-light brightened till she seemed all wrapped in flame. Before the storm of acclamation could burst from the enraptured house, a voice coming from the gallery was heard suddenly to cry:

"Woman! Blasphemous creature! You have profaned Beauty!"

For a single second there was utter silence, then a huge, angry "Hush!" was hurled up at the speaker; and all eyes turned towards the stage.

There stood the beautiful creature, motionless, staring up into the lime-light. And the voice from the gallery was heard again.

"The blind applaud you; it is natural. But you—unnatural! Go!" The beautiful creature threw up her head, as though struck below the jaw, and with hands flung out, rushed from the stage. Then, amidst the babel of a thousand cries—"Chuck the brute out!" "Throw him over!" "Where's the manager?" "Encore, encore!"—the manager himself came out from the wings. He stood gazing up into the stream of lime-light, and there was instant silence.

"Hullo! up there! Have you got him?"

A voice, far and small, travelled back in answer: "It's no one up here, sir!"

"What? Limes! It was in front of you!" A second faint, small voice came quavering down: "There's been no one hollerin' near me, sir."

"Cut off your light!"

Down came the quavering voice: "I 'ave cut off, sir."

"What?"

"I 'ave cut off—I'm disconnected."

"Look at it!" And, pointing towards the brilliant ray still showering down onto the stage, whence a faint smoke seemed rising, the manager stepped back into the wings.

Then, throughout the house, arose a rustling and a scuffing, as of a thousand furtively consulting; and through it, of it, continually louder, the whisper—"Fire!"

And from every row someone stole out; the women in the large hats clustered, and trooped towards the doors. In five minutes "The Paradise" was empty, save of its officials. But of fire there was none.

Down in the orchestra, standing well away from the centre, so that he could see the stream of limelight, the manager said:

"Electrics!"

"Yes, sir."

"Cut off every light."

"Right, sir."

With a clicking sound the lights went out; and all was black—but for that golden pathway still flowing down the darkness. For a moment the manager blinked silently at the strange effulgence. Then his scared voice rose: "Send for the Boss—look alive! Where's Limes?"

Close to his elbow a dark little quick-eyed man, with his air of professional stupidity, answered in doubt: "Here, sir."

"It's up to you, Limes!"

The little man, wiping his forehead, gazed at the stream of golden light, powdering out to silver at its edges.

"I've took out me limes, and I'm disconnected, and this blanky ray goes on. What am I to do? There's nothing up there to cause it. Go an' see for yourself, sir!" Then, passing his hand across his mouth, he blurted out: "It's got to do with that there voice—I shouldn't be surprised. Unnat'ral-like; the voice o'——"

The manager interrupted sharply: "Don't be a d—d ass, Limes!"

And, suddenly, all saw the proprietor passing from the prompt side behind that faint mist where the ray fell.

"What's the theatre dark like this for? Why is it empty? What's happened?"

The manager answered.

"We're trying to find out, sir; a madman in the gallery, whom we couldn't locate, made a disturbance, called the new turn 'A natural'; and now there's some hanky with this lime. It's been taken out, and yet it goes on like that!"

"What cleared the house?"

The manager pointed at the stage.

"It looked like smoke," he said: "That light's loose; we can't get hold of its end anywhere."

From behind him Signor Bensoni suddenly pushed up his dim, scared face.

"Boss!" he stammered: "It's the most bizarre—the most bizarre—thing I ever struck—Limes thinks——"

"Yes?" The Boss turned and spoke very quickly: "What does he think—yes?"

"He thinks—the voice wasn't from the gallery—but higher; he thinks—he thinks—it was the voice of—voice of——"

A sudden sparkle lit up the Boss's eyes. "Yes?" he hissed out; "yes?"

"He thinks it was the voice of—— Hullo!"

The stream of light had vanished. All was darkness.

Some one called: "Up with your lights!"

As the lights leaped forth, all about the house, the Boss was seen to rush to the centre of the stage, where the ray had been.

"Bizarre! By gum! . . . Hullo! Up there!"

No sound, no ray of light, answered that passionately eager shout.

The Boss spun round: "Electrics! You blazing ass! Ten to one but you've cut my connection, turning up the lights like that. The voice of—— ! Great snakes! What a turn! What a turn! I'd have given it a thou'a week! . . . *Hullo! up there! Hullo!*"

But there came no answer from under the gilt-starred dome.

1908.

ABRACADABRA

OUR families occupied neighbouring houses in the country, and Minna used to hide in the bathroom whenever our governess took us round. She was to us but a symbol of shyness for months before she became a body —a very thin body, with dark, straggly hair, and dark eyes, and very long legs and arms for an eight-year-old. Looking back on her hardihoods from eight to fifteen, I find difficulty in assigning to the bathroom period its full significance, to realise that she actually used to make herself invisible because she could not face strange people even of her own age. She faced us so beautifully afterwards, would steal up behind and pull our hairs, and bag our caps and throw them up onto the tops of wardrobes, and then, as likely as not, climb up, throw them down, and follow with a jump. Few were the tops of our trees that did not know her in her blue jersey and red cap, and stockings green at the knees and showing little white portions of her. She had a neck long as a turkey's and feet narrow as canoes. She was certainly going to be tall. Though quite normal

about sticking pins into a body, making the lives of calves and dogs burdensome, giving fizzy magnesia to cats, fetching stray souls down with a booby-trap, and other salutary pastimes, she would dissolve into tears and rush away if anybody played Chopin, or caught and killed a butterfly; and, if one merely shot a little bird with a catapult, would dash up and thump him. When she fought she was like a tiger-cat, but afterwards would sit and shake uncontrollably with most dreadful dry sobs. So there was no relying on her.

She could not have been called pretty in those days.

She became fifteen and went to school. We saw little of her for three years. At eighteen she came home, and out. Then we would meet her at dances and picnics, skating and playing tennis—always languid, pale, dark-eyed; still not quite regular in her features, and with angles not perfectly covered; but, on the whole, like a tall lily with a dark centre. She was very earnest, too, and beginning to be æsthetic, given to standing against walls, with her dark-brown eyes immovably fixed on persons playing violins; given to Russian linen and embroidering book covers; to poetry and the sermons of preachers just unorthodox enough; dreamy, too, but puffing and

starting at things which came too near. She was very attractive.

Going to college, one saw little more of Minna till she was twenty-two. She was working then at a "Settlement," and looked unhappy and anæmic. Two months later we were told she had broken down. The work was too painful; her nerves had gone all wrong. She was taken abroad.

We did not see her again till she was twenty-six. She was then marrying a Quaker, a handsome, big fellow with reddish hair, ten years older than herself. More like a swaying lily than ever she looked in her long white veil. A tall, striking couple! The Quaker had warm eyes, and by the way he looked at her, one wondered.

Another four years had passed before I, at all events, saw much of Minna again. She was now thirty, and had three children, two girls and a boy, and was evidently soon to have another. There was a pathetic look in her eyes. They said that the Quaker should have been a Turk, for his physique was powerful and his principles extremely strict. His wife had grown to have a shrinking, fagged-out air, and worried terribly over her infants. She was visibly unhappy; had gone off, too, in looks; grown sallow and thin-cheeked, and seemed not to care to hold herself up.

I recollect the Quaker coming in one day, full of health and happiness, and putting his affectionate hand on her shoulder. To me—not to the Quaker, from whom many things were hidden—it was apparent that she flinched, and when his back was turned I saw in a mirror that she was actually trembling all over, and on her face an expression as if she saw before her suffering from which she could not possibly escape. It was clear that the quivering, lilylike creature had been brought almost to her last gasp by the physique and principles of that healthy, happy Quaker. It was quite painful to see one for whom life seemed so terribly too much.

She was, I think, about thirty-two when one noticed how much better she was looking. She had begun to fill out and hold herself up; her eyes had light in them again. Though she was more attractive than ever, and the Quaker had abated no jot of either principle or physique, she had given up quivering and starting, and had a way of looking tranquilly through or over him, as if he were not there, though her amiability was obviously perfect, and from all accounts she fulfilled every duty better than ever. She no longer worried over her children, of whom there were now five. It was mysterious. I can only describe the impression she made by saying that she

seemed in a sort of trance, seeing and listening to something far away. There was a curious intentness in her eyes, and her voice had acquired a slight but not unpleasing drawl, as though what she was talking of had little reality. Every afternoon from three to four she was invisible.

Having in those days a certain interest in psychology, one used to concern oneself to account for the extraordinary change in her that was becoming more marked every year. By the time she was thirty-five it really seemed impossible that she could ever have been a sensitive, high-strung creature, hiding in the bathroom, thumping us for killing butterflies, sobbing afterwards so uncontrollably; suffering such tortures from the "Settlement," and the Quaker, and her children, whose ailments and troubles she now supported with an equanimity which anyone, seeing her for the first time, would surely have mistaken for callousness. And all the time she was putting on flesh without, however, losing her figure. Indeed, in those days she approached corporeal perfection.

And at last one afternoon I learned the reason.

She no longer believed she had a body!

She told me so, almost with tears of earnestness. And when I pointed out to her humbly that she had never had more, she insisted that I

saw nothing really sitting there except the serene and healthy condition of her spirit. Long she talked to me that afternoon, explaining again and again, in her slightly drawling voice, that she could never have gone on but for this faith; and how comforting and uplifting it was, so that no one who lacked it could be really happy! Every afternoon—she told me—from three to four she "held" that idea of "no body."

This was all so startling to me that I went away and thought it over. Next day I came back and said that I did not see how it could be much good to her to have no body, so long as other people still had theirs; since it was their bodies, not hers, which had caused her pain and grief.

"But, of course," she said, "they haven't."

I had just met the Quaker coming in from golf, and could only murmur:

"Is that really so?"

"I couldn't bear, now," she said, "to think they had."

"Then, do you really mean, Minna, that when they are there they are not there?"

"Yes!" And her eyes shone.

I thought of her eldest boy, who happened to be ill with mumps.

"What, then, is Willy's mumps," I said, "if not an affection of the fleshy tissue of his cheeks

and neck? Why should he cry with pain, and why should he look so horrid?"

She frowned, as if reflecting hard.

"When you came in," she said, "I'd just been holding the thought that he has no body, and I don't—I really don't feel any longer that he has mumps. So I don't worry. And that's splendid both for him and me."

I saw that it was splendid for her; but how was it splendid for him? I did not ask, however, because she looked so earnest and uplifted, and I was afraid of seeming unkind.

The next day I came back again, and said:

"I've been thinking over your faith, Minna. Candidly, I've never seen anyone improve so amazingly in health and looks since you've had it. But what I've been wondering is, whether it's in the nature of fresh air, hard work, and plain living, or in the nature of a drug or anodyne. Whether it's prevention, or cure. In fact, whether you could hold it, or ever have held it, unless you had been sick *before* you held it?"

She evidently did not grasp my meaning. I could, of course, have made it plain enough by saying: "Suppose you had not been a self-conscious, self-absorbed, high-strung, anæmic girl, like so many nowadays, quivering at life and Quakers with strong physique and principles;

suppose you had been an Italian peasant woman or an English cottage lass, obliged to work and think of others all her time; suppose, in a word, you had not had the chance to be so desperately sensitive and conscious of your body—do you think you would ever have felt the necessity for becoming unconscious of it?" But she looked so serene and puzzled, so corporeally charming on her sofa, that I hadn't the heart to put it thus brutally, and I merely said:

"Do tell me how the idea first came to you?"

"It was put there. It could never have come of its own accord."

"No doubt; but exactly when?"

She grew rather pink.

"It was one evening when Willy—he was only four then—had been very naughty, and Tom" (this was the Quaker) "insisted on my whipping him. I was obliged to, you see, for fear he would do it himself. Poor Willy cried so that I was simply in despair. It hurt me awfully. I remember thinking: 'Ah! but it's not really me; not me—not my arm.' It seemed to me that there was a dreadful unreality about myself; that I was not really doing it, and so I surely could not be hurting him. It was such a comfort—and I wanted comfort."

I felt the sacredness and the pathos of that;

I felt, too, that her despair, before that comfort came, had been her farewell to truth; but I would not for the world have said that, nor asked what Willy's tears had really been, if not real tears.

"Yes," I murmured; "and after that?"

"After that—I tried every day, and gradually the whole beauty of it came to me—because, you know, there are so many things to fret one, and it's so splendid to feel uplifted above it all."

They tell me the morphia habit is wonderful! But I only said:

"And so you really never suffer now?"

"Oh!" she answered, "I often have the beginnings; but I just hold that thought and—it goes. I do wish—I *do* wish you would try!"

"Yes, yes," I murmured; "yes, yes!" She looked so pathetically earnest and as if she would be so disappointed. "But just one thing: Don't you ever feel that the knowledge that people have no bodies and don't really suffer"—and there I stopped. I had meant to add—'blunts sympathy and dries up the springs of fellow-feeling from which all kindly action comes?' But I hadn't the heart.

"Oh! do put any questions to me!" she said. "You can't shake my faith! It's religion with me, you know."

"You certainly seem fitter and stronger every

day. I quite understand that you're being saved by it. And that's the essence of religion, isn't it?"

She drew herself up and smiled. "Tom says I'm getting fat!"

I looked at her. I must say that, for one who had no body, she was superb.

After that I again left London and did not see her for two years.

A few days after my return I asked after her at my sister's.

"Oh! haven't you heard? The most dreadful tragedy happened there six weeks ago. Kitty and Willy" (they were the two eldest children) "were run over by a motor; poor little Kitty was killed on the spot, and Willy will be lame for life, they say."

Thinking of Kitty blotted out like that—a little thing all shyness, sensibility, and pranks, just as Minna had been at her age—I could scarcely ask: "How does poor Minna take it?"

My sister wrinkled her brows.

"I was there," she said, "when they brought the children in. It was awful to see Tom—he broke down utterly. He's been quite changed ever since."

"But Minna?"

"Minna—yes. I shall never forget the expression of her face that first minute. It reminded me of—I don't know what—like nerves moving

under the skin. Dreadful! And then, ten minutes later, it was quite calm; you'd have thought nothing had happened. She's very wonderful. I've watched her since, and I don't—I really don't believe she feels it!"

"How is she looking?"

"Oh, just the same—very well and handsome. Rather too fat."

It was with very curious feelings that I went next day to see Minna. Truly she looked magnificent in her black clothes. Her curves had become ampler, her complexion deeper, perhaps a little coarse, and her drawl was more pronounced. Her husband came in while I was there. The poor man was indeed a changed Quaker. He seemed to have shrivelled. When she put her hand on his shoulder, I noticed with surprise that he jibbed away and seemed to avoid the gaze of her rather short-sighted, beautiful brown eyes that had grown appreciably warmer. It was strange indeed—his body had become so meagre and hers had so splendidly increased! We made no mention of the tragedy while he was there, but when he had left us I hazarded the question:

"How is poor little Willy?"

Her eyes shone, and she said, with a sort of beautiful earnestness:

"You mustn't call him that. He's not a bit

unhappy. We hold the thought together. It's coming wonderfully!"

In a sudden outburst of sympathy I said:

"I'm so sorry. It must be terrible for you all."

Her brow contracted just a little.

"Yes! I can't get Tom—if only he would see that it's nothing, really—that there's no such thing as the body. He's simply wearing himself away; he's grown quite thin; he's——" She stopped. And there rose up in me a kind of venom, as if I felt that she was about to say '—no longer fit to be my mate.' And, trying to keep that feeling out of my eyes, I looked at the magnificent creature. How marvellously she had flourished under the spell of her creed! How beautifully preserved and encased against the feelings of this life she had become! How grandly she had cured her sensitive and neurasthenic girlhood! How nobly, against the disease of self-consciousness and self-absorption, she had put on the armour of a subtler and deeper self-absorption!

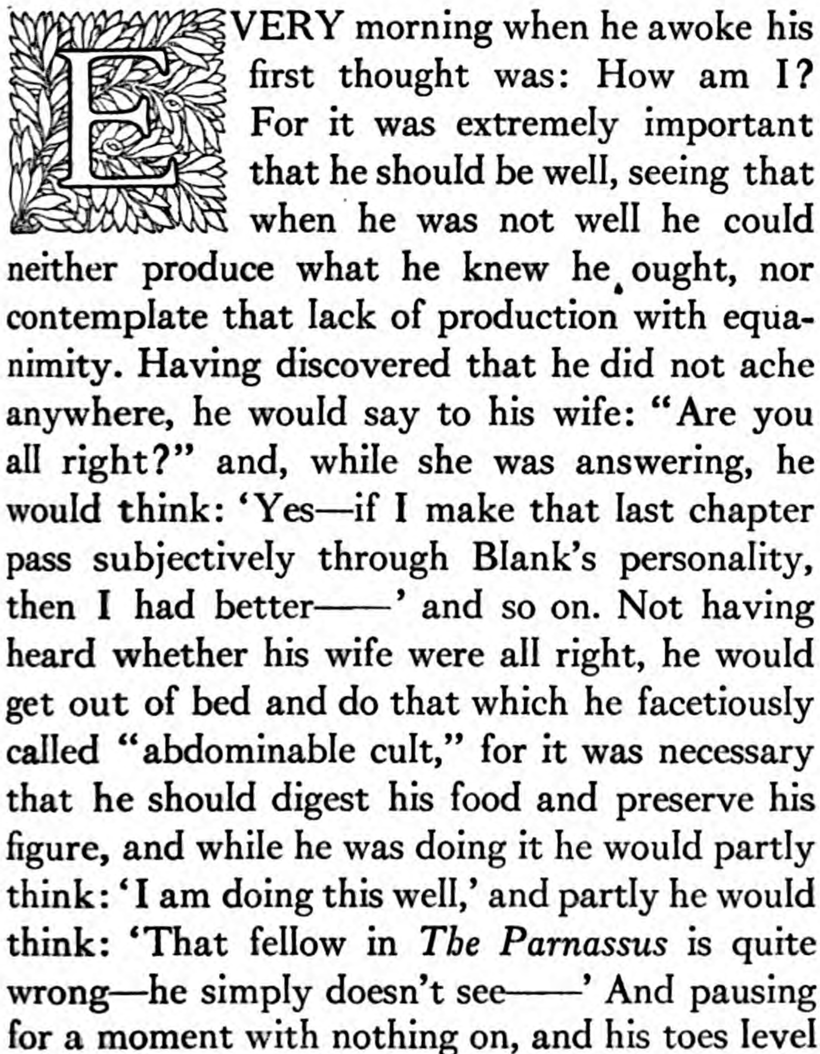
And suddenly I pitied or I envied her— Ah! which? For, to achieve immunity from her own suffering, I perceived that for the suffering of others she had become incapable of caring two brass buttons.

1913.

STUDIES OF EXTRAVAGANCE

I

THE WRITER



EVERY morning when he awoke his first thought was: How am I? For it was extremely important that he should be well, seeing that when he was not well he could neither produce what he knew he ought, nor contemplate that lack of production with equanimity. Having discovered that he did not ache anywhere, he would say to his wife: "Are you all right?" and, while she was answering, he would think: 'Yes—if I make that last chapter pass subjectively through Blank's personality, then I had better——' and so on. Not having heard whether his wife were all right, he would get out of bed and do that which he facetiously called "abdominable cult," for it was necessary that he should digest his food and preserve his figure, and while he was doing it he would partly think: 'I am doing this well,' and partly he would think: 'That fellow in *The Parnassus* is quite wrong—he simply doesn't see——' And pausing for a moment with nothing on, and his toes level

with the top of a chest of drawers, he would say to his wife: "What I think about that *Parnassus* fellow is that he doesn't grasp the fact that my books——" And he would not fail to hear her answer warmly: "Of course he doesn't; he's a perfect idiot." He would then shave. This was his most creative moment, and he would soon cut himself and utter a little groan, for it would be needful now to find his special cotton wool and stop the bleeding, which was a paltry business and not favourable to the flight of genius. And if his wife, taking advantage of the incident, said something which she had long been waiting to say, he would answer, wondering a little what it was she had said, and thinking: 'There it is, I get no time for steady thought.'

Having finished shaving he would bathe, and a philosophical conclusion would almost invariably come to him just before he douched himself with cold—so that he would pause, and call out through the door: "You know, I think the supreme principle——" And while his wife was answering, he would resume the drowning of her words, having fortunately remembered just in time that his circulation would suffer if he did not douse himself with cold while he was still warm. He would dry himself, dreamily developing that theory of the universe and imparting it to his

wife in sentences that seldom had an end, so that it was not necessary for her to answer them. While dressing he would stray a little, thinking: 'Why can't I concentrate myself on my work? it's awful!' And if he had by any chance a button off, he would present himself rather unwillingly, feeling that it was a waste of his time. Watching her frown from sheer self-effacement over her button-sewing, he would think: 'She is wonderful! How can she put up with doing things for me all day long?' And he would fidget a little, feeling in his bones that the postman had already come.

He went down always thinking: 'Oh, hang it! this infernal post taking up all my time!' And as he neared the breakfast-room, he would quicken his pace; seeing a large pile of letters on the table, he would say automatically: "Curse!" and his eyes would brighten. If—as seldom happened—there were not a green-coloured wrapper enclosing mentions of him in the press, he would murmur: "Thank God!" and his face would fall.

It was his custom to eat feverishly, walking a good deal and reading about himself, and when his wife tried to bring him to a sense of his disorder he would tighten his lips without a word and think: 'I have a good deal of self-control.'

He seldom commenced work before eleven, for,

though he always intended to, he found it practically impossible not to dictate to his wife things about himself, such as how he could not lecture here; or where he had been born; or how much he would take for this; and why he would not consider that; together with those letters which began:

"MY DEAR——,

"Thanks tremendously for your letter about my book, and its valuable criticism. Of course, I think you are quite wrong. . . . You don't seem to have grasped . . . In fact, I don't think you ever quite do me justice. . . .

"Yours affectionately,

"——."

When his wife had copied those that might be valuable after he was dead, he would stamp the envelopes and, exclaiming: "Nearly eleven—my God!" would go somewhere where they think.

It was during those hours when he sat in a certain chair with a pen in his hand that he was able to rest from thought about himself; save, indeed, in those moments, not too frequent, when he could not help reflecting: "That's a fine page—I have seldom written anything better"; or in those moments, too frequent, when he

sighed deeply and thought: 'I am not the man I was.' About half past one, he would get up, with the pages in his hand, and, seeking out his wife, would give them to her to read, remarking: "Here's the wretched stuff—no good at all"; and, taking a position where he thought she could not see him, would do such things as did not prevent his knowing what effect the pages made on her. If the effect were good he would often feel how wonderful she was; if it were not good he had at once a chilly sensation in the pit of his stomach, and ate very little lunch.

When, in the afternoons, he took his walks abroad, he passed great quantities of things and people without noticing, because he was thinking deeply on such questions as whether he were more of an observer or more of an imaginative artist; whether he were properly appreciated in Germany; and particularly whether one were not in danger of thinking too much about oneself. But every now and then he would stop and say to himself: "I really must see more of life, I really must take in more fuel"; and he would passionately fix his eyes on a cloud, or a flower, or a man walking, and there would instantly come into his mind the thought: 'I have written twenty books—ten more will make thirty—that cloud is grey'; or: 'That fellow X—— is jealous

of me! This flower is blue'; or: 'This man is walking very—very—— D—n *The Morning Muff*, it always runs me down!' And he would have a sort of sore, beaten feeling, knowing that he had not observed those things as accurately as he would have wished to.

During these excursions, too, he would often reflect impersonally upon matters of the day, large questions of art, public policy, and the human soul; and would almost instantly find that he had always thought this or that; and at once see the necessity for putting his conclusion forward in his book or in the press, phrasing it, of course, in a way that no one else could; and there would start up before him little bits of newspaper with these words on them: "No one, perhaps, save Mr. ——, could have so ably set forth the case for Baluchistan"; or, "In *The Daily Miracle* there is a noble letter from that eminent writer, Mr. ——, pleading against the hyper-spiritualism of our age."

Very often he would say to himself, as he walked with eyes fixed on things that he did not see: "This existence is not healthy. I really must get away and take a complete holiday, and not think at all about my work; I am getting too self-centred." And he would go home and say to his wife: "Let's go to Sicily, or Spain, or some-

where. Let's get away from all this, and just live." And when she answered: "How jolly!" he would repeat, a little absently: "How jolly!" considering what would be the best arrangement for forwarding his letters. And if, as sometimes happened, they *did* go, he would spend almost a whole morning living, and thinking how jolly it was to be away from everything; but towards the afternoon he would feel a sensation as though he were a sofa that had been sat on too much, a sort of subsidence very deep within him. This would be followed in the evening by a disinclination to live; and that feeling would grow until on the third day he received his letters, together with a green-coloured wrapper enclosing some mentions of himself, and he would say: "Those fellows—no getting away from them!" and feel irresistibly impelled to sit down. Having done so he would take up his pen, not writing anything, indeed—because of the determination to "live," as yet not quite extinct—but comparatively easy in his mind. On the following day he would say to his wife: "I believe I can work here." And she would answer, smiling: "That's splendid"; and he would think: 'She's wonderful!' and begin to write.

On other occasions, while walking the streets or about the countryside, he would suddenly be

appalled at his own ignorance, and would say to himself: "I know simply nothing—I must read." And going home he would dictate to his wife the names of a number of books to be procured from the library. When they arrived he would look at them a little gravely and think: 'By Jove! Have I got to read those?' and the same evening he would take one up. He would not, however, get beyond the fourth page, if it were a novel, before he would say: "Muck! He can't write!" and would feel absolutely stimulated to take up his own pen and write something that was worth reading. Sometimes, on the other hand, he would put the novel down after the third page, exclaiming: "By Jove! He can write!" And there would rise within him such a sense of dejection at his own inferiority that he would feel simply compelled to try to see whether he really was inferior.

But if the book were not a novel he sometimes finished the first chapter before one of two feelings came over him: Either that what he had just read was what he had himself long thought—that, of course, would be when the book was a good one; or that what he had just read was not true, or at all events debatable. In each of these events he found it impossible to go on reading, but would remark to his wife: "This fellow says what I've always said"; or, "This fellow says

so and so, now I say——" and he would argue the matter with her, taking both sides of the question, so as to save her all unnecessary speech.

There were times when he felt that he absolutely must hear music, and he would enter the concert-hall with his wife in the pleasurable certainty that he was going to lose himself. Towards the middle of the second number, especially if it happened to be music that he liked, he would begin to nod; and presently, on waking up, would get a feeling that he really was an artist. From that moment on he was conscious of certain noises being made somewhere in his neighbourhood causing a titillation of his nerves favourable to deep and earnest thoughts about his work. On going out his wife would ask him: "Wasn't the Mozart lovely?" or, "How did you like the Strauss?" and he would answer: "Rather!" wondering a little which was which; or he would look at her out of the corner of his eye and glance secretly at the programme to see whether he had really heard them, and which Strauss it might be.

He was extremely averse to being interviewed, or photographed, and all that sort of publicity, and only made exceptions in most cases because his wife would say to him: "Oh! I think you ought"; or because he could not bear to refuse anybody anything; together, perhaps, with a sort

of latent dislike of waste, deep down in his soul. When he saw the results he never failed to ejaculate: "Never again! No, really—never again! The whole thing is wrong and stupid!" And he would order a few copies.

For he dreaded nothing so much as the thought that he might become an egoist, and, knowing the dangers of his profession, fought continually against it. Often he would complain to his wife: "I don't think of you enough." And she would smile and say: "Don't you?" And he would feel better, having confessed his soul. Sometimes for an hour at a time he would make really heroic efforts not to answer her before having really grasped what she had said; and to check a tendency, that he sometimes feared was growing on him, to say: "What?" whether he had heard or no. In truth, he was not (as he often said) constitutionally given to small talk. Conversation that did not promise a chance of dialectic victory was hardly to his liking; so that he felt bound in sincerity to eschew it, which sometimes caused him to sit silent for "quite a while," as the Americans have phrased it. But once committed to an argument he found it difficult to leave off, having a natural, if somewhat sacred, belief in his own convictions.

His attitude to his creations was, perhaps, pe-

culiar. He either did not mention them, or touched on them if absolutely obliged, with a light and somewhat disparaging tongue; this did not, indeed, come from any real distrust of them, but rather from a superstitious feeling that one must not tempt Providence in the solemn things of life. If other people touched on them in the same way, he had, not unnaturally, a feeling of real pain, such as comes to a man when he sees an instance of cruelty or injustice. And, though something always told him that it was neither wise nor dignified to notice outrages of this order, he would mutter to his wife: "Well, I suppose it *is* true—I can't write"; feeling, perhaps, that—if *he* could not with decency notice such injuries, she might. And, indeed, she did, using warmer words than even he felt justified, which was soothing.

After tea it was his habit to sit down a second time, pen in hand; not infrequently he would spend those hours divided between the feeling that it was his duty to write something and the feeling that it was his duty not to write anything if he had nothing to say; and he generally wrote a good deal; for deep down he was convinced that if he did not write he would gradually fade away till there would be nothing left for him to read and think about, and, though he was

often tempted to believe and even to tell his wife that fame was an unworthy thing, he always deferred that pleasure, afraid, perhaps, of too much happiness.

In regard to the society of his fellows he liked almost anybody, though a little impatient with those, especially authors, who took themselves too seriously; and there were just one or two that he really could not stand, they were so obviously full of jealousy, a passion of which he was naturally intolerant and had, of course, no need to indulge in. And he would speak of them with extreme dryness—nothing more, disdaining to disparage. It was, perhaps, a weakness in him that he found it difficult to accept adverse criticism as anything but an expression of that same yellow sickness; and yet there were moments when no words would adequately convey his low opinion of his own powers. At such times he would seek out his wife and confide to her his conviction that he was a poor thing, no good at all, without a thought in his head; and while she was replying: "Rubbish! You know there's nobody to hold a candle to you," or words to that effect, he would look at her tragically, and murmur: "Ah! you're prejudiced!" Only at such supreme moments of dejection, indeed, did he feel it a pity that he had married her, seeing how

much more convincing her words would have been if he had not.

He never read the papers till the evening, partly because he had not time, and partly because he so seldom found anything in them. This was not remarkable, for he turned their leaves quickly, pausing, indeed, naturally, if there were any mention of his name; and if his wife asked him whether he had read this or that he would answer: "No," surprised at the funny things that seemed to interest her.

Before going up to bed he would sit and smoke. And sometimes fancies would come to him, and sometimes none. Once in a way he would look up at the stars, and think: 'What a worm I am! This wonderful Infinity! I must get more of it —more of it into my work; more of the feeling that the whole is marvellous and great, and man a little clutch of breath and dust, an atom, a straw, a nothing!'

And a sort of exaltation would seize on him, so that he knew that if only he did get that into his work, as he wished to, as he felt just then that he could, he would be the greatest writer the world had ever seen, the greatest man, almost greater than he wished to be, almost too great to be mentioned in the press, greater than Infinity itself—for would he not be Infinity's

creator? And suddenly he would check himself with the thought: 'I must be careful—I must be careful. If I let my brain go at this time of night, I sha'n't write a decent word to-morrow!'

And he would drink some milk and go to bed.

II

THE CRITIC

E often thought: 'This is a dog's life! I must give it up, and strike out for myself. If I can't write better than most of these fellows, it'll be very queer.' But he had not yet done so. He had in his extreme youth published fiction, but it had never been the best work of which he was capable—it was not likely that it could be, seeing that even then he was constantly diverted from the ham-bone of his inspiration by the duty of perusing and passing judgment on the work of other men.

If pressed to say exactly why he did not strike out for himself, he found it difficult to answer, and what he answered was hardly as true as he could have wished; for, though truthful, he was not devoid of the instinct of self-preservation. He could scarcely admit that he preferred to think what much better books he could have written, to actually writing them. To believe this was an inward comfort not readily to be put to the rude test of actual experience. And he could

scarcely acknowledge satisfaction in feeling that he could put in their proper places those who had to an extent, as one might say, retarded his creative genius by compelling him to read their books. But these, after all, were but minor factors in his long hesitation, for he was not a conceited or malicious person. Fundamentally, no doubt, he lived what he called "a dog's life" with pleasure, partly because he was used to it—and what a man is used to he is loth to part with; partly because he really had a liking for books; and partly because to be a judge is better than to be judged. No one could deny that he had a high conception of his functions. He had long laid down principles of professional conduct, from which he never departed, such as that a critic must not have any personal feelings, or be influenced by any private considerations whatever. This, no doubt, was why he often went a little out of his way to be more severe than usual with writers whom he suspected of a secret hope that personal acquaintanceship might incline him to favour them. He would, indeed, carry that principle further, and, where, out of impersonal enthusiasm, he had written in terms of striking praise, he would make an opportunity later on of deliberately taking that writer down a peg or two lower than he deserved, lest his

praise might be suspected of having been the outcome of personal motives, or of gush—for which he had a great abhorrence. In this way he preserved a remarkably pure sense of independence; a feeling that he was master in his own house, to be dictated to only by a proper conviction of his own importance. True, there were certain writers whom, for one reason or another, he could not very well stand; some having written to him to point out inaccuracies, or counter one of his critical conclusions, or, still worse, thanked him for having seen exactly what they had meant—a very unwise and even undignified thing to do, as he could not help thinking; others, again, having excited in him a natural dislike by their appearance, conduct, or manner of thought, or by having acquired too rapid or too swollen a reputation to be, in his opinion, good for them. In such cases, of course, he was not so unhuman as to disguise his convictions. For he was, before all things, an Englishman with a very strong belief in the freest play for individual taste. But of almost any first book by an unknown author he wrote with an impersonality which it would have been difficult to surpass.

Then there was his principle that one must never be influenced in judging a book by anything one has said of a previous book by the same

writer—each work standing entirely on its own basis. He found this important, and made a point of never rereading his own criticisms; so that the rhythm of his judgment, which, if it had risen to a work in 1920, would fall over the author's next in 1921, was entirely unbiassed by recollection, and followed merely those immutable laws of change and the moon so potent in regard to tides and human affairs.

Sameness and consistency he held in contempt. He looked for the unexpected both in art and criticism, anything being, as he said, preferable to dulness—a sentiment in which he was supported by the public. Not that this weighed with him, for he had a genuine distrust of the public, as was proper for one sitting in a seat of judgment. He knew that so-called critics had a kind of formula for each writer, as divines have sermons suitable to certain occasions. For example: "We have in 'The Mazy Swim' another of Mr. Hyphen Dash's virile stories. . . . We can thoroughly recommend this pulsating tale, with its true and beautiful character study of Little Katie, to every healthy reader as one of the best that Mr. Hyphen Dash has yet given us." Or: "We cannot say that 'The Mazy Swim' is likely to increase Mr. Hyphen Dash's reputation. It is sheer melodrama, such as we expect from this

writer. . . . The whole is artificial to a degree. . . . No sane reader will, for a moment, believe in Little Katie." Towards this sort of thing he showed small patience, having noticed with some acumen a relationship between the name of the writer, the politics of the paper, and the temper of the criticism. No! For him, if criticism did not embody the individual mood and temper of the critic, it was not worthy of the name.

But the canon which of all he regarded as most sacred was this: A critic must surrender himself to the mood and temper of the work he is criticising, take the thing as it is with its own special method and technique, its own point of view, and, only when all that is admitted, let his critical faculty off the chain. He was never tired of insisting on this, both to himself and others, and never sat down to a book without having it firmly in his mind. Not infrequently, however, he found that the author was, as it were, wilfully employing a technique or writing in a mood with which he had no sympathy, or had chosen a subject obviously distasteful, or a set of premises that did not lead to the conclusion which he would have preferred. In such cases his scrupulous honesty warned him not to compromise with his conscience, but to say outright that it would have been better if the technique

of the story had been objective instead of subjective; that the morbidity of the work prevented serious consideration of a subject which should never have been chosen; or that he would ever maintain that the hero was too weak a character to be a hero, and the book, therefore, of little interest. If any one pointed out to him that had the hero been a strong character there would have been no book, it being, in point of fact, the study of a weak character, he would answer: "That may be so, but it does not affect what I say—the book would have been better and more important if it had been the study of a strong character." And he would take the earliest opportunity of enforcing his recorded criticism that the hero was no hero, and the book no book to speak of. For, though not obstinate, he was a man who stood to his guns. He took his duty to the public very seriously, and felt it a point of honour never to admit himself in the wrong. It was so easy to do that and so fatal; and the fact of being anonymous, as on the whole he preferred to be, made it all the harder to abstain (on principle and for the dignity of criticism) from noticing printed contradictions to his conclusions.

In spite of all the heart he put into his work, there were times when, like other men, he suffered from dejection, feeling that the moment had

really come when he must either strike out into creative work, or compile a volume of synthetic criticism. And he would say: "None of us fellows are doing any constructive critical work; no one nowadays seems to have any conception of the first principles of criticism." Having talked that theory out thoroughly he would feel better, and next day would take an opportunity of writing: "We are not like the academic French, to whom the principles of criticism are so terribly important; our genius lies rather in individual judgments, pliant and changing as the works they judge."

There was that in him which, like the land from which he sprang, could ill brook control. He approved of discipline, but knew exactly where it was deleterious to apply it to himself; and no one, perhaps, had a finer and larger conception of individual liberty. In this way he maintained the best traditions of a calling whose very essence was superiority. In conversation he would generously admit that the artist, by reason of long years of devoted craftsmanship, had possibly the most intimate knowledge of his art, but he would not fail to point out, and very wisely, that there was no such unreliable testimony as that of experts, who had an axe to grind, each of his own way of doing things; for compre-

hensive views of literature seen in due perspective there was nothing—he thought—like the trained critic, rising superior to myopia and individual prejudice.

Of the school who maintained that true criticism was but reproduction in terms of sympathy, and just as creative as the creative work it reproduced, he was impatient, not so much on the ground that to make a model of a mountain was not quite the same thing as to make the mountain; but because he felt in his bones that the true creativeness of criticism was its destructive and satiric quality; its power of reducing things to rubbish and clearing them away, ready for the next lot. Possibly, too, the conviction, deep within him, that he would soon be striking out for himself and showing the world how a work of art really should be built, was in some sort responsible for the necessity he felt to keep the ground well cleared.

He was nearly fifty when his clock chimed, and he began seriously to work at the creation of that masterpiece which was to free him from "a dog's life," and, perhaps, fill its little niche in the gallery of immortality. He worked at it happily enough till one day, at the end of the fifth month, he had the misfortune to read through what he had written. With his critical faculty he was

able to perceive that which gave him no little pain—every chapter, most pages, and many sentences destroyed the one immediately preceding. He searched with intense care for that coherent thread which he had suspected of running through the whole. Here and there he seemed to come on its track, then it would vanish. This gave him great anxiety.

Abandoning thought for the moment, he wrote on. He paused again towards the end of the seventh month, and once more patiently reviewed the whole. This time he found four distinct threads that did not seem to meet; but still more puzzling was the apparent absence of any individual flavour. He was staggered. Before all he prized that quality, and throughout his career had fostered it in himself. To be unsapped in whim or fancy, to be independent, had been the salt of his existence as a critic. And now, and now—when his hour had struck, and he was in the throes of that long-deferred creation, to find——! He put thought away again, and doggedly wrote on.

At the end of the ninth month, in a certain exaltation, he finished; and slowly, with intense concentration, looked at what he had produced from beginning to end. And as he looked something clutched at him within, and he felt frozen.

The thing did not move, it had no pulse, no breath, no colour—it was dead.

Sitting before that shapeless masterpiece, still-born, without a spirit or the impress of a personality, a horrid thought crept and rattled in his brain. Had he, in his independence, in his love of being a law unto himself, *become so individual that he had no individuality left?* Was it possible that he had judged, and judged, and—not been judged, too long? Locking the flavourless thing away, he took up the latest novel sent him, and sat down to read. But, as he read, the pages of his own work implanted themselves above those that he turned and turned. At last he put the book down, and took up pen to review it. "This novel," he wrote, "is that most pathetic thing, the work of a man who has burned the lamp till the lamp has burned him; who has nourished and cultured his savour, and fed his idiosyncrasies, till he has dried and withered, without savour left." And, having written that damnation of the book that was not his own, the blood began once more flowing in his veins, and he felt warm.

III

THE PLAIN MAN

HE was plain. It was his great quality. Others might have graces, subtleties, originality, fire, and charm; they had not his plainness. It was that which made him so important, not only in his country's estimation, but in his own. For he felt that nothing was more valuable to the world than for a man to have no doubts, and no fancies, but to be quite plain about everything. And the knowledge that he was looked up to by the press, the pulpit, and the politician sustained him in the daily perfecting of that unique personality which he shared with all other plain men. In an age which bred so much that was freakish and peculiar, to know that there was always himself with his sane and plain outlook to fall back on, was an extraordinary comfort to him. He knew that he could rely on his own judgment, and never scrupled to give it to a public which never tired of asking for it.

In literary matters especially was it sought for, as invaluable. Whether he had read an author or

not, he knew what to think of him. For he had in his time unwittingly lighted on books before he knew what he was doing. They had served him as fixed stars forever after; so that if he heard any writer spoken of as "advanced," "erotic," "socialistic," "morbid," "pessimistic," "tragic," or what not unpleasant, he knew exactly what he was like, and thereafter only read him by accident. He liked a healthy tale, preferably of love or of adventure (of detective stories he was, perhaps, fondest), and insisted upon a happy ending, for, as he very justly said, there was plenty of unhappiness in life without gratuitously adding to it, and as to "ideas," he could get all he wanted and to spare from the papers. He deplored altogether the bad habit that literature seemed to have of seeking out situations which explored the recesses of the human spirit or of the human institution. As a plain man he felt this to be unnecessary. He himself was not conscious of having these recesses, or perhaps too conscious, knowing that if he once began to look, there would be no end to it; nor would he admit the use of staring through the plain surface of society's arrangements. To do so, he thought, endangered, if it did not altogether destroy, those simple faculties which men required for the fulfilment of plain duties, such as: Item, the acqui-

sition and investment of money; item, the attendance at church and maintenance of religious faith; item, the control of wife and children; item, the serenity of nerves and digestion; item, contentment with things as they were.

For there was just that little difference between him and all those of whom he strongly disapproved, that whereas *they* wanted to *see* things as they were, *he* wanted to *keep* things as they were. But he would not have admitted this little difference to be sound; he himself saw things as they were better than ever did such cranky people. If a human being had to get into spiritual fixes, as those fellows seemed to want one to believe, then the whole unpleasant matter should be put into poetry, and removed from comprehension. "Anyway," he would say: "In real life, I shall know it fast enough when I get there, and I'm not going to waste my time nosin' it over beforehand." His view of literary and, indeed, all art, was that it should help him to be cheerful. And he would make a really extraordinary outcry if amongst a hundred cheerful plays and novels he inadvertently came across one that was tragic. At once he would write to the papers to complain of the gloomy tone of modern literature; and the papers, with few exceptions, would echo his cry, because he was the plain man, and

took them in. "What on earth," he would remark, "is the good of showin' me a lot of sordid sufferin'? It doesn't make me any happier. Besides"—he would add—"it isn't art. The function of art is beauty." Someone had told him this, and he was emphatic on the point, going religiously to any show where there was a great deal of light and colour. The shapes of women pleased him, too, up to a point. But he knew where to stop; for he felt himself the real censor of morals in his country. When the plain man was shocked it was time to suppress the play, dance, or novel. He, beyond all other men, knew what was good for his wife and children. He would often meditate on that coming in to the City from his house in Surrey; for in the train he would see men reading novels, and this stimulated his imagination. A believer in liberty, like every Englishman, he was only for putting down a thing when it offended his own taste. In speaking with his friends on this subject, he would thus express himself: "These fellows talk awful skittles. Any plain man knows what's too hot and what isn't. All this 'flim-flam' about art, and all that, is beside the point. The question simply is: Would you take your wife and daughters? If not, there's an end of it, and it ought to be suppressed." Not that he did not like a "full-

blooded" book, as he called it, provided it had the right moral and religious tone. Indeed, a certain kind of fiction which abounded in descriptions "of her lovely bosom" often struck him pink, as he hesitated to express it; but there was never in such masterpieces of emotion any nasty subversiveness, or wrong-headed idealism, but frequently the opposite.

Though it was in relation to literature and drama, perhaps, that his quality of plainness was most valuable, he felt the importance of it, too, in regard to politics. When they had all done "messing about," they would come to him, because, after all, there he was, a plain man wanting nothing but his plain rights, not in the least concerned with the future, and Utopia, and all that, but putting things to the plain touchstone: "How will it affect me?" and forming his plain conclusions one way or the other. He felt, above all things, each new penny of the income-tax before they put it on, and saw to it if possible that they did not. He was extraordinarily plain about that, and about national defence, which instinct told him should be kept up to the mark at all costs. But there must be ways, he felt, of doing the latter without having recourse to the income-tax, and he was prepared to turn out any government unjust to plain principles of

property. In matters of national honour he was even plainer, for he never went into the merits of the question—a simple patriot, his country must be right; or, if not right, one must not say so. So aware were statesmen and the press of this sound attitude of his mind, that, without waiting to ascertain it, they acted on it in perfect confidence.

In regard to social reform, while recognising, of course, the need for it, he felt that, in practice, one should have just as much as was absolutely necessary and no more; a plain man did not go out of his way to make quixotic efforts, but neither did he sit upon a boiler till he was blown up.

In the matter of religion he regarded his position as the only sound one, for however little in these days one could believe and all that, yet, as a plain man, he did not refuse to go to church and say he was a Christian; on the contrary, he was rather more particular about it than formerly, since when a spirit has departed, one must be very careful of the body, lest it fall to pieces. He continued, therefore, to be a churchman—living in Hertfordshire.

He often spoke of science, medical or not, in his plain opinion those fellows all had an axe to grind. The latest sanitary system, the best forms

of locomotion and communication, the newest antiseptics, and time-saving machines—of all these, of course, he made full use; but as to the researches, speculations, and theories of scientists —to speak plainly, they were, he thought, 'pretty good rot.'

He abominated the word "humanitarian." No plain man wanted to inflict suffering, especially on himself. He would be the last person to do any such thing, but the plain facts of life must be considered, and convenience and property duly safeguarded. He wrote to the papers perhaps more often on this subject than on any other, and was gratified to read in their leading articles continual allusion to himself: "The plain man is not prepared to run the risks which a sentimental treatment of this subject would undoubtedly involve"; "After all, it is to the plain man that we must go for the sanity and common sense of this matter." For he had no dread in life like that of being called a sentimentalist. If an instance of cruelty came under his own eyes he was as much moved as any man, and took immediate steps to manifest his disapproval. To act thus on his feelings was not at all his idea of being sentimental. But what he could not stand was making a fuss about cruelties, as people called them, which had not actually come under

his own plain vision; to be indignant in regard to such *was* sentimental, involving an exercise of imagination, than which he distrusted nothing more. Deep instinct informed him perpetually that if he felt anything, other than what disturbed him personally at first hand, he would suffer unnecessarily, and encourage such public action as might diminish his comfort. But he was no alarmist, and, on the whole, felt pretty sure that while he was there, living in Kent, with his plain views, there was no chance of anything being done that would cause him any serious inconvenience.

On the woman's question generally he had long made his position plain. He would move when the majority moved, and not before. And he expected all plain men (and women—if there were any, which he sometimes doubted) to act in the same way. In this policy he felt instinctively there was no risk. No plain, solid person—would move until he did, and he would not, of course, move until they did; which guaranteed a perfectly plain position. And it was extraordinarily gratifying to him to feel, from the tone of politicians, pulpit, and press, that he had the country with him. He often said to his wife: "One thing's plain to me; we shall never have the suffrage till the country wants it." He rarely

discussed the question with other women, having observed that many of them could not keep their tempers over his plain view of the matter.

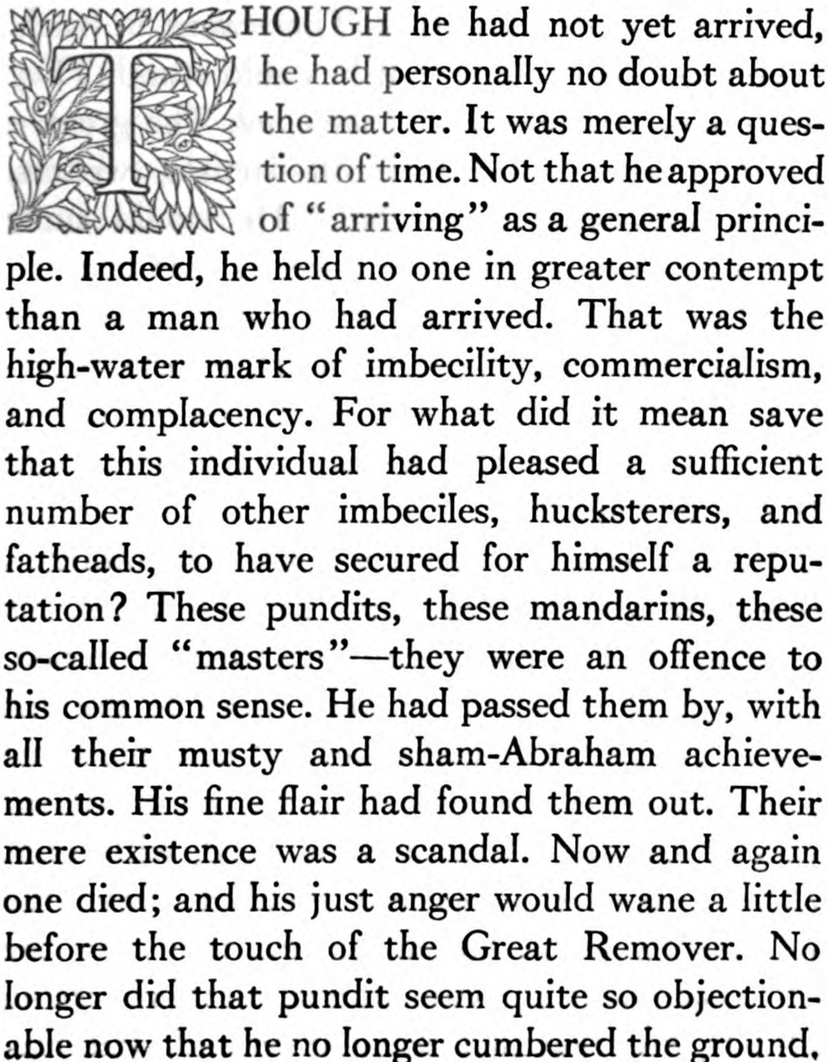
He was sometimes at a loss to think what on earth they would do without him on juries, of which he was usually elected foreman. And he would listen with pleasure to the words always spoken to him: "As plain men, gentlemen, you will at once see how improbable in every particular is the argument of my friend." To be valued in precisely the same way by both sides and ultimately by the judge filled him with a modest feeling that only a plain man was of any value whatever, certainly the only kind of man who had any sort of judgment.

He often wondered what the country would do without him; into what abysmal trouble she would get in her politics, her art, her law, and her religion. He alone so clearly stood between her and manifold destructions. How many times had he not seen her reeling in her cups and sophistries, and beckoning to him to save her! And had he ever failed her, with his simple philosophy of a plain man: "Follow me, and the rest will follow itself?" Never! As witness the veneration in which he saw that he was held every time he opened a paper, attended the performance of a play, heard a sermon, or listened to a speech.

Some day he meant to sit for his portrait, believing that this was due from him to posterity; and now and then he would look into the glass to fortify his resolution. What he saw there always gave him secret pleasure. Here was a face that he knew he could trust, and even in a way admire. Nothing brilliant, showy, eccentric, soulful; nothing rugged, devotional, profound, or fiery; not even anything proud, or stubborn; no surplus of kindliness, sympathy, or aspiration; but just simple, solid lines, a fresh colour, and sensible, rather prominent eyes—just the face that he would have expected and desired, the face of a plain man.

IV

THE SUPERLATIVE



THOUGH he had not yet arrived, he had personally no doubt about the matter. It was merely a question of time. Not that he approved of "arriving" as a general principle. Indeed, he held no one in greater contempt than a man who had arrived. That was the high-water mark of imbecility, commercialism, and complacency. For what did it mean save that this individual had pleased a sufficient number of other imbeciles, hucksterers, and fatheads, to have secured for himself a reputation? These pundits, these mandarins, these so-called "masters"—they were an offence to his common sense. He had passed them by, with all their musty and sham-Abraham achievements. His fine flair had found them out. Their mere existence was a scandal. Now and again one died; and his just anger would wane a little before the touch of the Great Remover. No longer did that pundit seem quite so objectionable now that he no longer cumbered the ground.

It might even, perhaps, be admitted that there had been something coming out of that one; and, as the years rolled on, this something would roll on too, till it became quite a big thing; and he would compare those miserable pundits who still lived with the one who had so fortunately died, to their great disadvantage. There were, in truth, very few living beings that he could stand. They were not—no, they really *were not*. The great—as they were called forsooth—artists, writers, politicians—what were they? He would smile down one side of his long nose. It was enough. Forthwith those reputations ceased to breathe—for him. Their theories, too, of art, reform, what-not—how puerile, old-fashioned, and worthy of all the destruction that his pen and tongue could lavish on them!

For, to save his country's art, his country's literature and politics—was, he well knew, his mission. And he periodically founded, or joined, the staff of papers that were going to do this trick. They always lasted several months, some several years, before breathing the last impatient sigh of genius. And while they lived, with what clean brooms they swept! Perched above the miasma known as human nature, they beat the air, sweeping it and sweeping it, till there was no air left. And that real vision of art and existence,

which they were going to put in place of all this muck, how nearly—oh! oh!—they brought it to reality! Just another month, another year, another good sweeping, would have done it! And on that final ride of the broomstick, he—he would have arrived! At last someone would have been there with a real philosophy, a truly creative mind; someone whose poems and paintings, music, novels, plays, and measures of reform would at last have borne inspection! And he would go out from the office of that great paper so untimely wrecked, and, conspiring with himself, would found another.

This one should follow principles that could not fail. For, first, it should tolerate nothing—nothing at all. That was the mistake they had made last time. They had tolerated some reputations. No more of that; no—more! The imbeciles, the shallow frauds, let them be carted! And with them cremated the whole structure of society, all its worn-out formulas of art, religion, sociology. In place of them he would not this time be content to put nothing. No; this was the moment to elucidate that rhyme and pulsation in the heart of the future hitherto undisclosed to any but himself. There should be flames going up out of that paper—pale-red, lovely flames of genius. Ah! the emanation should be wonderful. And,

collecting his tattered mantle round his middle so small, he would start his race again.

For three numbers he would lay about him and outline religiously what was going to come. In the fourth number he would be compelled to concentrate himself on a final destruction of all those defences and spiteful counter-attacks which wounded vanity had wrung from the pundits, those apostles of the past; this final destruction absorbed his energies during the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth numbers. In the ninth he would say positively that he was now ready to justify the constructive prophecies of his first issues. In the tenth he would explain that, unless a blighted public supported an heroic effort better, genius would be withheld from them. In the eleventh number he would lay about him as he had never done, and in the twelfth give up the ghost.

In connection with him one had always to remember that he was not one of those complacent folk whose complacency stops short somewhere; his was a nobler kind, ever trying to climb into heaven. He had a touch of the divine discontent even with himself; and it was only in comparison with the rest of the world that he felt he was superlative.

Luckily for him Nietzsche was dead; out of a

full heart he could bang upon the abandoned drum of a man whom he scarcely hesitated to term great. And yet, what—aha!—could be more dismally asinine than some of these live stucco moderns pretending to be supermen? Save this Nietzsche he admitted no philosopher into his own class, and was most down on Aristotle, and that one who had founded the religion of his country.

Of statesmen he held a low opinion—what were they, after all—politicians? Not one in the whole range of history could take a view like an angel of the dawn surveying creation; not one could soar above a contemptible adaptation of human means to human ends.

His poet was Blake. His playwright Strindberg, a man of distinct promise—fortunately dead. Of novelists he accepted Dostoievsky. Who else was there? Who else had gone outside the range of normal, stupid, rational humanity, and shown the marvellous qualities of the human creature drunk or dreaming? Who else had so arranged his scenery that from beginning to end one need never witness the dull shapes and colours of human life unracked by nightmare? In nightmare only the human spirit revealed its possibilities.

He had a great respect for nightmare, even in

its milder forms, it was the only thing an ordinary sane man could not achieve in his waking moments. He so hated the ordinary sane man.

In art he was paulo-post-futurist, the painter he had elected to admire was one no one had yet heard of. Ho, ho! they should hear of him when the moment came. With the arrival of that one would begin a new era of art, unparalleled in the past, save possibly by one Chinese period long before that of which the pundits—poor devils—so blatantly bleated.

A connoisseur of music, nothing gave him greater pain than a tune. Of the ancients he recognised Bach alone, and only in his fugues. Wagner was considerable in places. Strauss, Debussy, well—yes, but now *vieux jeu.* There was an Esquimau. His name? No, let them wait! That fellow was something. Let them mark his words, and wait!

Without his own torch-bearing arrival, he sometimes thought he could no longer bear things as they were, no longer go on watching his chariot unhitched to a star, trailing the mud of this musty, muddled world, whose ethics even, those paltry wrappings of the human soul, were uncongenial to him.

Talking of ethics, one thing he absolutely could not bear—that secondhand creature, a

gentleman. That his superlative self should be compelled by some mouldy and incomprehensible tradition to respect the feelings or see the point of view of others—that was indeed the limit. No, no! To bound upon the heads and limbs the prejudices and convictions of others, especially in print, was a holy duty. Conscientious to a degree, there was certainly no one of all his duties he performed so conscientiously as this. No amenities defiled his tongue or pen, he never shrank from personalities—his spiritual honesty was terrific. Yet he never thrust or cut where it was not deserved; since practically the whole world was open to his scorn. Indeed, he made no cult at all of eccentricity—that was for smaller creatures. Dress was of the soberest—a purple shirt, grey boots, or a yellow-ochre tie. Life and habits abstemious. No children! But in time he meant to have quite a number, for this was, he knew, his duty to a world breeding from mortal men. Whether they would arrive before he did was a question, since, until then, his creative attention could hardly be sufficiently disengaged.

At times he scarcely knew himself, so absorbed was he; but you knew him because he breathed rather hard, as became a man lost in creation. In his higher flights of genius he paused for nothing, not even pen and paper; he touched the

clouds—and, like the clouds, height piled on vapourous height, his images and conceptions hung wreathed, immortal, evanescent as the air. It was an annoyance to him afterwards to find that he had neglected to pin them to earth. Still, with his intolerance of all except divinity, and his complete faith that he must in time achieve it, he was perhaps the most interesting person to be found in the purlieus of—wherever it might be.

V

THE PRECEPTOR

E had a philosophy as yet untouched. His stars were the old stars, his faith the old faith; nor would he recognise that there was any other, for not to recognise any point of view except his own was no doubt the very essence of his faith. Wisdom! There was surely none save the flinging of the door to, standing with your back against that door, and telling people what was behind it. For, though he also could not know what was behind, he thought it low to say so. An "atheist," as he termed certain persons, was to him beneath contempt, an "agnostic," as he termed certain others, a poor and foolish creature. As for a rationalist, positivist, pragmatist, or any other "ist"—well, that was just what they were. He made no secret of the fact that he simply could not understand people like that. "What can they do—save deny?" he would say. "What do they contribute to the morals and the elevation of the world? What do they put in place of what they

take away? What have they got, to make up for what is behind that door? Where are their symbols? How shall they move and lead the people? No," he said, "a little child shall lead the people, and I am the little child! For I can spin them a tale such as children love, of what is behind the door." Such was the temper of his mind that he never flinched from believing true what he thought would benefit himself and others. For example, he held a crown of ultimate advantage to be necessary to induce pure and stable living. If one could not say: "Listen, children! there it is, behind the door! Look at it, shining, golden—yours! Not now, but when you die, if you are good. Be good, therefore! For if you are not good—no crown!" If one could not say that—what could one say? What inducement hold out? And warmly he would describe the crown! There was nothing he detested more than commercialism. And to anyone who ventured to suggest that there was something rather commercial about the idea of that crown, he would retort with asperity. A mere creed that good must be done, so to speak, just out of a present love of dignity and beauty—as a man, seeing something he admired, might work to reproduce it, knowing that he would never achieve it perfectly, but going on until he dropped, out of sheer love of going on—

he thought vague, futile, devoid of glamour, and contrary to human nature, for he always judged people by himself, and felt that no one could like to go on unless they knew that they would get something if they did. To promise victory, therefore, was most important. Forlorn hopes, setting your teeth, back to the wall, and such like, was bleak and wintry doctrine, without inspiration in it, because it led to nothing—so far as he could see. Those others, who, not presuming to believe in anything, went on, because—as they said—to give up would be to lose their honour, seemed to him poor lost creatures who had denied faith; and faith was, as has been said, the mainspring of his philosophy.

Once, indeed, in the unguarded moment of a heated argument, he had confessed that some day men might not require to use the symbols of religion which they used now. It was at once pointed out to him that, if he thought that, he could not believe these symbols to be true for all time; and if they were not true for all time, why did he say they were? He was dreadfully upset. Deferring answer, however, for the moment, he was soon able to retort that the symbols were true—er—mystically. If a man—and this was the point—did not stand by *these* symbols, by which could he stand? Tell him that!

Symbols were necessary. But what symbols were there in a mere good will; a mere vague following of one's own dignity and honour, out of a formless love of life? How put up a religion of such amorphous and unrewarded chivalry and devotion, how put up a blind love of mystery, in place of a religion of definite crowns and punishments, how substitute a worship of mere abstract goodness, or beauty, for worship of what could be called by Christian names? Human nature being what it was—it would not do, it absolutely would not do. Though he was fond of the words "mystery," "mystical," he had emphatically no use for them when they were vaguely used by people to express their perpetual (and quite unmoral) feeling that they would never find out the secret of their own existence, never even understand the nature of the universe or God. Mystery of that kind seemed to him pagan, almost nature-worship, having no finality. And if confronted by someone who said that a Mystery, *if* it could be understood, would naturally not be a mystery, he would raise his eyebrows. It was that kind of loose, specious, sentimental talk that did so much harm, and drew people away from right understanding of that Great Mystery which, if it was *not* understood and properly explained, was, for all practical purposes, not a

great mystery at all. No, it had all been gone into long ago, and he stood by the explanations and intended that every one else should, for in that way alone men were saved; and, though he well knew (for he was no Jesuit) that the end did not justify the means, yet in a matter of such all-importance one stopped to consider neither means nor ends—one just saved people. And as for truth—the question of that did not arise, if one believed. What one believed,. what one was told to believe, *was* the truth; and it was no good telling him that the whole range of a man's feeling and reasoning powers must be exercised to ascertain truth, and that, when ascertained, it would only be relative truth, and the best available to that particular man. Nothing short of the absolute truth would *be* put up with, and that guaranteed fixed and immovable, or it was no good for his purpose. To anyone who threw out doubts here and doubts there, and even worse than doubts, he had long formed the habit of saying simply, with a smile that he tried hard to make indulgent: "Of course, if you believe *that!*"

But he very seldom had to argue on these matters, because people, looking at his face with its upright bone-formation, rather bushy eyebrows, and eyes with a good deal of light in them, felt that it would be simpler not. He seemed to

them to know his own mind almost too well. Joined to this potent faculty of implanting in men a childlike trustfulness in what he told them was behind the door, he had a still more potent faculty of knowing exactly what was good for them in everyday life. The secret of this power was simple. He did not recognise the existence of what moderns and so-called "artists" dubbed "temperament." All talk of that sort was bosh, and generally immoral bosh; for all moral purposes people really had but one temperament, and that was, of course, just like his own. And no one knew better than he what was good for it. He was perfectly willing to recognise the theory of individual treatment for individual cases; but it did not do, in *practice*, to vary. This instinctive wisdom made him invaluable in all those departments of life where discipline and the dispensation of an even justice were important. To adapt men to the moral law was—he thought—perhaps the first duty of a preceptor, especially in days when there was perceptible a distinct but regrettable tendency to try and adapt the moral law to the needs—as they were glibly called—of men. There was, perhaps, in him something of the pedagogue, and when he met a person who disagreed with him his eyes would shift a bit to the right and a bit to the left, then become firmly

fixed upon that person from under brows rather drawn down; and his hand, large and strong, would move fingers, as if more and more tightly grasping a cane, birch, or other wholesome instrument. He loved his fellow creatures so that he could not bear to see them going to destruction for want of a timely flogging to salvation.

He was one of those who seldom felt the need for personal experience of a phase of life, or line of conduct, before giving judgment on it; indeed, he gravely distrusted personal experience. He had opposed, for instance, all relief for the unhappily married long before he left the single state; and, when he did leave it, would not admit for a moment that his own happiness was at all responsible for the petrifaction of his view that no relief was necessary. Hard cases made bad law! But he did not require to base his opinion upon that. He said simply that he had been told there was to be no relief—it was enough.

The saying "To understand all is to forgive all!" left him cold. It was, as he well knew, quite impossible to identify himself with such conditions as produced poverty, disease, and crime, even if he wished to do so (which he sometimes doubted). He knew better, therefore, than to waste his time attempting the impossible; and he pinned his faith to an instinctive knowledge

of how to deal with all such social ills: A contented spirit for poverty; for disease isolation; and for crime such punishment as would at once deter others, reform the criminal, and convince every one that law must be avenged and the social conscience appeased. On this point of revenge he was emphatic. No vulgar personal feeling of vindictiveness, of course, but a strong state feeling of "an eye for an eye." It was the only taint of socialism that he permitted himself. Loose thinkers, he knew, dared to say that a desire for retribution or revenge was a purely human or individual feeling like hate, love, and jealousy; and that to talk of satisfying such a feeling in the collected bosom of the State was either to talk nonsense—how could a State have a bosom?—or to cause the bosoms of the human individuals who administered the justice of the State to feel that each of them was itself that stately bosom, and entitled to be revengeful. "Oh, no!" he would answer to such loose-thinking persons; "judges, of course, give expression not to what they feel themselves but to what they imagine the State feels." He himself, for example, was perfectly able to imagine which crimes were those that inspired in the bosom of the State a particular abhorrence, a particular desire to be avenged; such as blackmail, assaults

upon children, or living on the earnings of immoral women; he was certain that the State regards all these with peculiar detestation, for he had, and quite rightly, a particular detestation of them himself; and if he were a judge, he would never for a moment hesitate to visit on the perpetrators of such vile crimes the utmost vengeance of the law. He was no loose thinker. In these times, bedridden with loose thinking and sickly sentiment, he often felt terribly the value of his own philosophy, and was afraid that it was in danger. But not many other people held that view, discerning his finger still very large in every pie—so much so that there often seemed less pie than finger.

It would have shocked him much to realise that he could be considered a fit subject for a study of extravagance; fortunately, he had not the power of seeing himself as others saw him, nor was there any danger that he ever would.

VI

THE ARTIST

HE had long known, of course, that to say the word "bourgeois" with contempt was a little bit old-fashioned, and he did his utmost not to; yet a still small voice within him would whisper: "Those people—I want to and I do treat them as my equals. I have even gone so far of late years as to dress like them, to play their games, to eat regularly, to drink little, to love decorously, with many other bourgeois virtues, but in spite of all I remain where I was, an inhabitant of another——" and, just as he thought the whispering voice was going to die away, it would add hurriedly—"and a better world."

It worried him; and he would diligently examine the premises of that small secret conclusion, hoping to find a flaw in the justness of his conviction that he was superior. But he never did; and for a long time he could not discover why.

Often the conduct of the "bourgeois" would

strike him as almost superfluously good. They were brave, much braver than he was conscious of being; clean-thinking, oh, far more clean-thinking than a man like himself, necessarily given to visions of all kinds; they were straightforward, almost ridiculously so, as it seemed to one who saw the inside-out of everything almost before he saw the outside-in; they were simple, as touchingly simple as those little children, to whom Scriptures and post-impressionism had combined to award the crown of wisdom; they were kind and self-denying in a way that often made him feel quite desperately his own selfishness—and yet—they were inferior. It was simply maddening that he could never rid himself of that impression.

It was one November afternoon, while talking with another artist, that the simple reason struck him with extraordinary force and clarity: *He could make them, and they could not make him!*

Clearly this was what caused him to feel so much like God when they were about. Glad enough, as any man might be, of that discovery, it did not set his mind at rest. He felt that he ought rather to be humbled than elated. And he went to work at once to be so, saying to himself: "I am just, perhaps, a little nearer to the Creative Purpose than the rest of the world—a

mere accident, nothing to be proud of; I can't help it, nothing to make a fuss about, though people will!" For it did seem to him sometimes that the whole world was in conspiracy to make him feel superior—as if there were any need! He would have felt much more comfortable if that world had despised him, as it used to in the old days, for then the fire of his conviction could with so much better grace have flared to heaven; there would have been something fine about a superiority leading its own forlorn hope. But this trailing behind the drums and trumpets of a press and public so easily taken in he felt to be both flat and a little degrading. True, he had his moments, as when his eyes would light on sentences like this (penned generally by clergymen): "All this talk of art is idle; what really matters is morals." Then, indeed, his spirit would flame, and after gazing at "is morals" with flashing eye and curling lip, and wondering whether it ought to have been "are morals," he would say to whomsoever might happen to be there: "These bourgeois! What do they know? What can they see?" and, without waiting for an answer, would reply: "Nothing! Nothing! Less than nothing!" and mean it. It was at moments such as these that he realised how he not only despised, but almost hated, those dense and

cocky Philistines who could not see his obvious superiority. He felt that he did not lightly call them by such names, because they really *were* dense and cocky, and no more able to see things from his point of view than they were to jump over the moon. These fellows could see nothing except from their own confounded view-point! They were so stodgy too; and he gravely distrusted anything static. Flux, flux, and once more flux! He knew by intuition that an artist alone had the capacity for concreting the tides of life in forms not deleterious to anybody. For rules and canons he recognised the necessity with his head (including his tongue), but never with his heart; except, of course, the rules and canons of art. He worshipped these; and when anybody like Tolstoi came along and said, "Blow art!" or words to that effect, he hummed like bees caught on a gust of wind. What did it matter whether you had anything to express, so long as you expressed it? That only was "pure æsthetics," as he often said. To place before the public eye something so exquisitely purged of thick and muddy actuality that it might be as perfectly without direct appeal to-day as it would be two thousand years hence—this was an ambition to which in truth he nearly always attained; this only was great art. He would assert with his last

breath—which was rather short, for he suffered from indigestion—that one must never concrete anything in terms of ordinary nature. No! one must devise pictures of life that would be equally unfamiliar to men in A. D. 2520 as they had been in A. D. 1920; and when an inconsiderate person drew his attention to the fact that to the spectator in 2520 the most naturalistic pictures of the life of 1920 would seem quite convincingly fantastic, so that there was no need for him to go out of his way to devise fantasy—he would stare. For he was emphatically not one of those who did not care a button what the form was so long as the spirit of the artist shone clear and potent through the pictures he drew. No, no; he either demanded the poetical, the thing that got off the ground, with the wind in its hair (and he himself would make the wind, rather perfumed); or—if not the poetical—something observed with extreme fidelity and without the smallest touch of that true danger to art, the temperamental point of view. "No!" he would say; "it's our business to put it down just as it is, to see it, not to feel it. In feeling damnation lies." And nothing gave him greater uneasiness than to find the emotions of anger, scorn, love, reverence, or pity surging within him as he worked, for he knew that they would, if he did not at once master

them, spoil a certain splendid vacuity that he demanded of all art. In painting, Raphael, Tintoretto, and Holbein pleased him greatly; in fiction, "Salammbô" was his model, for, as he very justly said, you could supply to it what soul you liked—there being no inconvenient soul already in possession.

As can be well imagined, his conviction of being, in a small way, God, permeated an outlook that was passionless and impartial to a degree—except perhaps towards the bourgeoisie, with their tiring morals and peculiar habits. If he had a weakness, it was his paramount desire to suppress in himself any symptoms of temperament, except just that temperament of having no temperament, which seemed to him the only one permissible to an artist, who, as he said, was nothing if not simply either a recorder or a weaver of beautiful lines in the air.

Record and design, statement and decoration—these, in combination, constituted creation! It was to him a certain source of pleasure that he had discovered this. Not that he was, of course, neglectful of sensations, but he was perfectly careful not to *feel*—in order that he might be able to record them, or use them for his weaving in a purely æsthetic manner. The moment they impinged on his spirit, and sent the blood to his

head, he reined in, and began tracing lines in the air, a practice that never failed him.

It was his deliberate opinion that a work of art quite as great as the "Bacchus and Ariadne" could be made out of a kettle singing on a hob. You had merely to record it with beautiful lines and colour; and what—in parenthesis—could lend itself more readily to beautiful treatment of lines woven in the air than steam rising from a spout? It was a subject, too, which in its very essence almost precluded temperamental treatment, so that this abiding temptation was removed from the creator. It could be transferred to canvas with a sort of immortal blandness—black, singing, beautiful. All that cant, such as, "The greater the artist's spirit, the greater the subject he will treat, and the greater achievement attain, technique being equal," was to him beneath contempt. The spirit did not matter, because one must not intrude it; and, since one must not intrude it, the more unpretentious the subject, the less temptation one had to diverge from impersonality, that first principle of art. Oranges on a dish afforded probably the finest subject one could meet with; unless one chanced to dislike oranges. As for what people called "criticism of life," he maintained that such was only permissible when the criticism was so sunk

into the very fibre of a work as to be imperceptible to the most searching eye. When this was achieved he thought it extremely valuable. Anything else was simply the work of the moralist, of the man who took sides and used his powers of expression to embody a temperamental and therefore an obviously one-sided view of his subject; and, however high those powers of expression might be, he could not admit that this was in any sense real art. He could never forgive Leonardo da Vinci, because, he said, "the fellow was always trying to put the scientific side of himself into his confounded paintings, and not just content to render faithfully in terms of decoration"; nor could he ever condone Euripides for letting his philosophy tincture his plays. And, if it were advanced that the former was the greatest painter and the latter the greatest dramatist the world had ever seen, he would say: "That may be, but they weren't artists, of course."

He was fond of the words "of course"; they gave the impression that he could not be startled, as was right and proper for a man occupying his post, a little nearer to the Creative Purpose than those others. As mark of that position, he always permitted himself just one eccentricity, changing it every year, his mind being subtle—not like those of certain politicians or millionaires, con-

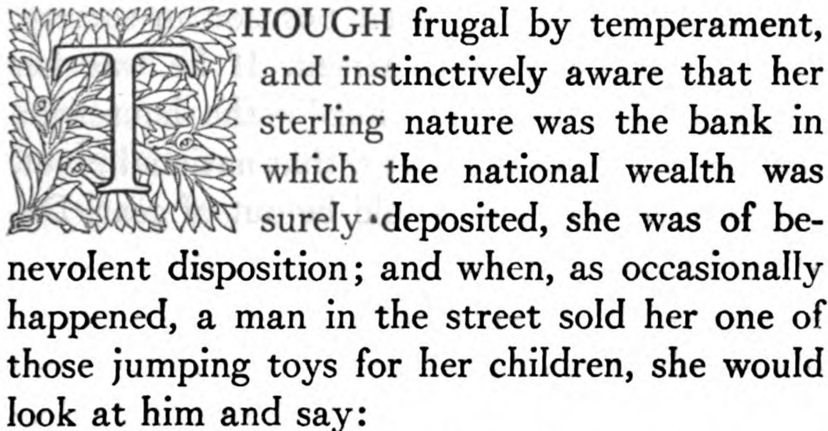
tent to wear orchids or drive zebras all their lives. Anon it would be a little pointed beard and no hair to speak of; next year, no beard, and wings; the year after, a pair of pince-nez with alabaster rims, very cunning; once more anon, a little pointed beard. In these ways he singled himself out just enough, no more; for he was no *poseur*, believing in his own place in the scheme of things too deeply.

His views on matters of the day varied, of course, with the views of those he talked to, since it was his privilege always to see either the other side or something so much more subtle on the same side as made that side the other.

But all topical thought and emotion was beside the point for one who lived in his work; who lived to receive impressions and render them again so faithfully that you could not tell he had ever received them. His was—as he sometimes felt—a rare and precious personality.

VII

THE HOUSEWIFE



THOUGH frugal by temperament, and instinctively aware that her sterling nature was the bank in which the national wealth was surely deposited, she was of benevolent disposition; and when, as occasionally happened, a man in the street sold her one of those jumping toys for her children, she would look at him and say:

"How much? You don't look well!" and he would answer: "Tuppence, lidy. Truth is, lidy, I've gone 'ungry this lawst week." Searching his face shrewdly, she would reply: "That's bad—a sin against the body. Here's threepence. Give me a ha'penny. You don't look well." And, taking the ha'penny, she would leave the man inarticulate.

Food appealed to her, not only in relation to herself, but to others. Often to some friend she would speak a little bitterly, a little mournfully, about her husband. "Yes, I quite like my 'hubby' to go out sometimes where he can talk

about art, and war, and things that women can't. He takes no interest in his food." And she would add, brooding: "What he'd do if I didn't study him, I really don't know." She often felt with pain that he was very thin. She studied him incessantly—that is, in due proportion to their children, their position in society, their Christianity, and herself. If he was her "hubby," she was his "hub"—the housewife, that central pivot of society, that national pivot, which never could or would be out of gear. Devoid of conceit, it seldom occurred to her to examine her own supremacy, quietly content to be "integer vitæ, scelerisque pura"—just the one person against whom nobody could say anything. Subconsciously, no doubt, she *must* have valued her worth and reputation, or she would never have felt such salutary gusts of irritation and contempt towards persons who had none. Like cows when a dog comes into a field, she would herd together whenever she saw a woman with what she suspected was a past, then advance upon her, horns down. If the offending creature did not speedily vacate the field, she would, if possible, trample her to death. When, by any chance, the female dog proved too swift and lively, she would remain sullenly turning and turning her horns in the direction of its vagaries.

Well she knew that, if she once raised those horns and let the beast pass, her whole herd would suffer. There was something almost magnificent about her virtue, based, as it was, entirely on self-preservation, and her remarkable power of rejecting all premises except those peculiar to herself. This gave it a fibre and substance hard as concrete. Here, indeed, was something one could build on; here, indeed, was the strait thing. Her husband would sometimes say to her: "My dear, we don't know what the poor woman's circumstances were, we really don't, you know. I think we should try to put ourselves in her place." And she would fix his eye, and say: "James, it's no good. I can't imagine myself in that woman's place, and I won't. Do you think that *I* would ever leave *you?*" And, watching till he shook his head, she would go on: "Of course not. No. Nor let you leave me." And, pausing a second, to see if he blinked, because men were rather like that (even those who had the best of wives), she would go on: "She deserves all she gets. I have no personal feeling, but, if once decent women begin to get soft about this sort of thing, then good-bye to family life and Christianity, and everything. I'm not hard, but there are things I feel strongly about, and this is one of them." And secretly she would think: 'That's why he

keeps so thin—always letting himself doubt, and sympathise, where one has no right to. Men!' Next time she passed the woman, she would cut her deader than the last time, and seeing her smile, would feel a sort of divine fury. More than once this had led her into courts of law on charges of libel and slander. But, knowing how impregnable was her position, she almost welcomed that opportunity. For it was ever transparent to judge and jury from the first that she was that crown of pearls, a virtuous woman, and so she was never cast in damages.

On one such occasion her husband had been so ill-advised as to remark: "My dear, I have my doubts whether our duty does not stop at seeing to ourselves, without throwing stones at others."

"Robert," she had answered, "if you think that, just because there's a chance that you may have to pay damages, I'm going to hold my tongue when vice flaunts itself, you make a mistake. I always put your judgment above mine, but this is not a matter of judgment—it is a matter of Christian and womanly conduct. I can't admit even your right to dictate."

She hated that expression, "The grey mare is the better horse"; it was vulgar, and she would never recognise its truth in her own case—for a wife's duty was to submit herself to her husband,

as she had already said. After this little incident she took the trouble to go and open her New Testament and look up the story of a certain woman. There was not a word in it about women not throwing stones; the discouragement referred entirely to men. Exactly! No one knew better than she the difference between men and women in the matter of moral conduct. Probably there *were* no men without that kind of sin, but there were plenty of women, and, without either false or true pride, she felt that she was one of them. And there the matter rested.

Her views on political and social questions—on the whole, very simple—were to be summed up in the words, "That *man*——!" and, so far as it lay in her power, she saw to it that her daughters should not have any views at all. She found this, however, an increasingly hard task, and on one occasion was almost terrified to find her first and second girls abusing "that man——," not for going too fast, but for not going fast enough. She spoke to William about it, but found him hopeless, as usual, where his daughters were concerned. It was her principle to rule them with good, motherly sense, as became a woman in whose hands the family life of her country centred; and it was satisfactory on the whole to find that they obeyed her whenever

they wished to. On this occasion, however, she spoke to them severely: "The place of woman," she said, "is in the home." "The whole home—and nothing but the home." "Ella! The place of woman is by the side of man; counselling, supporting, ruling, but never competing with him. The place of woman is in the shop, the kitchen, and——" "The—bed!" "*Ella!*" "In the soup!" "Beatrice! I wish—I do wish you girls would be more respectful. The place of woman is in the home. Yes, I've said that before, but I shall say it again, and don't you forget it! The place of woman is—the most important thing in national life. If you want to realise that, just think of your own mother; and——" "Our own father." "Ella! The place of woman is in the——!" She left the room, feeling that, for the moment, she had said enough.

In disposition sociable, and no niggard of her company, there was one thing she liked to work at alone—her shopping, an art which she had long reduced to a science. The principles she laid down are worth remembering: Never grudge your time to save a ha'penny. Never buy anything until you have turned it well over, recollecting that the rest of you will have turned it over too. Never let your feelings of pity interfere with your sense of justice, but bear in mind that the

girls who sell to you are paid for doing it; if you can afford the time to keep them on their legs, they can afford the time to let you. Never read pamphlets, for you don't know what may be in them about furs, feathers, and forms of food. Never buy more than your husband can afford to pay for; but, on the whole, buy as much. Never let any seller see that you think you have bought a bargain, but buy one if you can; you will find it pleasant afterwards to talk of your prowess. Shove, shove, and shove again!

In the perfect application of these principles, she had found, after long experience, that there was absolutely no one to touch her.

In regard to meat, she had sometimes thought she would like to give it up, because she had read in her paper that being killed hurt the poor animals; but she had never gone beyond thought, because it was very difficult to do that. Henry was thin, and distinctly pale; the girls were growing girls; Sunday would hardly seem Sunday without; besides, it did not do to believe what one read in the paper, and it would hurt her butcher's feelings—she was sure of that. Christmas, too, stood in the way. It was one's duty to be cheerful at that season, and Christmas would seem so strange without the cheery

butchers' shops and their appropriate holocaust. She had once read some pages of a disgraceful book that seemed going out of its way all the time to prove that *she* was just an animal—a dreadful book, not at all nice! As if she would eat those creatures if they were really her brother animals, and not just sent by God to feed her. No; at Christmas she felt especially grateful to the good God for his abundance, for all the good things he gave her to eat. For all these reasons she swallowed her scruples religiously. But it was very different in regard to dairy produce; for here there was, she knew, a real danger—not, indeed, to the animals, but to her family and herself. She was for once really proud of the thoroughness with which she dealt with that important nourishment—milk. None came into her house except in sealed bottles, with the name of the cow, spiritually speaking, on the outside. Some wag had suggested, in her hearing, that hens should be compelled to initial their eggs when they were delivered, as well as to put the dates on them. This she had thought ribald; one could go too far.

She was, before all things, an altruist; and in nothing more so than in her relations with her servants. If they did not do their duty, they went. It was the only way, she had found, to

really benefit them. Country girls and town girls, they passed from her in a stream, having learned, once for all, the standard that was expected from them. She christened and educated more servants, perhaps, than any one in the kingdom. The Marthas went first, being invariably dirty; the Marys and Susans lasted, on an average, perhaps four months, and then left for many reasons. Cook seldom hurried off before her year was over, because it was so difficult to get her before she came, and to replace her after she was gone; but when she did go it was in a gale of wind. The "day out" was, perhaps, the most fruitful source of disillusionment—girls of that class, no matter how much they protested their innocence, seemed utterly unable to keep away from man's society. It was only once a fortnight that she required them to exercise their self-control and self-respect in that regard, for on the other thirteen days she took care that they had no chance, suffering no male footstep in her basement. And yet—would you believe it?—on those fourteenth days, she was never able to be easy in her mind. But, however kindly and considerate she might be in her dealings with those of lowly station, she found ever the same ingratitude, the same incapacity, or, as she had reluctantly been forced to believe, the same de-

liberate unwillingness to grasp her point of view. It was as if they were always rudely saying to themselves: "What do you know of us? We wish you'd leave us alone!" The idea! As if she could, or would! As if it were not an almost sacred charge on her in her station, with the responsibilities that attached to it, to look after her poorer neighbours and see that they acted properly in their own interests. The drink, the immorality, the waste amongst the poor was notorious, and anything she could do to lessen it she always did, dismissing servants for the least slip, and never failing to point a moral. All that newfangled talk about the rich getting off the backs of the poor, about the law not being the same for both, about how easy it was to be moral and clean on two thousand a year, she put aside as silly. It was just the sort of thing that discontented people would say. In this view she was supported daily by her newspaper and herself, wherever she might be. No, no! If the well-to-do did not look after and control the poor, no one would, which was just what they would like. They were, in her estimation, incurable; but, so far as lay in her power, she would cure them, however painful it might be.

A religious woman, she rarely missed the morning, and seldom went to evening, service, feeling

that in daylight she could best set an example to her neighbours.

God knew her views on art, for she was not prodigal of them—her most remarkable pronouncement being delivered on hearing of the disappearance of the "Monna Lisa": "Oh, that dreadful woman! I remember her picture perfectly. Well, I'm glad she's gone. I thought she would some day." When asked why, she would only answer: "She gave me the creeps."

She read such novels as the library sent, to save her daughters from reading a second time those which did not seem to her suitable, and promptly sent them back. In this way she preserved purity in her home. As to purity outside the home, she made a point of never drawing Frederick's attention to female beauty; not that she felt she had any real reason to be alarmed, for she was a fine woman; but because men were so funny.

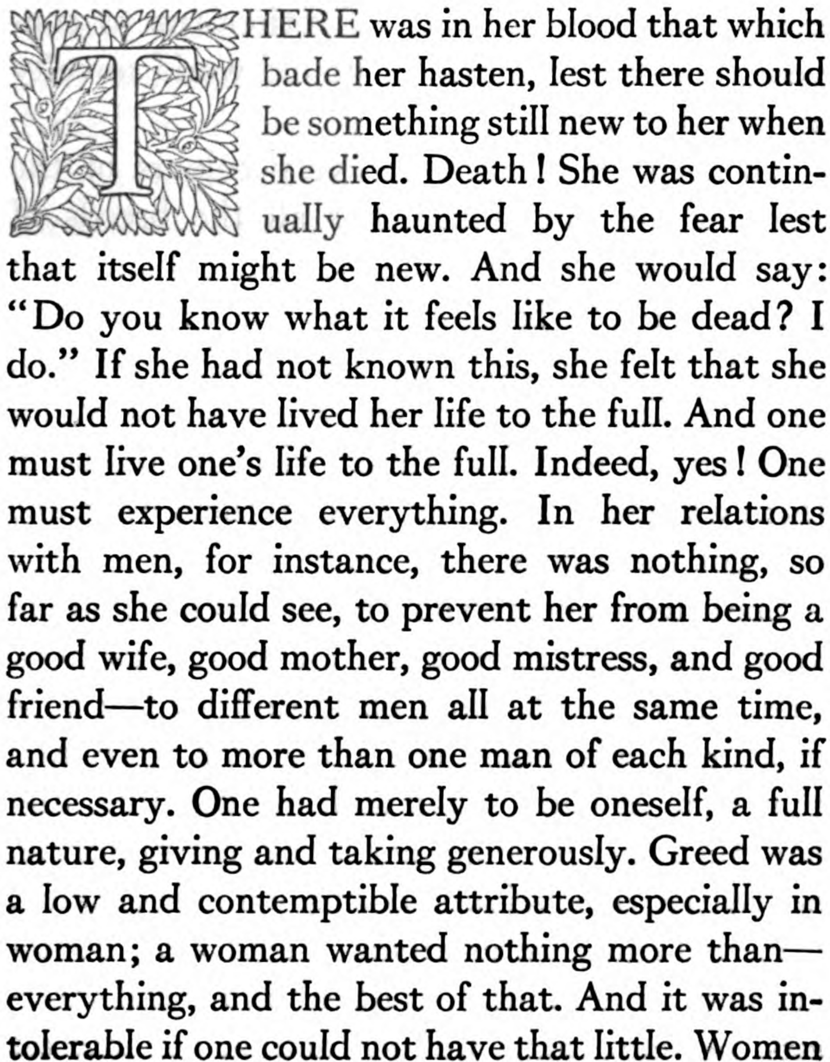
There were no things in life of which she would have so entirely disapproved, if she had known about them, as Greek ideals, for she profoundly distrusted any display of the bare limb, and fully realised that, whatever beauty may have meant to the Greeks, to her and George it meant something very different. To her, indeed, Nature was a "hussy," to be tied to the wheels of that char-

iot which she was going to keep as soon as motor-cars were just a little cheaper and really reliable.

It was often said that she was a vanishing type, but she knew better. Pedantic fools murmured that Ibsen had destroyed her, but she had not yet heard of him. Literary folk and artists, socialists and society people, might talk of types, and liberty, of brotherhood, and new ideas, and sneer at Mrs. Grundy. With what unmoved solidity she dwelt among them! They were but as gadflies, buzzing and darting on the fringes of her central bulk. To those flights, to that stinging she paid less attention than if she had been cased in leather. In the words of her favourite Tennyson: "They may come, and they may go, but—whatever you may think—I go on forever!"

VIII

THE LATEST THING



THERE was in her blood that which bade her hasten, lest there should be something still new to her when she died. Death! She was continually haunted by the fear lest that itself might be new. And she would say: "Do you know what it feels like to be dead? I do." If she had not known this, she felt that she would not have lived her life to the full. And one must live one's life to the full. Indeed, yes! One must experience everything. In her relations with men, for instance, there was nothing, so far as she could see, to prevent her from being a good wife, good mother, good mistress, and good friend—to different men all at the same time, and even to more than one man of each kind, if necessary. One had merely to be oneself, a full nature, giving and taking generously. Greed was a low and contemptible attribute, especially in woman; a woman wanted nothing more than—everything, and the best of that. And it was intolerable if one could not have that little. Women

had always been kept down. Not to be kept down was still, on the whole, new. Yet sometimes, after she had not been kept down rather violently, she would feel: Oh, the weariness! I shall throw it all up, and live on a shilling a day, like a sweated worker—that, at all events, will be new! She even sometimes dreamed of retirement to convent life—the freshness of its old-world novelty appealed to her.

To such an idealist, the very colours of the rainbow did not suffice, nor all the breeds of birds there were; her life was piled high with cages. Here she had had them one by one, borrowed their songs, relieved them of their plumes; then, finding that they no longer had any, let them go; for to look at things without possessing them was intolerable, but to keep them when she had got them even more so.

She often wondered how people could get along at all whose natures were not so full as hers. Life, she thought, must be so dull for the poor creatures, only doing one thing at a time, and that time so long. What with her painting, and her music, her dancing, her flying, her motoring, her writing of novels and poems, her love-making, maternal cares, entertaining, friendships, housekeeping, wifely duties, political and social interests, her gardening, talking, acting, her interest

in Russian linen and the woman's movement; what with travelling in new countries, listening to new preachers, lunching new novelists, discovering new dancers, taking lessons in Spanish; what with new dishes for dinner, new religions, new dogs, new dresses, new duties to new neighbours, and newer charities—life was so full that the moment it stood still and was simply old "life," it seemed to be no life at all.

She could not bear the amateur; feeling within herself some sacred fire that made her "an artist" whatever she took up—or dropped. She had a particular dislike, too, of machine-made articles; for her, personality must be deep-woven into everything—look at flowers, how wonderful they were in that way, growing quietly to perfection, each in its corner, and inviting butterflies to sip their dew! She knew, for she had been told it so often, that she was the crown of creation—the latest thing in women, who were, of course, the latest thing in creatures. There had never, till quite recently, been a woman like her, so awfully interested in so many things, so likely to be interested in so many more. She had flung open all the doors of life, and was so continually going out and coming in, that life had some considerable difficulty in catching a glimpse of her at all. Just as the cinematograph was the future

of the theatre, so was she the future of women, and in the words of the poet "prou' title." To sip at every flower before her wings closed; if necessary, to make new flowers to sip at. To smoke the whole box of cigarettes straight off, and in the last puff of smoke expire! And withal, no feverishness, only a certain reposeful and womanly febrility; a mere perpetual glancing from quick-sliding eyes, to see the next move, to catch the new movement—God bless it! And, mind you, a high sense of duty—perhaps a higher sense of duty than that of any woman who had gone before; a deep and intimate conviction that women had an immensity of leeway to make up, that their old, starved, stunted lives must be avenged, and that right soon. To enlarge the horizon—this was the sacred duty! No mere Boccaccian or Louis Quinze cult of pleasurable sensations; no crude, lolling, plutocratic dollery of a spoiled dame. No! the full, deep river of sensations nibbling each other's tails. Life was real, life was earnest, and time the essence of its contract.

To say that she had favourite books, plays, men, dogs, colours, was to do her but momentary justice. A deeper equity assigned her only one favourite—the next; and, for the sake of that one favourite, no Catharine, no Semiramis or

Messalina, could more swiftly dispose of all the others. With what avidity she sprang into its arms, drained its lips of kisses, looking hurriedly the while for its successor; for Heaven alone—she felt—knew what would happen to her if she finished drinking before she caught sight of that next necessary one.

And yet, now and again, time played her false, and she got through too soon. It was then that she realised the sensation of death. After the first terrible inanition, those moments lived without "living" would begin to assume a sort of preciousness, to acquire holy sensations of their own. "I am dead," she would say to herself: "I really am dead; I lie motionless, hearing, feeling, smelling, seeing, thinking nothing. I lie impalpable—yes, that is the word—completely impalpable; above me I can see the vast blue blue, and all around me the vast brown brown—it is something like what I remember of Egypt. And there is a kind of singing in my ears, that are really not ears now, a grey, thin sound, like—ah!—Maeterlinck, and a very faint honey smell, like—er—Omar Kháyyam. And I just move as a blade of grass moves in the wind. Yes, I am dead. It feels exactly like it." And a new exhilaration would seize her, for she felt that, in that sensation of death, she was living! At lunch, or it

might be dinner, she would tell her newest man, already past the prime of her interest, exactly what it felt like to be dead. "It's not really disagreeable," she would say; "it has its own flavour. You know, like Turkish coffee, just a touch of india-rubber in it—I mean the coffee." And the poor man would sneeze, and answer: "Yes, I know a little what you mean; asphodels, too; you get it in Greece. My only difficulty is that, if you *are* dead, you know—you—er—are." She would not admit that; it sounded true, but the man was getting stupid—to be dead like that would be the end of novelty, which was, to her, unthinkable.

Once, in a new book, she came across a little tale of a man who "lived" in Persia, of all heavenly places, frantically pursuing sensation. Entering one day the courtyard of his house, he heard a sigh behind him, and, looking round, saw his own spirit, apparently in the act of breathing its last. The little thing, dry and pearly-white as a seed-pod of "honesty," was opening and shutting its mouth, for all the world like an oyster trying to breathe. "What is it?" he said; "you don't seem well." And his spirit answered: "All right, all right! Don't distress yourself—it's nothing! I've just been crowded out. That's all. Good-bye!" And, with a wheeze, the little

thing went flat, fell onto the special blue tiles he had caused to be put down there, and lay still. He bent to pick it up, but it came off on his thumb in a smudge of grey-white powder.

This fancy was so new that it pleased her greatly, and she recommended the book to all her friends. The moral, of course, was purely Eastern, and had no applicability whatever to Western life, where, the more one did and expressed, the bigger and more healthy one's spirit grew—as witness what she always felt to be going on within herself. But next spring she changed the blue tiles of her Persian smoking-room, put in a birch-wood floor, and made it all Russian. This she did, however, merely because one new room a year was absolutely essential to her spirit.

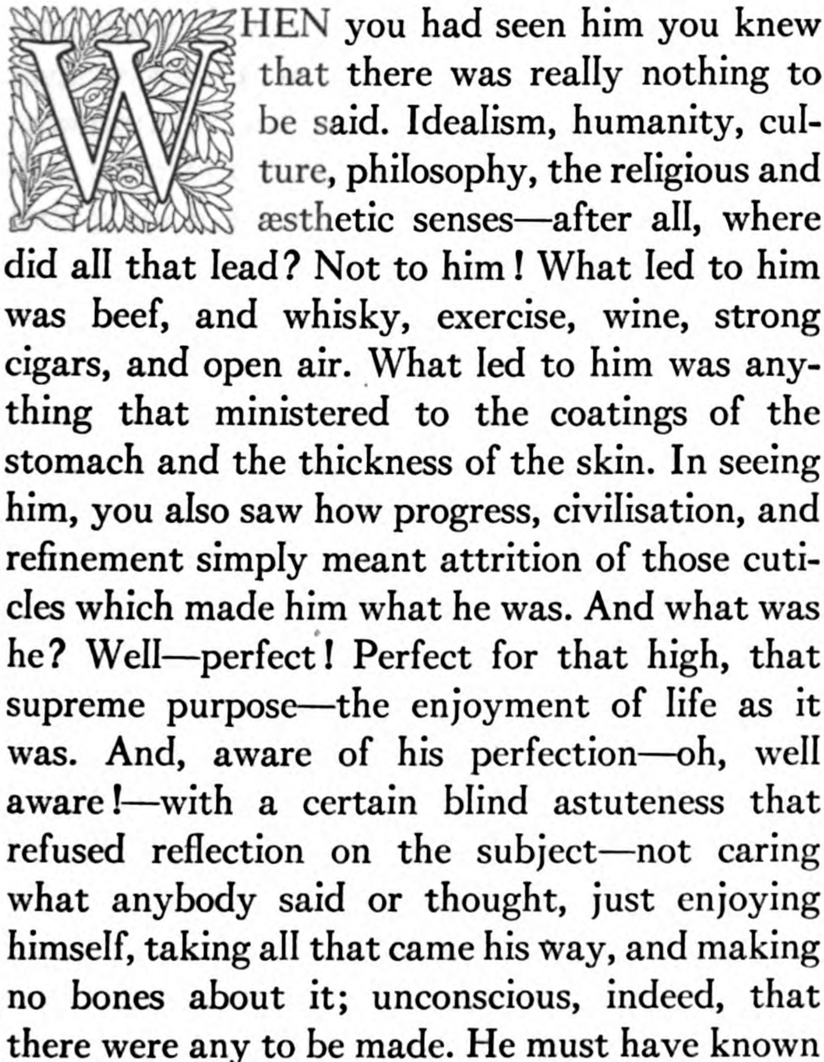
In her perpetual journey towards an ever-widening horizon of woman's life, she was not so foolish as to prize danger for its own sake—that was by no means her idea of adventure. That she ran some risks it would be idle to deny, but only when she had discerned the substantial advantage of a new sensation to be had out of adventures, not at all because they were necessary to keep her soul alive. She was, she felt, a Greek in spirit, only more so perhaps, having in her also something of America and the West End.

How she came to be at all was only known to

that age—whose daughter she undoubtedly was—an age which ran all the time, without any foolish notion where it was running to. There was no novelty in a destination, and no sensation to be had from sitting cross-legged in a tub of sunlight—not, at least, after you had done it once. *She* had been born to dance the moon down, to ragtime. The moon, the moon! Ah, yes! It was the one thing that had as yet eluded her avidity. That, and her own soul.

IX

THE PERFECT ONE



WHEN you had seen him you knew that there was really nothing to be said. Idealism, humanity, culture, philosophy, the religious and æsthetic senses—after all, where did all that lead? Not to him! What led to him was beef, and whisky, exercise, wine, strong cigars, and open air. What led to him was anything that ministered to the coatings of the stomach and the thickness of the skin. In seeing him, you also saw how progress, civilisation, and refinement simply meant attrition of those cuticles which made him what he was. And what was he? Well—perfect! Perfect for that high, that supreme purpose—the enjoyment of life as it was. And, aware of his perfection—oh, well aware!—with a certain blind astuteness that refused reflection on the subject—not caring what anybody said or thought, just enjoying himself, taking all that came his way, and making no bones about it; unconscious, indeed, that there were any to be made. He must have known

by instinct that thought, feeling, sympathy only made a man chickeny, for he avoided them in an almost sacred way. To be "hard" was his ambition, and he moved through life hitting things, especially balls—whether they reposed on little inverted tubs of sand, or moved swiftly towards him, he almost always hit them, and told people how he did it afterwards. He hit things, too, at a distance, through a tube, with a certain noise, and a pleasant swelling sensation under his fifth rib every time he saw them tumble, feeling that they had swollen still more under their fifth ribs and would not require to be hit again. He tried to hit things in the middle distance with little hooks which he flung out in front of him, and when they caught on, and he pulled out the result, he felt better. He was a sportsman, and not only in the field. He hit anyone who disagreed with him, and was very angry if they hit him back. He hit the money-market with his judgment when he could, and when he couldn't, he hit it with his tongue. And all the time he hit the Government. It was a perpetual comfort to him in those shaky times to have that Government to hit. Whatever turned out wrong, whatever turned out right—there it was! To give it one—two—three, and watch it crawl away, was wonderfully soothing. Of a summer evening,

sitting in the window of his club, having hit balls or bookies hard all day, how pleasant still to have that fellow Dash, and that fellow Blank, and all the ——y crew to hit still harder. He hit women, not, of course, with his fists, but with his philosophy. Women were made for the perfection of men; they had produced, nourished, and nursed him, and he now felt the necessity for them to comfort and satisfy him. When they had done that he felt no further responsibility in regard to them; to feel further responsibility was to be effeminate. The idea, for instance, that a spiritual feeling must underlie the physical was extravagant; and when a woman took another view, he took—if not actually, then metaphorically—a stick. He was almost Teutonic in that way. But the Government, the Government! Right and left, he hit it all the time. He had a rooted conviction that some day it would hit him back, and this naturally exasperated him. In the midst of danger to the game laws, of socialism, and the woman's movement, the only hope, almost the only comfort, lay in hitting the Government. For socialists were getting so near that he could only hit them now in clubs, music-halls, and other quite safe places; and the woman's movement might be trusted implicitly to hit itself. Thus, in the world arena there was nothing left

but that godsend. Always a fair man, and of thoroughly good heart, he, of course, gave it credit for the same amount of generosity and goodwill that he felt present in his own composition. There was no extravagance in that; and any man who gave it more he deemed an ass.

He had heard of "the people," and, indeed, at times had seen and smelt them; it had sufficed. Some persons, he knew, were concerned about their condition and all that; but what good it would do him to share that concern he could not see. Fellows spoke of them as "poor devils," and so forth; to his mind they were "pretty good rotters," most of them—especially the working-man, who wanted something for nothing all the time, and grumbled when he got it. The more you gave him the more he wanted, and, if he were this —— Government, instead of coddling the blighters up he would hit them one, and have done with it. Insurance, indeed; pensions; land reform; minimum wage—it was a bit too thick! They would soon be putting the beggars into glass cases, and labelling them "This side up."

Sometimes he dreamed of the time when he would have to ride for God and the king. But he strongly repelled, of course, any suggestion that he had been brought up to a belief in "caste." At his school he had once kicked a small

scion of the royal family; this heroic action had dispersed in his mind once for all any notion that he was a snob. "Caste," indeed! There was no such thing in England nowadays. Had he not sung "The Leather Bottel" to an audience of dirty people in his school mission-hall, and—rather enjoyed it. It was not his fault that Labor was not satisfied. It was all those professional agitators, confound them! He himself was opposed to setting class against class. It was, however, ridiculous to imagine that he was going to hobnob with or take interest in people who weren't clean, who wore clothes with a disagreeable smell—people, moreover, who, in the most blatant way, showed him continually that they wanted what he had got. No, no! there were limits. Clean, at all events, anyone could be—it was the *sine quâ non.* What with clothes, a man to look after them, baths, and so on, he himself spent at least two hundred a year on being clean, and even took risks with the thickness of his skin, from the way he rubbed and scrubbed it. A man could not be hard and healthy if he wasn't clean, and if the blighters were only hard and healthy they would not be bleating about their wants.

One could see him perhaps to the best advantage in lands like India, or Egypt, striding in the

early morn over the purlieus of the desert, with his loping, strenuous step, scurried after by what looked like little dark and anxious women, carrying his golf-clubs; his eyes, with their look of outfacing Death, fixed on the ball that he had just hit so hard, intent on overtaking it and hitting it even harder next time. Did he at these times of worship ever pause to contemplate that vast and ancient plain where, in the distance, pyramids, those creatures of eternity, seemed to tremble in the sun haze? Did he ever feel an ecstatic wonder at the strange cry of immemorial peoples far-travelling the desert air; or look and marvel at those dark and anxious little children of old civilisations who pattered after him? Did he ever feel the majesty of those vast lonely sands and that vast lonely sky? Not he! He d——d well hit the ball, until his skin began to act; then, going in, took a bath, and rubbed himself. At such moments he felt perhaps more truly religious than at any other, for one naturally could not feel so fit and good on Sundays, with the necessity it imposed for extra eating, smoking, kneeling, and other sedentary occupations. Indeed, he had become perhaps a little distracted in religious matters. There seemed to be things in the Bible about turning the other cheek, and lilies of the field, about rich men and camels, and

the poor in spirit, which did not go altogether with his religion. Still, of course, one remained in the English church, hit things, and hoped for the best.

Once his convictions nearly took a toss. It was on a ship, not as classy as it might have been, so that he was compelled to talk to people that he would not otherwise perhaps have noticed. Amongst such was a fellow with a short beard, coming from Morocco. This person was lean and brown, his eyes were extremely clear; he held himself very straight, and looked fit to jump over the moon. It seemed obvious that he hit a lot of things. One questioned him, therefore, with some interest as to what he had been hitting. The fellow had been hitting nothing, absolutely nothing. How on earth, then, did he keep himself so fit? Walking, riding, fasting, swimming, climbing mountains, writing books; hitting neither the Government nor golf balls! Never to hit anything; write books, tolerate the Government, and look like that! It was "not done." And the odd thing was, the fellow didn't seem to know or care whether he was fit or not. All the four days that the voyage lasted, with this infernal healthy fellow under his very nose, he suffered. There was nothing to hit on board, and he himself did not feel very fit. However, on reaching South-

ampton and losing sight of his travelling acquaintance he soon regained his equanimity.

He often wondered what he would do when he passed the age of fifty; and felt more and more that he would either have to go into Parliament or take up the duties of a county magistrate. After that age there were certain kinds of balls and beasts that could no longer be hit with impunity, and if one was at all of an active turn of mind one must have substitutes. Marriage, no doubt, would do something for him, but not enough; his was a strenuous nature, and he intended to remain "hard" unto the end. To combine that with service to his country, especially if, incidentally, he could hit socialism and poachers, radicals, loafers, and the income tax—this seemed to him an ideal well worthy of his philosophy and life, so far. And with this in mind he lived on, his skin thickening, growing ever more and more perfect, more and more impervious to thought and feeling, to æstheticism, sympathy, and all the elements destructive of perfection. And thus—when his time has come there is every hope that he may die.

X

THE COMPETITOR

E was given that way almost from his nursery days, for he could not even dress without racing his little brother in the doing up of little buttons, and being upset if he got one little button behind. At the age of eight he climbed all the trees of his father's garden and, arriving at their tops, felt a pang because the creatures left off so abruptly that he could not get any higher. He wrestled with anybody who did not mind rolling on the floor; and stayed awake once all night because he heard that one of his cousins was coming next day and was a year older than himself. It was not that he desired to see this cousin, to welcome, or give him a good time; he simply designed to race him in the kitchen-garden, and to wrestle with him afterwards. It would be grand, he thought, to bump the head of someone a year older than himself. The cousin, however, was "scratched" at the last moment. It was a blow. At the age of ten he cut his head open against a swing, and

so far forgot himself as to cry when he saw the blood flowing. To have missed such an opportunity of being superior to other small boys made an indelible mark on his soul, for, though he had not cried from pain, he had from fright, and felt he might have beaten both emotions, if only he had had proper warning.

His first term at school he came out top, after a terrific struggle; there was one other boy in the class. And term after term he went on coming out top, or very near it. He never knew what he was learning, but he knew that he beat other boys. He ran all the races he could, and played all the games; not because he enjoyed them, but because unless you did you could not win. He was considered almost a prize specimen.

He went to college in an exhausted condition, and for two years devoted himself to dandyism, designing to be the coolest, slackest, best-dressed man up. He almost was. But as that day approached when one must either beat or be beaten in learning by one's contemporaries, a fearful feeling beset him, and he rushed off to a crammer. For a whole year he poured the crammer's notes into his memory. What they were all about he had no notion, but his memory retained them just over that hot week when he sat writing for his life, twice a day. He would have received a

First, had not an examiner who did not understand that examinations are simply held to determine who can beat whom, asked him in the living voice a question, to answer which required a knowledge of why there was an answer. He came down exhausted, and ate his dinners for the Bar. It was an occupation at which he could achieve no distinction save that of eating them faster than any other student; and for two whole years he merely devoted himself to trying to be the best amateur actor and the best shot in the land. His method of acting was based on nothing so flat as identification with the character he personified, but on the amount of laughter and applause that he could get in excess of that bestowed on any other member of the company. Nor did he shoot birds because he loved them, like a true sportsman, but because it was a pleasure to him to feel each day that he had shot or was going to shoot more than anyone who was shooting with him.

The time had now come for him to embrace his profession, and he did so like a true Briton, with his eye ever on the future. He perceived from the first that this particular race was longer than any race he had ever started for, and he began slowly, with a pebble in his mouth, husbanding his wind. The whole thing was extremely

dry and extremely boring, but of course one had to get there before all those other fellows. And round and round he ran, increasing his speed almost imperceptibly, soon beginning to have his eye on the half-dozen who seemed dangerously likely to get there before him if he did not mind that eye. It cannot be said that he enjoyed his work, or cared for the money it brought him, for, what with getting through his day, and thinking of those other fellows who might be forging ahead of him, he had no time to spend money, or even to give it away. And so it began rolling up. One day, however, perceiving that he had quite a lot, the thought came to him that he ought to do something with it. And happening soon after to go into a picture-gallery, he bought a picture. He had not had it long before it seemed to him better than the picture of a friend who rather went in for them; and he thought, 'I could easily beat him if I gave myself to it a little.' And he did. It was fascinating to perceive, each time he bought, that his taste had improved, and was getting steadily ahead of his friend's taste; and, indeed, not only of his friend's, but of that of other people. He felt that soon he would have better taste than anybody, and he bought and bought. It was not that he cared for the pictures, for he really had not

time or mind to give to them—set as he was on reaching eminence; but he dreamed of leaving them to the National Gallery as a monument to his taste, and final proof of superiority to his friend, after they were both gone.

About this time he took silk, sacrificing nearly half of his income. He would have preferred to wait longer, had he not perceived that if he did wait, his friends —— and —— and —— —— would be taking silk before him. And, since he meant to be a judge first, this must naturally be guarded against. The prospective loss of so much income made him for a moment restful and expansive, as if he felt that he had been pushed almost too far by his competitive genius; and so he found time to marry—it being the commencement of the long vacation. For six weeks he hardly thought of his friends —— and —— and —— ——, but near the end of September he was shocked back into a more normal frame of mind by the news that they also had been offered and had taken silk. It behoved him, he felt, to put his wife behind him and go back into harness. It would be just like those fellows to get ahead of him, if they could; and he curtailed his honeymoon by quite three weeks. Not two years, however, elapsed before it became clear to him that to keep his place he must enter Parliament. And

against his own natural feelings, against even the inclinations of his country, he secured a seat at the general election and began sitting. What, then, was his chagrin to find that his friend ——, and his friend ——, and even his friend —— ——, had also secured seats, and were sitting when he got there! What with the courts, and what with "the House," he became lean and very yellow; and his wife complained. He determined to give her a child every year to keep her quiet; for he felt that he must have perfect peace in his home surroundings if he were to maintain his position in the great life race for which he had started, knowing that his friends —— and —— and —— —— would never hesitate to avail themselves of his ill health, to beat him. None of those wretched fellows were having so many children. He did not find his work in Parliament congenial; it seemed to him unreal. For he could not get his mind—firmly fixed on himself and the horizon—to believe that all those little measures which he was continually passing would benefit people with whose lives he really had not time or inclination to be familiar. When one had got up, prepared two cases, had breakfast, walked down to the courts, sat there from half past ten to four, walked to "the House," sat there a little longer than his friend —— —— (the worst of

them), spoken if his friend —— had spoken, or if he thought his friend —— were going to speak, had dinner, prepared two cases, kissed his wife, mentally compared his last picture with that last one of his friend's, had a glass of barley-water, and gone to bed—when one had done all this, there really was not time for living his own life, much less anyone else's. He sometimes thought he would have to give up doing so much; but that, of course, was out of the question, seeing that his friends would at once shoot ahead. He took "Vitogen" instead. They used his photograph, with the words, "It does wonders with me," coming out of his mouth, and on the opposite page they used a photograph of his friend —— ——, with the words, "I take a glass a day, and revel in it," coming out of his. On discovering this he increased the amount at some risk to two glasses, determined not to be outdone by that fellow.

He sometimes wondered whether, in the army, the church, the stock exchange, or in literature, he would not have had a more restful life; for he would by no means have admitted that he carried within himself the microbe of his own fate.

His natural love of beauty, for instance, inspired him when he saw a sunset, or a mountain,

or even a sea, with the thought: How jolly it would be to look at it! But he had gradually become so reconciled to knowing he had not time for this that he never did. But if he had heard by any chance that his friend —— —— did find time to contemplate such natural beauties, he would certainly have contrived somehow to contemplate them too.

As the time approached for being made a judge he compared himself more and more carefully with his friends —— and —— and —— ——. If they were appointed before him, it would be very serious for his prospects of ultimate preeminence. And it was with a certain relief, tempered with sorrow, that he heard one summer morning that his friend —— had fallen seriously ill, and was not expected to recover. He was assiduous in the expression of an anxiety that was quite genuine. His friend —— died as the courts rose. And all through that long vacation he thought continually of poor ——, and of his career cut so prematurely short. It was then that the idea came to him of capping his efforts by writing a book. He chose for subject, "The Evils of Competition in the Modern State," and devoted to it every minute he could spare during autumn months, fortunately bereft of Parliamentary duties. It would just, he felt, make the

difference between himself and his friends —— and —— ——, to a government essentially favourable to literary men. He finished it at Christmas, and arranged for a prompt publication. It was with a certain natural impatience that he read, two days later, of the approaching issue of a book by his friend —— ——, entitled, "Joy of Life, or the Cult of the Moment." What on earth the fellow was about to rush into print and on such a subject he was at a loss to understand! The book came out a week before his own. He read the reviews rather feverishly, for they were favourable. What to do now to recover his lead he hardly knew. If he had not been married it might have been possible to arrange something in that line with the daughter of an important personage; as it was, there was nothing for it but to part with his pictures to the National Gallery by way of a loan. And this he did, to the chagrin of his wife, about the middle of May. On the 1st of June he read in his Sunday paper that his friend —— —— had given his library outright to the British Museum. Some relief to the strain of his anxiety, however, was afforded in July by the unexpected accession of his friend —— to a peerage, through the death of a cousin. The estate attached was considerable. He felt that this friend at all events would not continue

to struggle; he would surely recognise that he was removed from active life. His premonition was correct; and his friend —— —— and himself were left to fight it out alone.

That judge who had so long been expected to quit his judgeship did so for another world in the fourth week of the long vacation.

He hastened back to town at once. This was one of the most crucial moments of a crucial career. If appointed, he would be the youngest judge. But his friend —— —— was of the same age, the same politics, the same calibre in every way, and more robust. During those weeks of waiting, therefore, he grew perceptibly greyer. His joy knew only the bounds of a careful concealment, when, at the beginning of October, he was appointed a judge of the High Court; for it was not till the following morning that he learned that his friend —— —— had also been appointed, the Government having decided to add one to the number of his Majesty's judges. Which of them had been made the extra judge he neither dared nor cared to inquire; but, setting his teeth, entered forthwith on his duties.

It cannot be pretended that he liked them; to like them one would have to take a profound, and, as it were, amateurish interest in equity and the lives of one's fellow men. For this, of course,

he had not time, having to devote all his energies to not having his judgments reversed, and watching the judgments of his friend —— ——. In the first year that fellow was upset in the Court of Appeal three times oftener than himself, and it came as a blow when the House of Lords so restored him that they came out equal. In other respects, of course, the life was something of a rest after that which he had led hitherto, and he watched himself carefully lest he might deteriorate, and be tempted to enjoy himself, steadily resisting every effort on the part of his friends and family to draw him into recreations other than those of dining out, playing golf, and improving his acquaintanceship with that Law of which he would require a perfect knowledge when he became Lord Chancellor. He never could quite make up his mind whether to be glad or sorry that his friend —— —— did not confine himself entirely to this curriculum.

At about this epoch he became so extremely moderate in his politics that neither party knew to which of them he belonged. It was a period of uncertainty when no man could say in whose hands power would be in, say, five or ten years' time, and instinctively he felt that he must look ahead. A moderate man stood perhaps the greater chance of steady and perpetual prefer-

ment, and he felt moderate, now that the spur of a necessary political activity was removed. It was a constant source of uneasiness to him that his friend —— —— had become so dark a horse that one could find out nothing about his political convictions; people, indeed, went so far as to say that the beggar had none.

He had not been a judge four years when an epidemic of influenza swept off three of his Majesty's judges, and sent one mad; and almost imperceptibly he found himself sitting with his friend —— —— in the Court of Appeal. Having the fellow there under his eye day by day, he was able to study him, and noted with satisfaction that, though more robust, he was certainly of full and choleric temperament, and not too careful of himself. At once he began taking extra care of his own health, giving up wine, tobacco, and any other pleasure that he had left. For three years they sat there side by side, almost mechanically differing in their judgments; and then one morning the Prime Minister went and made his friend —— —— Lord Chief Justice, and himself only Master of the Rolls. The shock was very great. After a week's indisposition, he reset his teeth and decided to struggle on; his friend —— —— was not Lord Chancellor yet! Two more years passed, during which he unwill-

ingly undermined his health by dining constantly in the highest social and political circles, and delivering longer and weightier judgments every day. His wife and children, who still had access to him at times, watched him with anxiety.

One morning they found him pacing up and down the dining-room with *The Times* newspaper in his hand, and every mark of cerebral excitement. His friend —— —— had made a speech at a certain banquet, in which he had hit the Government a nasty knock. It was now, of course, only a question of whether they would retain office till the Lord Chancellor, who was very shaky, dropped off. He dropped off in June, and they buried him in Westminster Abbey; his friend —— —— and himself being chief mourners. In the same week the Government was defeated. The state of his mind can now not well be imagined. In one week he lost five pounds that could not be spared. He stopped losing weight when the Government decided to hang on till the end of the session. On the 15th of July the Prime Minister sent for him, and offered him the Chancellorship. He accepted it, after first drawing attention to the superior claims of his friend —— ——. That evening, in the bosom of his family, he sat silent. A little smile played three times on his worn lips, and now and again his thin hand

smoothed the parallel folds in his cheeks. His youngest daughter, moving to the bell behind his revered and beloved presence, heard him suddenly mutter, and bending hastily caught the precious words: "Pipped him on the post, by gum!"

He took up his final honours with the utmost ceremony. From that moment it was almost too noticeable how his powers declined. It was as if he had felt that, having won the race, he had nothing left to live for. Indeed, he only waited till his friend —— —— had received a slight stroke before, under doctor's orders, he laid down office. He dragged on for several years, writing his memoirs, but without interest in life; till one day, being drawn in his Bath-chair down the esplanade at Margate, he was brought to a standstill by another chair being drawn in the opposite direction. Letting his eye rest wearily on the occupant, he recognised his friend —— ——. How the fellow had changed; but not in nature, for he quavered out at once: "Hallo! It's you! By George! You look jolly bad!" Hearing those words, seeing that paralytic smile, a fire seemed suddenly relit within him. Compressing his lips, he answered nothing, and dug his Bath-chair man in the back. From that moment he regained his interest in life. If he could not outlive his friend

—— —— it would be odd! And he set himself to do it, thinking of nothing else by day or night, and sending daily to inquire how his friend —— —— was. The fellow lived till New Year's Day, and died at two in the morning. They brought him the news at nine. A smile lighted up his parched and withered face; his old hands, clenched on the feeding-cup, relaxed; he fell back—dead. The shock of his old friend's death, they said, had been too much for him.

1913.

GROTESQUES

GROTESQUES

Κυνηδόν

I

HE Angel Æthereal, on his official visit to the Earth in 1947, paused between the Bank and the Stock Exchange to smoke a cigarette and scrutinise the passers-by.

"How they swarm," he said, "and with what seeming energy—in such an atmosphere! Of what can they be made?"

"Of money, sir," replied his dragoman; "in the past, the present, or the future. Stocks are booming. The barometer of joy stands very high. Nothing like it has been known for thirty years; not, indeed, since the days of the Great Skirmish."

"There is, then, a connection between joy and money?" remarked the Angel, letting smoke dribble through his chiselled nostrils.

"Such is the common belief; though to prove it might take time. I will, however, endeavour to do this if you desire it, sir."

"I certainly do," said the Angel; "for a less joyous-looking crowd I have seldom seen. Be-

tween every pair of brows there is a furrow, and no one whistles."

"You do not understand," returned his dragoman; "nor indeed is it surprising, for it is not so much the money as the thought that some day you need no longer make it which causes joy."

"If that day is coming to all," asked the Angel, "why do they not look joyful?"

"It is not so simple as that, sir. To the majority of these persons that day will never come, and many of them know it—these are called clerks; to some amongst the others, even, it will not come—these will be called bankrupts; to the rest it will come, and they will live at Wimblehurst and other islands of the blessed, when they have become so accustomed to making money that to cease making it will be equivalent to boredom, if not torture, or when they are so old that they can but spend it in trying to modify the disabilities of age."

"What price joy, then?" said the Angel, raising his eyebrows. "For that, I fancy, is the expression you use?"

"I perceive, sir," answered his dragoman, "that you have not yet regained your understanding of the human being, and especially of the breed which inhabits this country. Illusion is what we are after. Without our illusions we

might just as well be angels or Frenchmen, who pursue at all events to some extent the sordid reality known as '*le plaisir*,' or enjoyment of life. In pursuit of illusion we go on making money and furrows in our brows, for the process is wearing. I speak, of course, of the bourgeoisie or Patriotic classes; for the practice of the Laborious is different, though their illusions are the same."

"How?" asked the Angel briefly.

"Why, sir, both hold the illusion that they will one day be joyful through the possession of money; but whereas the Patriotic expect to make it through the labour of the Laborious, the Laborious expect to make it through the labour of the Patriotic."

"Ha, ha!" said the Angel.

"Angels may laugh," replied his dragoman, "but it is a matter to make men weep."

"You know your own business best," said the Angel, "I suppose."

"Ah! sir, if we did, how pleasant it would be. It is frequently my fate to study the countenances and figures of the population, and I find the joy which the pursuit of illusion brings them is insufficient to counteract the confined, monotonous and worried character of their lives."

"They are certainly very plain," said the Angel.

"They are," sighed his dragoman, "and getting plainer every day. Take for instance that one," and he pointed to a gentleman going up the steps. "Mark how he is built. The top of his grizzled head is narrow, the bottom of it broad. His body is short and thick and square; his legs even thicker, and his feet turn out too much; the general effect is almost pyramidal. Again, take this one," and he indicated a gentleman coming down the steps, "you could thread his legs and body through a needle's eye, but his head would defy you. Mark his boiled eyes, his flashing spectacles, and the absence of all hair. Disproportion, sir, has become endemic."

"Can this not be corrected?" asked the Angel.

"To correct a thing," answered his dragoman, "you must first be aware of it, and these are not; no more than they are aware that it is disproportionate to spend six days out of every seven in a counting-house or factory. Man, sir, is the creature of habit, and when his habits are bad, man is worse."

"I have a headache," said the Angel; "the noise is more deafening than it was when I was here in 1910."

"Yes, sir; since then we have had the Great Skirmish, an event which furiously intensified money-making. We, like every other people, have

ever since been obliged to cultivate the art of making five out of two-and-two. The progress of civilisation has been considerably speeded up thereby, and everything but man has benefited; even horses, for they are no longer overloaded and overdriven up Tower Hill or any other."

"How is that," asked the Angel, "if the pressure of work is greater?"

"Because they are extinct," said his dragoman; "entirely superseded by electric and air traction, as you see."

"You appear to be inimical to money," the Angel interjected, with a penetrating look. "Tell me, would you really rather own one shilling than five and sixpence?"

"Sir," replied his dragoman, "you are putting the candidate before the caucus, as the saying is. For money is nothing but the power to purchase what one wants. You should rather be inquiring what I want."

"Well, what do you?" said the Angel.

"To my thinking," answered his dragoman, "instead of endeavouring to increase money when we found ourselves so very bankrupt, we should have endeavoured to decrease our wants. The path of real progress, sir, is the simplification of life and desire till we have dispensed even with trousers and wear a single clean garment

reaching to the knees; till we are content with exercising our own limbs on the solid earth; the eating of simple food we have grown ourselves; the hearing of our own voices, and tunes on oaten straws; the feel on our faces of the sun and rain and wind; the scent of the fields and woods; the homely roof, and the comely wife unspoiled by heels, pearls, and powder; the domestic animals at play, wild birds singing, and children brought up to colder water than their fathers. It should have been our business to pursue health till we no longer needed the interior of the chemist's shop, the optician's store, the hairdresser's, the corset-maker's, the thousand and one emporiums which patch and prink us, promoting our fancies and disguising the ravages which modern life makes in our figures. Our ambition should have been to need so little that, with our present scientific knowledge, we should have been able to produce it very easily and quickly, and have had abundant leisure and sound nerves and bodies wherewith to enjoy nature, art, and the domestic affections. The tragedy of man, sir, is his senseless and insatiate curiosity and greed, together with his incurable habit of neglecting the present for the sake of a future which will never come."

"You speak like a book," said the Angel.

"I wish I did," retorted his dragoman, "for no book I am able to procure enjoins us to stop this riot, and betake ourselves to the pleasurable simplicity which alone can save us."

"You would be bored stiff in a week," said the Angel.

"We should, sir," replied his dragoman, "because from our schooldays we are brought up to be acquisitive, competitive, and restless. Consider the baby in the perambulator, absorbed in contemplating the heavens and sucking its own thumb. Existence, sir, should be like that."

"A beautiful metaphor," said the Angel.

"As it is, we do but skip upon the hearse of life."

"You would appear to be of those whose motto is: 'Try never to leave things as you find them,'" observed the Angel.

"Ah, sir!" responded his dragoman, with a sad smile, "the part of a dragoman is rather ever to try and find things where he leaves them."

"Talking of that," said the Angel dreamily, "when I was here in 1910, I bought some Marconi's for the rise. What are they at now?"

"I cannot tell you," replied his dragoman in a deprecating voice, "but this I will say: Inventors are not only the benefactors but the curses of mankind, and will be so long as we do not find

a way of adapting their discoveries to our very limited digestive powers. The chronic dyspepsia of our civilisation, due to the attempt to swallow every pabulum which ingenuity puts before it, is so violent that I sometimes wonder whether we shall survive until your visit in 1984."

"Ah!" said the Angel, pricking his ears; "you really think there is a chance?"

"I do indeed," his dragoman answered gloomily. "Life is now one long telephone call—and what's it all about? A tour in darkness! A rattling of wheels under a sky of smoke! A never-ending game of poker!"

"Confess," said the Angel, "that you have eaten something which has not agreed with you?"

"It is so," answered his dragoman; "I have eaten of modernity, the damndest dish that was ever set to lips. Look at those fellows," he went on, "busy as ants from nine o'clock in the morning to seven in the evening. And look at their wives!"

"Ah! yes," said the Angel cheerily; "let us look at their wives," and with three strokes of his wings he passed to Oxford Street.

"Look at them!" repeated his dragoman, "busy as ants from ten o'clock in the morning to five in the evening."

"Plain is not the word for *them*," said the Angel sadly. "What are they after, running in and out of these shop-holes?"

"Illusion, sir. The romance of business there, the romance of commerce here. They have got into these habits and, as you know, it is so much easier to get in than to get out. Would you like to see one of their homes?"

"No, no," said the Angel, starting back and coming into contact with a lady's hat. "Why do they have them so large?" he asked, with a certain irritation.

"In order that they may have them small next season," replied his dragoman. "The future, sir; the future! The cycle of beauty and eternal hope, and, incidentally, *the good of trade*. Grasp that phrase and you will have no need for further inquiry, and probably no inclination."

"One could get American sweets in here, I guess," said the Angel, entering.

II

"And where would you wish to go to-day, sir?" asked his dragoman of the Angel who was moving his head from side to side like a dromedary in the Haymarket.

"I should like," the Angel answered, "to go into the country."

"The country!" returned his dragoman, doubtfully. "You will find very little to see there."

"Natheless," said the Angel, spreading his wings.

"These," gasped his dragoman, after a few breathless minutes, "are the Chilterns—they will serve; any part of the country is now the same. Shall we descend?"

Alighting on what seemed to be a common, he removed the cloud moisture from his brow, and shading his eyes with his hand, stood peering into the distance on every side. "As I thought," he said; "there has been no movement since I brought the Prime here in 1944; we shall have some difficulty in getting lunch."

"A wonderfully peaceful spot," said the Angel.

"True," said his dragoman. "We might fly sixty miles in any direction and not see a house in repair."

"Let us!" said the Angel. They flew a hundred, and alighted again.

"Same here!" said his dragoman. "This is Leicestershire. Note the rolling landscape of wild pastures."

"I am getting hungry," said the Angel. "Let us fly again."

"I have told you, sir," remarked his dragoman,

while they were flying, "that we shall have the greatest difficulty in finding any inhabited dwelling in the country. Had we not better alight at Blackton or Bradleeds?"

"No," said the Angel. "I have come for a day in the fresh air."

"Would bilberries serve?" asked his dragoman; "for I see a man gathering them."

The Angel closed his wings, and they dropped on to a moor close to an aged man.

"My worthy wight," said the Angel, "we are hungry. Would you give us some of your bilberries?"

"Wot oh!" ejaculated the ancient party; "never 'eard yer comin'. Been flyin' by wireless, 'ave yer? Got an observer, I see," he added, jerking his grizzled chin at the dragoman. "Strike me, it's the good old dyes o' the Gryte Skirmish over agyne."

"Is this," asked the Angel, whose mouth was already black with bilberries, "the dialect of rural England?"

"I will interrogate him, sir," said his dragoman, "for in truth I am at a loss to account for the presence of a man in the country." He took the old person by his last button and led him a little apart. Returning to the Angel, who had finished the bilberries, he whispered:

"It is as I thought. This is the sole survivor of the soldiers settled on the land at the conclusion of the Great Skirmish. He lives on berries and birds who have died a natural death."

"I fail to understand," answered the Angel. "Where is all the rural population, where the mansions of the great, the thriving farmer, the contented peasant, the labourer about to have his minimum wage, the Old, the Merrie England of 1910?"

"That," responded his dragoman somewhat dramatically, extending his hand towards the old man, "*that* is the rural population, and he a cockney hardened in the Great Skirmish, or he could never have stayed the course."

"What!" said the Angel; "is no food grown in all this land!"

"Not a cabbage," replied his dragoman; "not a mustard and cress—outside the towns, that is."

"I perceive," said the Angel, "that I have lost touch with much that is of interest. Give me, I pray, a brief sketch of the agricultural movement."

"Why, sir," replied his dragoman, "the agricultural movement in this country since the days of the Great Skirmish, when all were talking of resettling the land, may be summed up in two

words: 'Town Expansion.' In order to make this clear to you, however, I must remind you of the political currents of the past thirty years. You will not recollect that during the Great Skirmish, beneath the seeming absence of politics, there were germinating the Parties of the future. A secret but resolute intention was forming in all minds to immolate those who had played any part in politics before and during the important world-tragedy which was then being enacted, especially such as continued to hold portfolios, or persisted in asking questions in the House of Commons, as it was then called. It was not that people held them to be responsible, but nerves required soothing, and there is no anodyne, as you know, sir, equal to human sacrifice. The politician was, as one may say! 'off.' No sooner, of course, was peace declared than the first real General Election was held, and it was with a certain chagrin that the old Parties found themselves in the soup. The Parties which had been forming beneath the surface swept the country; one called itself the Patriotic, and was called by its opponents the Prussian Party; the other called itself the Laborious, and was called by its opponents the Loafing Party. Their representatives were nearly all new men. After the first flush of peace, with which the human mind ever asso-

ciates plenty, and its peculiar Governments, they came out on such an even keel that no Cabinet could pass anything at all. Since, however, it was imperative to find the interest on a National Debt of £8,000,000,000, further elections were needed. By this time, though the word Peace remained, the word Plenty had already long vanished; and the Laborious Party, which, having much less to tax, felt that it could tax more freely, found itself in an overwhelming majority. You will be curious to hear, sir, of what elements this Party was composed. Its solid bulk were the returned soldiers, and the other manual workers of the country; but to this main body there was added a rump, of pundits, men of excellent intentions, brains, and principles, such as in old days had been known as Radicals and advanced Liberals. These had joined out of despair, feeling that otherwise their very existence was jeopardised. To this collocation—and to one or two other circumstances, as you will presently see, sir—the doom of the land must be traced. Now, the Laborious Party, apart from its rump, on which it would or could not sit—we shall never know now—had views about the resettlement of the land not far divergent from those held by the Patriotic Party, and they proceeded to put a scheme into operation, which, for perhaps a

year, seemed to have a prospect of success. Many hopeful aspirants were established in favourable localities, and there was even a disposition to place the country on a self-sufficing basis in regard to food. But they had not been in power eighteen months when their rump—which, as I have told you, contained nearly all their principles—had a severe attack of these. 'Free Trade,'—which, say what you will, follows the line of least resistance and is based on the 'good of trade'—was, they perceived, endangered, and they began to agitate against the revival of bonuses and preferential treatment of a pampered industry. The bonus on corn was in consequence finally defeated, and in lieu thereof the system of small holdings was extended—on paper. At the same time the somewhat stunning taxation which had been placed upon the wealthy began to cause the break-up of landed estates. As the general bankruptcy and exhaustion of Europe became more and more apparent the notion of danger from future war began to seem increasingly remote, and the 'good of trade' became again the one object before every British eye. Food from overseas was cheapening once more. The inevitable occurred. Country mansions became a drug in the market, farmers farmed at a loss; small holders went bust daily, and emigrated; agricultural labourers

sought the towns. Thereon the Laborious Party, who had carried the taxation of their opponents to a pitch beyond the power of human endurance, got what the racy call 'the knock,' and the four years which followed witnessed the bitterest internecine struggle within the memory of every journalist. In the course of this strife emigration increased and the land emptied rapidly. The final victory of the Laborious Party saw them, still propelled by their rump, committed, among other things, to a pure town policy. They have never been out of power since; the result you see. Food is now entirely brought from overseas, largely by submarine and air service, in tabloid form, and expanded to its original proportions on arrival by an ingenious process discovered by a German. The country is now used only as a subject for sentimental poets, and to fly over, or by lovers on bicycles at week-ends."

"*Mon Dieu!*" said the Angel thoughtfully. "To me, indeed, it seems that this must have been a case of: 'Oh! What a surprise!'"

"You are not mistaken, sir," replied his dragoman; "people still open their mouths over this consummation. It is pre-eminently an instance of what will happen sometimes when you are not looking, even to the English, who have been most fortunate in this respect. For you must remem-

ber that all Parties, even the Pundits, have always declared that rural life and all that, don't you know, is most necessary, and have ever asserted that they were fostering it to the utmost. But they forgot to remember that our circumstances, traditions, education, and vested interests so favoured town life and the 'good of trade' that it required a real and unparliamentary effort not to take that line of least resistance. In fact, we have here a very good example of what I told you the other day was our most striking characteristic—never knowing where we are till after the event. But what with fog and principles, how can you expect we should? Better be a little town blighter with no constitution and high political principles, than your mere healthy country product of a pampered industry. But you have not yet seen the other side of the moon."

"To what do you refer?" asked the Angel.

"Why, sir, to the glorious expansion of the towns. To this I shall introduce you to-morrow, if such is your pleasure."

"Is London, then, not a town?" asked the Angel playfully.

"London?" cried his dragoman; "a mere pleasure village. To which real town shall I take you? Liverchester?"

"Anywhere," said the Angel, "where I can get

a good dinner." So saying, he paid the rural population with a smile and spread his wings.

III

"The night is yet young," said the Angel Æthereal on leaving the White Heart Hostel at Liverchester, "and I have had perhaps too much to eat. Let us walk and see the town."

"As you will, sir," replied his dragoman; "there is no difference between night and day, now that they are using the tides for the provision of electric power."

The Angel took a note of the fact. "What do they manufacture here?" he asked.

"The entire town," returned his dragoman, "which now extends from the old Liverpool to the old Manchester (as indeed its name implies), is occupied with expanding the tabloids of food which are landed in its port from the new worlds. This and the town of Brister, reaching from the old Bristol to the old Gloucester, have had the monopoly of food expansion for the United Kingdom for some years past."

"By what means precisely?" asked the Angel.

"Congenial environment and bacteriology," responded his dragoman. They walked for some time in silence, flying a little now and then in the dirtier streets, before the Angel spoke again:

"It is curious," he said, "but I perceive no difference between this town and those I remember on my visit in 1910, save that the streets are better lighted, which is not an unmixed joy, for they are dirty and full of people whose faces do not please me."

"Ah! sir," replied his dragoman, "it is too much to expect that the wonderful darkness which prevailed at the time of the Great Skirmish could endure; then, indeed, one could indulge the hope that the houses were all built by Wren, and the people all clean and beautiful. There is no poetry now."

"No!" said the Angel, sniffing, "but there is atmosphere, and it is not agreeable."

"Mankind, when herded together, *will* smell," answered his dragoman. "You cannot avoid it. What with old clothes, patchouli, petrol, fried fish and the fag, those five essentials of human life, the atmosphere of Turner and Corot are as nothing."

"But do you not run your towns to please yourselves?" said the Angel.

"Oh, no, sir! The resistance would be dreadful. They run us. You see, they are so very big, and have such prestige. Besides," he added, "even if we dared, we should not know how. For, though some great and good man once

brought us plane-trees, we English are above getting the best out of life and its conditions, and despise light Frenchified taste. Notice the principle which governs this twenty-mile residential stretch. It was intended to be light, but how earnest it has all turned out! You can tell at a glance that these dwellings belong to the species 'house' and yet are individual houses, just as a man belongs to the species 'man,' and yet, as they say, has a soul of his own. This principle was introduced off the Avenue Road a few years before the Great Skirmish, and is now universal. Any person who lives in a house identical with another house is not known. Has anything heavier and more conscientious ever been seen?"

"Does this principle also apply to the houses of the working-man?" inquired the Angel.

"Hush, sir!" returned his dragoman, looking round him nervously; "a dangerous word. The LABORIOUS dwell in palaces built after the design of an architect called Jerry, with communal kitchens and baths."

"Do they use them?" asked the Angel with some interest.

"Not as yet, indeed," replied his dragoman; "but I believe they are thinking of it. As you know, sir, it takes time to introduce a custom. Thirty years is but as yesterday."

"The Japanese wash daily," mused the Angel.

"Not a Christian nation," replied his dragoman; "nor have they the dirt to contend with which is conspicuous here. Let us do justice to the discouragement which dogs the ablutions of such as know they will soon be dirty again. It was confidently supposed, at the time of the Great Skirmish, which introduced military discipline and so entirely abolished caste, that the habit of washing would at last become endemic throughout the whole population. Judge how surprised were we of that day when the facts turned out otherwise. Instead of the Laborious washing more, the Patriotic washed less. It may have been the higher price of soap, or merely that human life was not very highly regarded at the time. We cannot tell. But not until military discipline disappeared, and caste was restored, which happened the moment peace returned, did the survivors of the Patriotic begin to wash immoderately again, leaving the Laborious to preserve a level more suited to democracy."

"Talking of levels," said the Angel; "is the populace increasing in stature?"

"Oh, no, indeed!" responded his dragoman; "the latest statistics give a diminution of one inch and a half during the past generation."

"And in longevity?" asked the Angel.

"As to that, babies and old people are now communally treated, and all those diseases which are curable by lymph are well in hand."

"Do people, then, not die?"

"Oh, yes, sir! About as often as before. There are new complaints which redress the balance."

"And what are those?"

"A group of diseases called for convenience Scienticitis. Some think they come from the present food system; others from the accumulation of lymphs in the body; others, again, regard them as the result of dwelling on the subject—a kind of hypnotisation by death; a fourth school hold them traceable to town air; while a fifth consider them a mere manifestation of jealousy on the part of Nature. They date, one may say, with confidence, from the time of the Great Skirmish, when men's minds were turned with some anxiety to the question of statistics, and babies were at a premium."

"Is the population, then, much larger?"

"You mean smaller, sir, do you not? Not perhaps so much smaller as you might expect; but it is still nicely down. You see, the Patriotic Party, including even those Pontificals whose private practice most discouraged all that sort of thing, began at once to urge propagation. But their propaganda was, as one may say, brain-

spun; and at once bumped up—pardon the colloquialism—against the economic situation. The existing babies, it is true, were saved; the trouble was rather that the babies began not to exist. The same, of course, obtained in every European country, with the exception of what was still, in a manner of speaking, Russia; and if that country had but retained its food resources, it would soon by sheer numbers have swamped the rest of Europe. Fortunately, perhaps, it did not. An incurable reluctance to make food for cannon and impose further burdens on selves already weighted to the ground by taxes, developed in the peoples of each Central and Western land; and in certain sinister years the downward curve was so alarming in Great Britain that if the Patriotic Party could only have kept office long enough at a time they would, no doubt, have enforced conception at the point of the bayonet. Luckily or unluckily, according to taste, they did not; and it was left for more natural causes to produce the inevitable reaction which began to set in later, when the population of the United Kingdom had been reduced to some thirty millions. About that time commerce revived. The question of the land had been settled by its unconscious abandonment, and people began to see before them again the possibility of support-

ing families. The ingrained disposition of men and women to own pets, together with 'the good of trade,' began once more to have its way; and the population rose rapidly. A renewed joy in life, and the assurance of not having to pay the piper, caused the slums, as they used to be called, to swarm once more, and filled the communal crèches. And had it not been for the fact that any one with physical strength, or love of fresh air, promptly emigrated to the Sister Nations on attaining the age of eighteen we might now, sir, be witnessing an overcrowding equal to that of the times before the Great Skirmish. The movement is receiving an added impetus with the approach of the Greater Skirmish in the air, for it is expected that trade will boom and much wealth accrue to those countries which are privileged to look on with equanimity at this 'great new drama,' as the editors are already billing it."

"In all this," said the Angel Æthereal, "I perceive something rather sordid."

"Sir," replied his dragoman earnestly, "your remark is characteristic of the sky, where people are not made of flesh and blood; pay, I believe, no taxes; and have no experience of the devastating consequences of war. I recollect so well when I was a young man, before the Great Skirmish began, and even when it had been going on

several years, how glibly the leaders of opinion talked of human progress, and how blind they were to the fact that it has a certain connection with environment. You must remember that ever since that large and, as some still think, rather tragic occurrence environment has been very dicky and Utopia not unrelated to thin air. It has been perceived time and again that the leaders of public opinion are not always confirmed by events. The new world, which was so sapiently prophesied by rhetoricians, is now nigh thirty years old, and, for my part, I confess to surprise that it is not worse than it actually is. I am moralising, I fear, however, for these suburban buildings grievously encourage the philosophic habit. Rather let us barge along and see the Laborious at their labours, which are never interrupted now by the mere accident of night."

The Angel increased his speed till they alighted amid a forest of tall chimneys, whose sirens were singing like a watch of nightingales.

"There is a shift on," said the dragoman. "Stand here, sir; we shall see them passing in and out."

The Laborious were not hurrying, and went by uttering the words: "Cheer oh!" "So long!" and "Wot abaht it!"

The Angel contemplated them for a time be-

fore he said: "It comes back to me now how they used to talk when they were doing up my flat on my visit in 1910."

"Give me, I pray, an imitation," said his dragoman.

The Angel struck the attitude of one painting a door. "William," he said, rendering those voices of the past, "what money are you obtaining?"

"Not half, Alfred."

"If that is so, indeed, William, should you not rather leave your tools and obtain better money? I myself am doing this."

"Not half, Alfred."

"Round the corner I can obtain more money by working for fewer hours. In my opinion there is no use in working for less money when you can obtain more. How much does Henry obtain?"

"Not half, Alfred."

"What I am now obtaining is, in my opinion, no use at all."

"Not half, Alfred."

Here the Angel paused, and let his hand move for one second in a masterly exhibition of activity.

"It is doubtful, sir," said his dragoman, "whether you would be permitted to dilute your

conversation with so much labour in these days; the rules are very strict."

"Are there, then, still Trades Unions?" asked the Angel.

"No, indeed," replied his dragoman; "but there are Committees. That habit which grew up at the time of the Great Skirmish has flourished ever since. Statistics reveal the fact that there are practically no adults in the country between the ages of nineteen and fifty who are not sitting on Committees. At the time of the Great Skirmish all Committees were nominally active; they are now both active and passive. In every industry, enterprise, or walk of life a small active Committee directs; and a large passive Committee, formed of everybody else, resists that direction. And it is safe to say that the Passive Committees are active and the Active Committees passive; in this way no inordinate amount of work is done. Indeed, if the tongue and the electric button had not usurped practically all the functions of the human hand, the State would have some difficulty in getting its boots blacked. But a ha'porth of visualisation is worth three lectures at ten shillings the stall, so enter, sir, and see for yourself."

Saying this, he pushed open the door.

In a shed, which extended beyond the illimit-

able range of the Angel's eye, machinery and tongues were engaged in a contest which filled the ozone with an incomparable hum. Men and women in profusion were leaning against walls or the pillars on which the great roof was supported, assiduously pressing buttons. The scent of expanding food revived the Angel's appetite.

"I shall require supper," he said dreamily.

"By all means, sir," replied his dragoman; "after work—play. It will afford you an opportunity to witness modern pleasures in our great industrial centres. But what a blessing is electric power!" he added. "Consider these lilies of the town, they toil not, neither do they spin——"

"Yet Solomon in all his glory," chipped in the Angel eagerly, "had not their appearance, you bet."

"Indeed they are an insouciant crowd," mused his dragoman. "How tinkling is their laughter! The habit dates from the days of the Great Skirmish, when nothing but laughter would meet the case."

"Tell me," said the Angel, "are the English satisfied at last with their industrial conditions, and generally with their mode of life in these expanded towns?"

"Satisfied? Oh, dear, no, sir! But you know what it is: They are obliged to wait for each

fresh development before they can see what they have to counteract; and, since that great creative force, 'the good of trade,' is always a little stronger than the forces of criticism and reform, each development carries them a little further on the road to——"

"Hell! How hungry I am again!" exclaimed the Angel. "Let us sup!"

IV

"Laughter," said the Angel Æthereal, applying his wineglass to his nose, "has ever distinguished mankind from all other animals with the exception of the dog. And the power of laughing at nothing distinguishes man even from that quadruped."

"I would go further, sir," returned his dragoman, "and say that the power of laughing at that which should make him sick distinguishes the Englishman from all other varieties of man except the negro. Kindly observe!" He rose, and taking the Angel by the waist, fox-trotted him among the little tables.

"See!" he said, indicating the other supper-takers with a circular movement of his beard, "they are consumed with laughter. The habit of fox-trotting in the intervals of eating has been known ever since it was introduced by Ameri-

cans a generation ago, at the beginning of the Great Skirmish, when that important people had as yet nothing else to do; but it still causes laughter in this country. A distressing custom," he wheezed, as they resumed their seats, "for not only does it disturb the oyster, but it compels one to think lightly of the human species. Not that one requires much compulsion," he added, "now that music-hall, cinema, and restaurant are conjoined. What a happy idea that was of Berlin's, and how excellent for business! Kindly glance for a moment—but not more—at the left-hand stage."

The Angel turned his eyes towards a cinematograph film which was being displayed. He contemplated it for the moment without speaking.

"I do not comprehend," he said at last, "why the person with the arrested moustaches is hitting so many people with that sack of flour."

"To cause amusement, sir," replied his dragoman. "Look at the laughing faces around you."

"But it is not funny," said the Angel.

"No, indeed," returned his dragoman. "Be so good as to carry your eyes now to the stage on the right, but not for long. What do you see?"

"I see a very red-nosed man beating a very white-nosed man about the body."

"It is a real scream, is it not?"

"No," said the Angel drily. "Does nothing else ever happen on these stages?"

"Nothing. Stay! *Revues* happen!"

"What are *revues?*" asked the Angel.

"Criticisms of life, sir, as it would be seen by persons inebriated on various intoxicants."

"They should be joyous."

"They are accounted so," his dragoman replied; "but for my part, I prefer to criticise life for myself, especially when I am drunk."

"Are there no plays, no operas?" asked the Angel from behind his glass.

"Not in the old and proper sense of these words. They disappeared towards the end of the Great Skirmish."

"What food for the mind is there, then?" asked the Angel, adding an oyster to his collection.

"None in public, sir, for it is well recognised, and has been ever since those days, that laughter alone promotes business and removes the thought of death. You cannot recall, as I can, sir, the continual stream which used to issue from theatres, music-halls, and picture-palaces in the days of the Great Skirmish, nor the joviality of the Strand and the more expensive restaurants. I have often thought," he added with a touch of philosophy, "what a height of civilisation we

must have reached to go jesting, as we did, to the Great Unknown."

"Is that really what the English did at the time of the Great Skirmish?" asked the Angel.

"It is," replied his dragoman solemnly.

"Then they are a very fine people, and I can put up with much about them which seems to me distressing."

"Ah! sir, though, being an Englishman, I am sometimes inclined to disparage the English, I am yet convinced that you could not fly a week's journey and come across another race with such a peculiar nobility, or such an unconquerable soul, if you will forgive my using a word whose meaning is much disputed. May I tempt you with a clam?" he added more lightly. "We now have them from America—in fair preservation, and very nasty they are, in my opinion."

The Angel took a clam.

"My Lord!" he said, after a moment of deglutition.

"Quite so!" replied his dragoman. "But kindly glance at the right-hand stage again. There is a *revue* on now. What do you see?"

The Angel made two holes with his forefingers and thumbs and, putting them to his eyes, bent a little forward.

"Tut, tut!" he said; "I see some attractive

young females with very few clothes on, walking up and down in front of what seem to me, indeed, to be two grown-up men in collars and jackets as of little boys. What precise criticism of life is this conveying?"

His dragoman answered in reproachful accents:

"Do you not feel, sir, from your own sensations, how marvellously this informs one of the secret passions of mankind? Is there not in it a striking revelation of the natural tendencies of the male population? Remark how the whole audience, including your august self, is leaning forward and looking through their thumb-holes?"

The Angel sat back hurriedly.

"True," he said, "I was carried away. But that is not the criticism of life which art demands. If it had been, the audience, myself included, would have been sitting back with their lips curled dry, instead of watering."

"For all that," replied his dragoman, "it is the best we can give you; anything which induces the detached mood of which you spoke, has been banned from the stage since the days of the Great Skirmish; it is so very bad for business."

"Pity!" said the Angel, imperceptibly edging forward; "the mission of art is to elevate."

"It is plain, sir," said his dragoman, "that you

have lost touch with the world as it is. The mission of art—now truly democratic—is to level—in principle up, in practice down. Do not forget, sir, that the English have ever regarded æstheticism as unmanly, and grace as immoral; when to that basic principle you add the principle of serving the taste of the majority, you have perfect conditions for a sure and gradual decrescendo."

"Does taste, then, no longer exist?" asked the Angel.

"It is not wholly, as yet, extinct, but lingers in the communal kitchens and canteens, as introduced by the Young Men's Christian Association in the days of the Great Skirmish. While there is appetite there is hope, nor is it wholly discouraging that taste should now centre in the stomach; for is not that the real centre of man's activity? Who dare affirm that from so universal a foundation the fair structure of æstheticism shall not be rebuilt? The eye, accustomed to the look of dainty dishes and pleasant cookery, may once more demand the architecture of Wren, the sculpture of Rodin, the paintings of—dear me—whom? Why, sir, even before the days of the Great Skirmish, when you were last on earth, we had already begun to put the future of æstheticism on a more real basis, and were converting the concert-halls of London into hotels. Few at

the time saw the far-reaching significance of that movement, or realised that æstheticism was to be levelled down to the stomach, in order that it might be levelled up again to the head, on true democratic principles."

"But what," said the Angel, with one of his preternatural flashes of acumen, "what if, on the other hand, taste should continue to sink and lose even its present hold on the stomach? If all else has gone, why should not the beauty of the kitchen go?"

"That indeed," sighed his dragoman, placing his hand on his heart, "is a thought which often gives me a sinking sensation. Two liqueur brandies," he murmured to the waiter. "But the stout heart refuses to despair. Besides, advertisements show decided traces of æsthetic advance. All the great painters, poets, and fiction writers are working on them; the movement had its origin in the propaganda demanded by the Great Skirmish. You will not recollect the war poetry of that period, the patriotic films, the death cartoons, and other remarkable achievements. We have just as great talents now, though their object has not perhaps the religious singleness of those stirring times. Not a food, corset, or collar which has not its artist working for it! Toothbrushes, nutcrackers, babies' baths—the whole caboodle of

manufacture—are now set to music. Such themes are considered subliminal if not sublime. No, sir, I will not despair; it is only at moments when I have dined poorly that the horizon seems dark. Listen—they have turned on the 'Kakophone,' for you must know that all music now is beautifully made by machine—so much easier for every one."

The Angel raised his head, and into his eyes came the glow associated with celestial strains.

"The tune," he said, "is familiar to me."

"Yes, sir," answered his dragoman, "for it is 'The Messiah' in ragtime. No time is wasted, you notice; all, even pleasure, is intensively cultivated, on the lines of least resistance, thanks to the feverishness engendered in us by the Great Skirmish, when no one knew if he would have another chance, and to the subsequent need for fostering industry. But whether we really enjoy ourselves is perhaps a question to answer which you must examine the English character."

"That I refuse to do," said the Angel.

"And you are wise, sir, for it is a puzzler, and many have cracked their heads over it. But have we not been here long enough? We can pursue our researches into the higher realms of art to-morrow."

A beam from the Angel's lustrous eyes fell on a

lady at the next table. "Yes, perhaps we had better go," he sighed.

V

"And so it is through the fields of true art that we shall walk this morning?" said the Angel Æthereal.

"Such as they are in this year of Peace 1947," responded his dragoman, arresting him before a statue; "for the development of this hobby has been peculiar since you were here in 1910, when the childlike and contortionist movement was just beginning to take hold of the British."

"Whom does this represent?" asked the Angel.

"A celebrated publicist, recently deceased at a great age. You see him unfolded by this work of multiform genius, in every aspect known to art, religion, nature, and the population. From his knees downwards he is clearly devoted to nature, and is portrayed as about to enter his bath. From his waist to his knees he is devoted to religion—mark the complete disappearance of the human aspect. From his neck to his waist he is devoted to public affairs; observe the tweed coat, the watch chain, and other signs of practical sobriety. But the head is, after all, the crown of the human being, and is devoted to art. This is why you cannot make out that it is a head. Note its py-

ramidal severity, its cunning little ears, its box-built, water-tightal structure. The hair you note to be in flames. Here we have the touch of beauty —the burning shrub. In the whole you will observe that aversion from natural form and the single point of view, characteristic of all twentieth-century æsthetics. The whole thing is a very great masterpiece of childlike contortionism. To do things as irresponsibly as children and contortionists—what a happy discovery of the line of least resistance in art that was! Mark, by the way, this exquisite touch about the left hand."

"It appears to be deformed," said the Angel, going a step nearer.

"Look closer still," returned his dragoman, "and you will see that it is holding a novel of the great Russian, upside down. Ever since that simple master who so happily blended the childlike with the contortionist became known in this country they have been trying to go him one better, in letters, in painting, in sculpture, and in music, refusing to admit that he was the last cry; and until they have beaten him this movement simply cannot cease; it may therefore go on for ever, for he was the limit. That hand symbolises the whole movement."

"How?" said the Angel.

"Why, sir, somersault is its mainspring. Did

you never observe the great Russian's method? Prepare your characters to do one thing, and then make them very swiftly do the opposite. Thus did that terrific novelist demonstrate his overmastering range of vision and knowledge of the depths of human nature. Since his characters never varied this routine in the course of some eight thousand pages, people have lightly said that he repeated himself. But what of that? Consider what perfect dissociation he thereby attained between character and action; what nebulosity of fact; what a truly childlike and mystic mix-up of all human values hitherto known! And here, sir, at the risk of tickling you, I must whisper." The dragoman made a trumpet of his hand: "Fiction can only be written by those who have exceptionally little knowledge of ordinary human nature, and great fiction only by such as have none at all."

"How is that?" said the Angel, somewhat disconcerted.

"Surprise, sir, is the very kernel of all effects in art, and in real life people *will* act as their characters and temperaments determine that they shall. This dreadful and unmalleable trait would have upset all the great mystic masters from generation to generation if they had only noticed it. But did they? Fortunately not. These greater

men naturally put into their books the greater confusion and flux in which their extraordinary selves exist! The nature they portray is not human, but super- or subter-human, which you will. Who should have it otherwise?"

"Not I," said the Angel. "For I confess to a liking for what is called the 'tuppence coloured.' But Russians are not as other men, are they?"

"They are not," said his dragoman, "but the trouble is, sir, that since the British discovered him, every character in our greater fiction has a Russian soul, though living in Cornwall or the Midlands, in a British body under a Scottish or English name."

"Very piquant," said the Angel, turning from the masterpiece before him. "Are there no undraped statues to be seen?"

"In no recognisable form. For, not being educated to the detached contemplation which still prevailed to a limited extent even as late as the days of the Great Skirmish, the populace can no longer be trusted with such works of art; they are liable to rush at them, for embrace, or demolition, as their temperaments may dictate."

"The Greeks are dead, then," said the Angel.

"As door-nails, sir. They regarded life as a thing to be enjoyed—a vice you will not have noticed in the British. The Greeks were an out-

door people, who lived in the sun and the fresh air, and had none of the niceness bred by the life of our towns. We have long been renowned for our delicacy about the body; nor has the tendency been decreased by constituting Watch Committees of young persons in every borough. These are now the arbiters of art, and nothing unsuitable to the child of seven passes their censorship."

"How careful!" said the Angel.

"The result has been wonderful," remarked his dragoman. "Wonderful!" he repeated, dreamily. "I suppose there is more smouldering sexual desire and disease in this country than in any other."

"Was that the intention?" asked the Angel.

"Oh! no, sir! That is but the natural effect of so remarkably pure a surface. All is within instead of without. Nature has now wholly disappeared. The process was sped up by the Great Skirmish. For, since then, we have had little leisure and income to spare on the gratification of anything but laughter; this and the 'unco-guid' have made our art-surface glare in the eyes of the nations, thin and spotless as if made of tin."

The Angel raised his eyebrows. "I had hoped for better things," he said.

"You must not suppose, sir," pursued his

dragoman, "that there is not plenty of the undraped, so long as it is vulgar, as you saw just now upon the stage, for that is good business; the line is only drawn at the danger-point of art, which is always very bad business in this country. Yet even in real life the undraped has to be grotesque to be admitted; the one fatal quality is natural beauty. The laugh, sir, the laugh—even the most hideous and vulgar laugh—is such a disinfectant. I should, however, say in justice to our literary men, that they have not altogether succumbed to the demand for cachinnations. A school, which first drew breath before the Great Skirmish began, has perfected itself, till now we have whole tomes where hardly a sentence would be intelligible to any save the initiate; this enables them to defy the Watch Committees, with other Philistines. We have writers who mysteriously preach the realisation of self by never considering anybody else; of purity through experience of exotic vice; of courage through habitual cowardice; and of kindness through Prussian behaviour. They are generally young. We have others whose fiction consists of autobiography interspersed with philosophic and political fluencies. These may be of any age from eighty odd to the bitter thirties. We have also the copious and chatty novelist; and transcribers

of the life of the Laborious, whom the Laborious never read. Above all, we have the great Patriotic school, who put the national motto first, and write purely what is good for trade. In fact, we have every sort, as in the old days."

"It would appear," said the Angel, "that the arts have stood somewhat still."

"Except for a more external purity, and a higher internal corruption," replied his dragoman.

"Are artists still noted for their jealousies?" asked the Angel.

"They are, sir; for that is inherent in the artistic temperament, which is extremely touchy about fame."

"And do they still get angry when those gentlemen—the——"

"Critics," his dragoman suggested. "They get angry, sir; but critics are usually anonymous, and from excellent reasons; for not only are the passions of an angry artist very high, but the knowledge of an angry critic is not infrequently very low, especially of art. It is kinder to save life, where possible."

"For my part," said the Angel, "I have little regard for human life, and consider that many persons would be better buried."

"That may be," his dragoman retorted with

some irritation; "'*errare est humanum.*' But I, for one, would rather be a dead human being any day than a live angel, for I think they are more charitable."

"Well," said the Angel genially, "you have the prejudice of your kind. Have you an artist about the place, to show me? I do not recollect any at Madame Tussaud's."

"They have tåken to declining that honour. We could see one in real life if we went to Cornwall."

"Why Cornwall?"

"I cannot tell you, sir. There is something in the air which affects their passions."

"I am hungry, and would rather go to the Savoy," said the Angel, walking on.

"You are in luck," whispered his dragoman, when they had seated themselves at a table covered with prawns; "for at the next on your left is our most famous exponent of the mosaic school of novelism."

"Then here goes!" replied the Angel. And, turning to his neighbour, he asked pleasantly: "How do you do, sir? What is your income?"

The gentleman addressed looked up from his prawn, and replied wearily: "Ask my agent. He may conceivably possess the knowledge you require."

"Answer me this, at all events," said the Angel, with more dignity, if possible: "How do you write your books? For it must be wonderful to summon around you every day the creatures of your imagination. Do you wait for afflatus?"

"No," said the author; "er—no! I—er—" he added weightily, "sit down every morning."

The Angel rolled his eyes and, turning to his dragoman, said in a well-bred whisper: "He sits down every morning! My Lord, how good for trade!"

VI

"A glass of sherry, dry, and ham sandwich, stale, can be obtained here, sir," said the dragoman; "and for dessert, the scent of parchment and bananas. We will then attend Court 45, where I shall show you how fundamentally our legal procedure has changed in the generation that has elapsed since the days of the Great Skirmish."

"Can it really be that the Law has changed? I had thought it immutable," said the Angel, causing his teeth to meet with difficulty: "What will be the nature of the suit to which we shall listen?"

"I have thought it best, sir, to select a divorce

case, lest you should sleep, overcome by the ozone and eloquence in these places."

"Ah!" said the Angel: "I am ready."

The Court was crowded, and they took their seats with difficulty, and a lady sitting on the Angel's left wing.

"The public *will* frequent this class of case," whispered his dragoman. "How different when you were here in 1910!"

The Angel collected himself: "Tell me," he murmured, "which of the grey-haired ones is the judge?"

"He in the bag-wig, sir," returned his dragoman; "and that little lot is the jury," he added, indicating twelve gentlemen seated in two rows.

"What is their private life?" asked the Angel.

"No better than it should be, perhaps," responded his dragoman facetiously; "but no one can tell that from their words and manner, as you will presently see. These are special ones," he added, "and pay income tax, so that their judgment in matters of morality is of considerable value."

"They have wise faces," said the Angel. "Which is the prosecutor?"

"No, no!" his dragoman answered, vividly: "This is a civil case. That is the plaintiff with a little mourning about her eyes and a touch of

red about her lips, in the black hat with the aigrette, the pearls, and the fashionably sober clothes."

"I see her," said the Angel: "an attractive woman. Will she win?"

"We do not call it winning, sir; for this, as you must know, is a sad matter, and implies the breaking-up of a home. She will most unwillingly receive a decree, at least, I think so," he added; "though whether it will stand the scrutiny of the King's Proctor we may wonder a little, from her appearance."

"King's Proctor?" said the Angel. "What is that?"

"A celestial Die-hard, sir, paid to join together again those whom man has put asunder."

"I do not follow," said the Angel fretfully.

"I perceive," whispered his dragoman, "that I must make clear to you the spirit which animates our justice in these matters. You know, of course, that the intention of our law is ever to penalise the wrong-doer. It therefore requires the innocent party, like that lady there, to be exceptionally innocent, not only before she secures her divorce, but for six months afterwards."

"Oh!" said the Angel. "And where is the guilty party?"

"Probably in the south of France," returned

his dragoman, "with the new partner of his affections. They have a place in the sun; this one a place in the Law Courts."

"Dear me!" said the Angel. "Does she prefer that?"

"There are ladies," his dragoman replied, "who find it a pleasure to appear, no matter where, so long as people can see them in a pretty hat. But the great majority would rather sink into the earth than do this thing."

"The face of this one is most agreeable to me; I should not wish her to sink," said the Angel warmly.

"Agreeable or not," resumed his dragoman, "they have to bring their hearts for inspection by the public if they wish to become free from the party who has done them wrong. This is necessary, for the penalisation of the wrong-doer."

"And how will he be penalised?" asked the Angel naïvely.

"By receiving his freedom," returned his dragoman, "together with the power to enjoy himself with his new partner, in the sun, until, in due course, he is able to marry her."

"This is mysterious to me," murmured the Angel. "Is not the boot on the wrong leg?"

"Oh! sir, the law would not make a mistake like that. You are bringing a single mind to the

consideration of this matter, but that will never do. This lady is a true and much-wronged wife; that is—let us hope so!—to whom our law has given its protection and remedy; but she is also, in its eyes, somewhat reprehensible for desiring to avail herself of that protection and remedy. For, though the law is now purely the affair of the State and has nothing to do with the Appointed, it still secretly believes in the religious maxim: 'Once married, always married,' and feels that however much a married person is neglected or ill-treated, she should not desire to be free."

"She?" said the Angel. "Does a man never desire to be free?"

"Oh, yes! sir, and not infrequently."

"Does your law, then, not consider him reprehensible in that desire?"

"In theory, perhaps; but there is a subtle distinction. For, sir, as you observe from the countenances before you, the law is administered entirely by males, and males cannot but believe in the divine right of males to have a better time than females; and, though they do not say so, they naturally feel that a husband wronged by a wife is more injured than a wife wronged by a husband."

"There is much in that," said the Angel. "But

tell me how the oracle is worked—for it may come in handy!"

"You allude, sir, to the necessary procedure? I will make this clear. There are two kinds of cases: what I may call the 'O.K.' and what I may call the 'rig.' Now in the 'O.K.' it is only necessary for the plaintiff, if it be a woman, to receive a black eye from her husband and to pay detectives to find out that he has been too closely in the company of another; if it be a man, he need not receive a black eye from his wife, and has merely to pay the detectives to obtain the same necessary information."

"Why this difference between the sexes?" asked the Angel.

"Because," answered his dragoman, "woman is the weaker sex, things are therefore harder for her."

"But," said the Angel, "the English have a reputation for chivalry."

"They have, sir."

"Well——" began the Angel.

"When these conditions are complied with," interrupted his dragoman, "a suit for divorce may be brought, which may or may not be defended. Now, the 'rig,' which is always brought by the wife, is not so simple, for it must be subdivided into two sections: 'Ye straight rig' and

'Ye crooked rig.' 'Ye straight rig' is where the wife cannot induce her husband to remain with her, and discovering from him that he has been in the close company of another, wishes to be free of him. She therefore tells the Court that she wishes him to come back to her, and the Court will tell him to go back. Whereon, if he obey, the fat is sometimes in the fire. If, however, he obeys not, which is the more probable, she may, after a short delay, bring a suit, adducing the evidence she has obtained, and receive a decree. This may be the case before you, or, on the other hand, it may not, and will then be what is called 'Ye crooked rig.' If that is so, these two persons, having found that they cannot live in conjugal friendliness, have laid their heads together for the last time, and arranged to part; the procedure will now be the same as in 'Ye straight rig.' But the wife must take the greatest care to lead the Court to suppose that she really wishes her husband to come back; for, if she does not, it is collusion. The more ardent her desire to part from him, the more care she must take to pretend the opposite! But this sort of case is, after all, the simplest, for both parties are in complete accord in desiring to be free of each other, so neither does anything to retard that end, which is soon obtained."

"About that evidence?" said the Angel. "What must the man do?"

"He will require to go to an hotel with a lady friend," replied his dragoman; "once will be enough. And, provided they are called in the morning, there is no real necessity for anything else."

"H'm!" said the Angel. "This, indeed, seems to me to be all around about the bush. Could there not be some simple method which would not necessitate the perversion of the truth?"

"Ah, no!" responded his dragoman. "You forget what I told you, sir. However unhappy people may be together, our law grudges their separation; it requires them therefore to be immoral, or to lie, or both, before they can part."

"Curious!" said the Angel.

"You must understand, sir, that when a man says he will take a woman, and a woman says she will take a man, for the rest of their natural existence, they are assumed to know all about each other, though not permitted, of course, by the laws of morality to know anything of real importance. Since it is almost impossible from a modest acquaintanceship to make sure whether they will continue to desire each other's company after a completed knowledge, they are naturally disposed to go it 'blind,' if I may be pardoned

the expression, and will take each other for ever on the smallest provocations. For the human being, sir, makes nothing of the words 'for ever,' when it sees immediate happiness before it. You can well understand, therefore, how necessary it is to make it very hard for them to get untied again."

"I should dislike living with a wife if I were tired of her," said the Angel.

"Sir," returned his dragoman confidentially, "in that sentiment you would have with you the whole male population. And, I believe, the whole of the female population would feel the same if they were tired of you, as the husband."

"That!" said the Angel, with a quiet smile.

"Ah! yes, sir; but does not this convince you of the necessity to force people who are tired of each other to go on living together?"

"No," said the Angel, with appalling frankness.

"Well," his dragoman replied soberly, "I must admit that some have thought our marriage laws should be in a museum, for they are unique; and, though a source of amusement to the public, and emolument to the profession, they pass the comprehension of men and angels who have not the key of the mystery."

"What key?" asked the Angel.

"I will give it you, sir," said his dragoman: "The English have a genius for taking the shadow of a thing for its substance. 'So long,' they say, 'as our marriages, our virtue, our honesty, and happiness *seem* to be, they *are*.' So long, therefore, as we do not dissolve a marriage it remains virtuous, honest and happy though the parties to it may be unfaithful, untruthful, and in misery. It would be regarded as awful, sir, for marriage to depend on mutual liking. We English cannot bear the thought of defeat. To dissolve an unhappy marriage is to recognise defeat by life, and we would rather that other people lived in wretchedness all their days than admit that members of our race had come up against something too hard to overcome. The English do not care about making the best out of this life in reality so long as they can do it in appearance."

"Then they believe in a future life?"

"They did to some considerable extent up to the 'eighties of the last century, and their laws and customs were no doubt settled in accordance therewith, and have not yet had time to adapt themselves. We are a somewhat slow-moving people, always a generation or two behind our real beliefs."

"They have lost their belief, then?"

"It is difficult to arrive at figures, sir, on such

a question. But it has been estimated that perhaps one in ten adults now has some semblance of what may be called active belief in a future existence."

"And the rest are prepared to let their lives be arranged in accordance with the belief of that tenth?" asked the Angel, surprised. "Tell me, do they think their matrimonial differences will be adjusted over there, or what?"

"As to that, all is cloudy; and certain matters would be difficult to adjust without bigamy; for general opinion and the law permit the remarriage of persons whose first has gone before."

"How about children?" said the Angel; "for that is no inconsiderable item, I imagine."

"Yes, sir, they are a difficulty. But here, again, my key will fit. So long as the marriage *seems* real, it does not matter that the children know it isn't and suffer from the disharmony of their parents."

"I think," said the Angel acutely, "there must be some more earthly reason for the condition of your marriage laws than those you give me. It's all a matter of property at bottom, I suspect."

"Sir," said his dragoman, seemingly much struck, "I should not be surprised if you were right. There is little interest in divorce where no money is involved, and our poor are considered

able to do without it. But I will never admit that this is the reason for the state of our divorce laws. No, no; I am an Englishman."

"Well," said the Angel, "we are wandering. Does this judge believe what they are now saying to him?"

"It is impossible to inform you, for judges are very deep and know all that is to be known on these matters. But of this you may be certain: if anything is fishy to the average apprehension, he will not suffer it to pass his nose."

"Where is the average apprehension?" asked the Angel.

"There, sir," said his dragoman, pointing to the jury with his chin, "noted for their common sense."

"And these others with grey heads who are calling each other friend, though they appear to be inimical?"

"Little can be hid from them," returned his dragoman; "but this case, though defended as to certain matters of money, is not disputed in regard to the divorce itself. Moreover, they are bound by professional etiquette to serve their clients through thin and thick."

"Cease!" said the Angel; "I wish to hear this evidence, and so does the lady on my left wing."

His dragoman smiled in his beard, and made no answer.

"Tell me," remarked the Angel, when he had listened, "does this woman get anything for saying she called them in the morning?"

"Fie, sir!" responded his dragoman; "only her expenses to the Court and back. Though indeed, it is possible that after she had called them, she got half a sovereign from the defendant to impress the matter on her mind, seeing that she calls many people every day."

"The whole matter," said the Angel with a frown, "appears to be in the nature of a game; nor are the details as savoury as I expected."

"It would be otherwise if the case were defended, sir," returned his dragoman; "then, too, you would have had an opportunity of understanding the capacity of the human mind for seeing the same incident to be both black and white; but it would take much of your valuable time, and the Court would be so crowded that you would have a lady sitting on your right wing also, and possibly on your knee. For, as you observe, ladies are particularly attracted to these dramas of real life."

"If my wife were a wrong one," said the Angel, "I suppose that, according to your law, I could

not sew her up in a sack and place it in the water?"

"We are not now in the days of the Great Skirmish," replied his dragoman somewhat coldly. "At that time any soldier who found his wife unfaithful, as we call it, could shoot her with impunity and receive the plaudits and possibly a presentation from the populace, though he himself may not have been impeccable while away—a masterly method of securing a divorce. But, as I told you, our procedure has changed since then; and even soldiers now have to go to work in this roundabout fashion."

"Can he not shoot the paramour?" asked the Angel.

"Not even that," answered his dragoman. "So soft and degenerate are the days. Though, if he can invent for the paramour a German name, he will still receive but a nominal sentence. Our law is renowned for never being swayed by sentimental reasons. I well recollect a case in the days of the Great Skirmish, when a jury found contrary to the plainest facts sooner than allow that reputation for impartiality to be tarnished."

"Ah!" said the Angel absently; "what is happening now?"

"The jury are considering their verdict. The conclusion is, however, foregone, for they are not

retiring. The plaintiff is now using her smelling salts."

"She is a fine woman," said the Angel emphatically.

"Hush, sir! The judge might hear you."

"What if he does?" asked the Angel in surprise.

"He would then eject you for contempt of Court."

"Does he not think her a fine woman, too?"

"For the love of justice, sir, be silent," entreated his dragoman. "This concerns the happiness of three, if not of five lives. Look! She is lifting her veil; she is going to use her handkerchief."

"I cannot bear to see a woman cry," said the Angel, trying to rise; "please take this lady off my left wing."

"Kindly sit tight!" murmured his dragoman to the lady, leaning across behind the Angel's back. "Listen, sir!" he added to the Angel: "The jury are satisfied that what is necessary has taken place. All is well; she will get her decree."

"Hurrah!" said the Angel in a loud voice.

"If that noise is repeated, I will have the Court cleared."

"I am going to repeat it," said the Angel firmly; "she is beautiful!"

His dragoman placed a hand respectfully over the Angel's mouth. "Oh, sir!" he said soothingly, "do not spoil this charming moment. Hark! He is giving her a decree *nisi*, with costs. To-morrow it will be in all the papers, for it helps to sell them. See! She is withdrawing; we can now go." And he disengaged the Angel's wing.

The Angel rose quickly and made his way towards the door. "I am going to walk out with her," he announced joyously.

"I beseech you," said his dragoman, hurrying beside him, "remember the King's Proctor! Where is your chivalry? For *he* has none, sir—not a little bit!"

"Bring him to me; I will give it him!" said the Angel, kissing the tips of his fingers to the plaintiff, who was vanishing in the gloom of the fresh air.

VII

In the Strangers' room of the Strangers' Club the usual solitude was reigning when the Angel Æthereal entered.

"You will be quiet here," said his dragoman, drawing up two leather chairs to the hearth, "and comfortable," he added, as the Angel crossed his legs. "After our recent experience, I thought it better to bring you where your mind would be

composed, since we have to consider so important a subject as morality. There is no place, indeed, where we could be so completely sheltered from life, or so free to evolve from our inner consciousness the momentous conclusions of the armchair moralist. When you have had your sneeze," he added, glancing at the Angel, who was taking snuff, "I shall make known to you the conclusions I have formed in the course of a chequered career."

"Before you do that," said the Angel, "it would perhaps be as well to limit the sphere of our inquiry."

"As to that," remarked his dragoman, "I shall confine my information to the morals of the English since the opening of the Great Skirmish, in 1914, just a short generation of three and thirty years ago; and you will find my theme readily falls, sir, into the two main compartments of public and private morality. When I have finished you can ask me any questions."

"Proceed!" said the Angel, letting his eyelids droop.

"Public morality," his dragoman began, "is either superlative, comparative, positive, or negative. And superlative morality is found, of course, only in the newspapers. It is the special prerogative of leader-writers. Its note, remote and

unchallengeable, was well struck by almost every organ at the commencement of the Great Skirmish, and may be summed up in a single solemn phrase: 'We will sacrifice on the altar of duty the last life and the last dollar—except the last life and dollar of the last leader-writer.' For, as all must see, that one had to be preserved, to ensure and comment on the consummation of the sacrifice. What loftier morality can be conceived? And it has ever been a grief to the multitude that the lives of those patriots and benefactors of their species should, through modesty, have been unrevealed to such as pant to copy them. Here and there the lineaments of a tip-topper were discernible beneath the disguise of custom; but what fair existences were screened! I may tell you at once, sir, that the State was so much struck at the time of the Great Skirmish by this doctrine of the utter sacrifice of others that it almost immediately adopted the idea, and has struggled to retain it ever since. Indeed, only the unaccountable reluctance of 'others' to be utterly sacrificed has ensured their perpetuity."

"In 1910," said the Angel, "I happened to notice that the Prussians had already perfected that system. Yet it was against the Prussians that this country fought?"

"That is so," returned his dragoman; "there were many who drew attention to the fact. And at the conclusion of the Great Skirmish the reaction was such that for a long moment even the leader-writers wavered in their selfless doctrines; nor could continuity be secured till the Laborious Party came solidly to the State saddle. Since then the principle has been firm but the practice has been firmer, and public morality has never been altogether superlative. Let us pass to comparative public morality. In the days of the Great Skirmish this was practised by those with names, who told others what to do. This large and capable body included all the preachers, publicists, and politicians of the day, and in many cases there is even evidence that they would have been willing to practice what they preached if their age had not been so venerable or their directive power so invaluable."

"*In*-valuable," murmured the Angel; "has that word a negative signification?"

"Not in all cases," said his dragoman with a smile; "there were men whom it would have been difficult to replace, though not many, and those perhaps the least comparatively moral. In this category, too, were undoubtedly the persons known as conchies."

"From conch, a shell?" asked the Angel.

"Not precisely," returned his dragoman; "and yet you have hit it, sir, for into their shells they certainly withdrew, refusing to have anything to do with this wicked world. Sufficient unto them was the voice within. They were not well treated by an unfeeling populace."

"This is interesting to me," said the Angel. "To what did they object?"

"To war," replied his dragoman. "'What is it to us,' they said, 'that there should be barbarians like these Prussians, who override the laws of justice and humanity?'—words, sir, very much in vogue in those days. 'How can it affect our principles if these rude foreigners have not our views, and are prepared, by cutting off the food supplies of this island, to starve us into submission to their rule? Rather than turn a deaf ear to the voice within we are prepared for general starvation; whether we are prepared for the starvation of our individual selves we cannot, of course, say until we experience it. But we hope for the best, and believe that we shall go through with it to death, in the undesired company of all who do not agree with us.' And it is certain, sir, that some of them were capable of this; for there is, as you know, a type of man who will die rather than admit that his views are too extreme to keep himself and his fellow-men alive."

"How entertaining!" said the Angel. "Do such persons still exist?"

"Oh! yes," replied the dragoman; "and always will. Nor is it, in my opinion, altogether to the disadvantage of mankind, for they afford a salutary warning to the human species not to isolate itself in fancy from the realities of existence and extinguish human life before its time has come. We shall now consider the positively moral. At the time of the Great Skirmish these were such as took no sugar in their tea and invested all they had in War Stock at five per cent. without waiting for what were called Premium Bonds to be issued. They were a large and healthy group, more immediately concerned with commerce than the war. But the largest body of all were the negatively moral. These were they who did what they crudely called 'their bit,' which I may tell you, sir, was often very bitter. I myself was a ship's steward at the time, and frequently swallowed much salt water, owing to the submarines. But I was not to be deterred, and would sign on again when it had been pumped out of me. Our morality was purely negative, if not actually low. We acted, as it were, from instinct, and often wondered at the sublime sacrifices which were being made by our betters. Most of us were killed or injured in one way or

another; but a blind and obstinate mania for not giving in possessed us. We were a simple lot." The dragoman paused and fixed his eyes on the empty hearth. "I will not disguise from you," he added, "that we were fed-up nearly all the time; and yet—we couldn't stop. Odd, was it not?"

"I wish I had been with you," said the Angel, "for—to use that word without which you English seem unable to express anything—you were heroes."

"Sir," said his dragoman, "you flatter us by such encomium. We were, I fear, dismally lacking in commercial spirit, just men and women in the street having neither time nor inclination to examine our conduct and motives, nor to question or direct the conduct of others. Purely negative beings, with perhaps a touch of human courage and human kindliness in us. All this, however, is a tale of long ago. You can now ask me any questions, sir, before I pass to private morality."

"You alluded to courage and kindliness," said the Angel: "How do these qualities now stand?"

"The quality of courage," responded his dragoman, "received a set-back in men's estimation at the time of the Great Skirmish, from which it has never properly recovered. For physical courage was then, for the first time, perceived to be

most excessively common; it is, indeed, probably a mere attribute of the bony chin, especially prevalent in the English-speaking races. As to moral courage, it was so hunted down that it is still somewhat in hiding. Of kindliness there are, as you know, two sorts: that which people manifest towards their own belongings; and that which they do not as a rule manifest towards everyone else."

"Since we attended the Divorce Court," remarked the Angel with deliberation, "I have been thinking. And I fancy no one can be really kind unless they have had matrimonial trouble, preferably in conflict with the law."

"A new thought to me," observed his dragoman attentively; "and yet you may be right, for there is nothing like being morally outcast to make you feel the intolerance of others. But that brings us to private morality."

"Quite!" said the Angel, with relief. "I forgot to ask you this morning how the ancient custom of marriage was now regarded in the large?"

"Not indeed as a sacrament," replied his dragoman; "such a view was becoming rare already at the time of the Great Skirmish. Yet the notion might have been preserved but for the opposition of the Pontifical of those days to the reform of the Divorce Laws. When principle

opposes common sense too long, a landslide follows."

"Of what nature, then, is marriage now?"

"Purely a civil, or uncivil, contract, as the case may be. The holy state of judicial separation, too, has long been unknown."

"Ah!" said the Angel, "that was the custom by which the man became a monk and the lady a nun, was it not?"

"In theory, sir," replied his dragoman, "but in practice not a little bit, as you may well suppose. The Pontifical, however, and the women, old and otherwise, who supported them, had but small experience of life to go on, and honestly believed that they were punishing those still-married but erring persons who were thus separated. These, on the contrary, almost invariably assumed that they were justified in free companionships, nor were they particular to avoid promiscuity! So it ever is, sir, when the great laws of Nature are violated in deference to the Higher Doctrine."

"Are children still born out of wedlock?" asked the Angel.

"Yes," said his dragoman, "but no longer considered responsible for the past conduct of their parents."

"Society, then, is more humane?"

"Well, sir, we shall not see the Millennium in

that respect for some years to come. Zoos are still permitted, and I read only yesterday a letter from a Scottish gentleman pouring scorn on the humane proposal that prisoners should be allowed to see their wives once a month without bars or the presence of a third party; precisely as if we still lived in the days of the Great Skirmish. Can you tell me why it is that such letters are always written by Scotsmen?"

"Is it a riddle?" asked the Angel.

"It is indeed, sir."

"Then it bores me. Speaking generally, are you satisfied with current virtue now that it is a State matter, as you informed me yesterday?"

"To tell you the truth, sir, I do not judge my neighbours; sufficient unto myself is the vice thereof. But one thing I observe, the less virtuous people assume themselves to be, the more virtuous they commonly are. Where the limelight is not, the flower blooms. Have you not frequently noticed that they who day by day cheerfully endure most unpleasant things, while helping their neighbours at the expense of their own time and goods, are often rendered lyrical by receiving a sovereign from someone who would never miss it, and are ready to enthrone him in their hearts as a king of men? The truest virtue, sir, must be sought among the lowly. Sugar and

snow may be seen on the top, but for the salt of the earth one must look to the bottom."

"I believe you," said the Angel. "It is probably harder for a man in the limelight to enter virtue than for the virtuous to enter the limelight. Ha, ha! Is the good old custom of buying honour still preserved?"

"No, sir; honour is now only given to such as make themselves too noisy to be endured, and saddles the recipient with an obligation to preserve public silence for a period not exceeding three years. That maximum sentence is given for a dukedom. It is reckoned that few can survive so fearful a term."

"Concerning the morality of this new custom," said the Angel, "I feel doubtful. It savours of surrender to the bully and the braggart, does it not?"

"Rather to the bore, sir; not necessarily the same thing. But whether men be decorated for making themselves useful, or troublesome, the result in either case is to secure a comparative inertia, which has ever been the desideratum; for you must surely be aware, sir, how a man's dignity weighs him down."

"Are women also rewarded in this way?"

"Yes, and very often; for although their dignity is already ample, their tongues are long, and

they have little shame and no nerves in the matter of public speaking."

"And what price their virtue?" asked the Angel.

"There is some change since the days of the Great Skirmish," responded his dragoman. "They do not now so readily sell it, except for a wedding ring; and many marry for love. Women, indeed, are often deplorably lacking in commercial spirit; and though they now mix in commerce, have not yet been able to adapt themselves. Some men even go so far as to think that their participation in active life is not good for trade and keeps the country back."

"They are a curious sex," said the Angel; "I like them, but they make too much fuss about babies."

"Ah! sir, there is the great flaw. The mother instinct—so heedless and uncommercial! They seem to love the things just for their own sakes."

"Yes," said the Angel, "there's no future in it. Give me a cigar."

VIII

"What, then, is the present position of 'the good'?" asked the Angel Æthereal, taking wing from Watchester Cathedrome towards the City Tabernacle.

"There are a number of discordant views, sir," his dragoman whiffled through his nose in the rushing air; "which is no more novel in this year of Peace 1947 than it was when you were here in 1910. On the far right are certain extremists, who believe it to be what it was—omnipotent, but suffering the presence of 'the bad' for no reason which has yet been ascertained; omnipresent, though presumably absent where 'the bad' is present; mysterious, though perfectly revealed; terrible, though loving; eternal, though limited by a beginning and an end. They are not numerous, but all stall-holders, and chiefly characterised by an almost perfect intolerance of those whose views do not coincide with their own; nor will they suffer for a moment any examination into the nature of 'the good,' which they hold to be established for all time, in the form I have stated, by persons who have long been dead. They are, as you may imagine, somewhat out of touch with science, such as it is, and are regarded by the community at large rather with curiosity than anything else."

"The type is well known in the sky," said the Angel. "Tell me: Do they torture those who do not agree with them?"

"Not materially," responded his dragoman. "Such a custom was extinct even before the days

of the Great Skirmish, though what would have happened if the Patriotic or Prussian Party had been able to keep power for any length of time we cannot tell. As it is, the torture they apply is purely spiritual, and consists in looking down their noses at all who have not their belief and in calling them erratics. But it would be a mistake to underrate their power, for human nature loves the Pontifical, and there are those who will follow to the death anyone who looks down his nose, and says: 'I know!' Moreover, sir, consider how unsettling a question 'the good' is, when you come to think about it and how unfatiguing the faith which precludes all such speculation."

"That is so," said the Angel thoughtfully.

"The right centre," continued his dragoman, "is occupied by the small yet noisy Fifth Party. These are they who play the cornet and tambourine, big drum and concertina, descendants of the Old Prophet, and survivors of those who, following a younger prophet, joined them at the time of the Great Skirmish. In a form ever modifying with scientific discovery they hold that 'the good' is a superman, bodiless yet bodily, with a beginning but without an end. It is an attractive faith, enabling them to say to Nature: '*Je m'en fiche de tout cela.* My big brother will look after

me—Pom!' One may call it anthropomorphia, for it seems especially soothing to strong personalities. Every man to his creed, as they say; and I would never wish to throw cold water on such as seek to find 'the good' by closing one eye instead of two, as is done by the extremists on the right."

"You are tolerant," said the Angel.

"Sir," said his dragoman, "as one gets older, one perceives more and more how impossible it is for man not to regard himself as the cause of the universe, and for certain individual men not to believe themselves the centre of the cause. For such to start a new belief is a biological necessity, and should by no means be discouraged. It is a safety-valve—the form of passion which the fires of youth take in men after the age of fifty, as one may judge by the case of the prophet Tolstoy and other swells. But to resume: In the centre, of course, are situated the enormous majority of the community, whose view is that they have no view of what 'the good' is."

"None?" repeated the Angel Æthereal, somewhat struck.

"Not the faintest," answered his dragoman. "These are the only true mystics; for what is a mystic if not one with an impenetrable belief in the mystery of his own existence? This group embraces the great bulk of the Laborious. It is

true that many of them will repeat what is told them of 'the good' as if it were their own view, without compunction, but this is no more than the majority of persons have done from the beginning of time."

"Quite," admitted the Angel; "I have observed that phenomenon in the course of my travels. We will not waste words on them."

"Ah, sir!" retorted his dragoman, "there is more wisdom in these persons than you imagine. For, consider what would be the fate of their brains if they attempted to think for themselves. Moreover, as you know, all definite views about 'the good' are very wearing, and it is better, so this great majority thinks, to let sleeping dogs lie than to have them barking in its head. But I will tell you something," the dragoman added: "These innumerable persons have a secret belief of their own, old as the Greeks, that good fellowship is all that matters. And, in my opinion, taking 'the good' in its limited sense, it is an admirable creed."

"Oh! cut on!" said the Angel.

"My mistake, sir!" said his dragoman. "On the left centre are grouped that increasing section whose view is that since everything is very bad, 'the good' is ultimate extinction—'Peace, perfect peace,' as the poet says. You will recollect

the old tag: 'To be or not to be.' These are they who have answered that question in the negative; pessimists masquerading to an unsuspecting public as optimists. They are no doubt descendants of such as used to be called 'Theosophians,' a sect which presupposed everything and then desired to be annihilated; or, again, of the Christian Scientists, who simply could not bear things as they were, so set themselves to think they were not, with some limited amount of success, if I remember rightly. I recall to mind the case of a lady who lost her virtue, and recovered it by dint of remembering that she had no body."

"Curious!" said the Angel. "I should like to question her; let me have her address after the lecture. Does the theory of reincarnation still obtain?"

"I do not wonder, sir, that you are interested in the point, for believers in that doctrine are compelled, by the old and awkward rule that 'Two and two make four,' to draw on other spheres for the reincarnation of their spirits."

"I do not follow," said the Angel.

"It is simple, however," answered his dragoman, "for at one time on earth, as is admitted, there was no life. The first incarnation, therefore —an amœba, we used to be told—enclosed a spirit, possibly from above. It may, indeed, have

been yours, sir. Again, at some time on this earth, as is admitted, there will again be no life; the last spirit will therefore flit to an incarnation, possibly below; and again, sir, who knows, it may be yours."

"I cannot jest on such a subject," said the Angel, with a sneeze.

"No offence," murmured his dragoman. "The last group, on the far left, to which indeed I myself am not altogether unaffiliated, is composed of a small number of extremists, who hold that 'the good' is things as they are—pardon the inevitable flaw in grammar. They consider that what is now has always been, and will always be; that things do but swell and contract and swell again, and so on for ever and ever; and that, since they could not swell if they did not contract, since without the black there could not be the white, nor pleasure without pain, nor virtue without vice, nor criminals without judges; even contraction, or the black, or pain, or vice, or judges, are not 'the bad,' but only negatives; and that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. They are Voltairean optimists masquerading to an unsuspecting population as pessimists. 'Eternal Variation' is their motto."

"I gather," said the Angel, "that these think there is no purpose in existence?"

"Rather, sir, that existence *is* the purpose. For, if you consider, any other conception of purpose implies fulfilment, or an *end*, which they do not admit, just as they do not admit a beginning."

"How logical!" said the Angel. "It makes me dizzy! You have renounced the idea of climbing then?"

"Not so," responded his dragoman. "We climb to the top of the pole, slide imperceptibly down, and begin over again; but since we never really know whether we are climbing or sliding, this does not depress us."

"To believe that this goes on for ever is futile," said the Angel.

"So we are told," replied his dragoman, without emotion. "*We* think, however, that the truth is with us, in spite of jesting Pilate."

"It is not for me," said the Angel, with dignity, "to argue with my dragoman."

"No, sir, for it is always necessary to beware of the open mind. I myself find it very difficult to believe the same thing every day. And the fact is that whatever you believe will probably not alter the truth, which may be said to have a certain mysterious immutability, considering the number of efforts men have made to change it from time to time. We are now, however, just

above the City Tabernacle, and if you will close your wings we shall penetrate it through the clap-trap-door which enables its preachers now and then to ascend to higher spheres."

"Stay!" said the Angel; "let me float a minute while I suck a peppermint, for the audiences in these places often have colds." And with that delicious aroma clinging to them they made their entry through a strait gate in the roof and took their seats in the front row, below a tall prophet in eyeglasses, who was discoursing on the stars. The Angel slept heavily.

"You have lost a good thing, sir," said his dragoman reproachfully, when they left the Tabernacle.

"In my opinion," the Angel playfully responded, "I won a better, for I went nap. What can a mortal know about the stars?"

"Believe me," answered his dragoman, "the subject is not more abstruse than is generally chosen."

"If he had taken religion I should have listened with pleasure," said the Angel.

"Oh! sir, but in these days such a subject is unknown in a place of worship. Religion is now exclusively a State affair. The change began with discipline and the Education Bill in 1918, and has gradually crystallised ever since. It is

true that individual extremists on the right make continual endeavours to encroach on the functions of the State, but they preach to empty houses."

"And the Deity?" said the Angel: "You have not once mentioned Him. It has struck me as curious."

"Belief in the Deity," responded his dragoman, "perished shortly after the Great Skirmish, during which there was too active and varied an effort to revive it. Action, as you know, sir, always brings reaction, and it must be said that the spiritual propaganda of those days was so grossly tinged with the commercial spirit that it came under the head of profiteering and earned for itself a certain abhorrence. For no sooner had the fears and griefs brought by the Great Skirmish faded from men's spirits than they perceived that their new impetus towards the Deity had been directed purely by the longing for protection, solace, comfort, and reward, and not by any real desire for 'the good' in itself. It was this truth, together with the appropriation of the word by Emperors, and the expansion of our towns, a process ever destructive of traditions, which brought about extinction of belief in His existence."

"It was a large order," said the Angel.

"It was more a change of nomenclature," replied his dragoman. "The ruling motive for belief in 'the good' is still the hope of getting something out of it—the commercial spirit is innate."

"Ah!" said the Angel, absently. "Can we have another lunch now? I could do with a slice of beef."

"An admirable idea, sir," replied his dragoman; "we will have it in the White City."

IX

"What in your opinion is the nature of happiness?" asked the Angel Æthereal, as he finished his second bottle of Bass, in the grounds of the White City. The dragoman regarded his angel with one eye.

"The question is not simple, sir, though often made the subject of symposiums in the more intellectual journals. Even now, in the middle of the twentieth century, some still hold that it is a by-product of fresh air and good liquor. The Old and Merrie England indubitably procured it from those elements. Some, again, imagine it to follow from high thinking and low living, while no mean number believe that it depends on women."

"Their absence or their presence?" asked the Angel, with interest.

"Some this and others that. But for my part, it is not altogether the outcome of these causes."

"Is this now a happy land?"

"Sir," returned his dragoman, "all things earthly are comparative."

"Get on with it," said the Angel.

"I will comply," responded his dragoman reproachfully, "if you will permit me first to draw your third cork. And let me say in passing that even your present happiness is comparative, or possibly superlative, as you will know when you have finished this last bottle. It may or may not be greater; we shall see."

"We shall," said the Angel, resolutely.

"You ask me whether this land is happy; but must we not first decide what happiness is? And how difficult this will be you shall soon discover. For example, in the early days of the Great Skirmish, happiness was reputed non-existent; every family was plunged into anxiety or mourning; and, though this to my own knowledge was not the case, such as were not pretended to be. Yet, strange as it may appear, the shrewd observer of those days was unable to remark any indication of added gloom. Certain creature comforts, no doubt, were scarce, but there was no lack of spiritual comfort, which high minds have ever associated with happiness; nor do I here allude to

liquor. What, then, was the nature of this spiritual comfort, you will certainly be asking. I will tell you, and in seven words: People forgot themselves and remembered other people. Until those days it had never been realised what a lot of medical men could be spared from the civil population; what a number of clergymen, lawyers, stockbrokers, artists, writers, politicians, and other persons, whose work in life is to cause people to think about themselves, never would be missed. Invalids knitted socks and forgot to be unwell; old gentlemen read the papers and forgot to talk about their food; people travelled in trains and forgot not to fall into conversation with each other; merchants became special constables and forgot to differ about property; the House of Lords remembered its dignity and forgot its impudence; the House of Commons almost forgot to chatter. The case of the working man was the most striking of all—he forgot he was the working man. The very dogs forgot themselves, though that, to be sure, was no novelty, as the Irish writer demonstrated in his terrific outburst: 'On my doorstep.' But time went on, and hens in their turn forgot to lay, ships to return to port, cows to give enough milk, and Governments to look ahead, till the first flush of self-forgetfulness which had dyed people's cheeks——"

"Died on them," put in the Angel, with a quiet smile.

"You take my meaning, sir," said his dragoman, "though I should not have worded it so happily. But certainly the return to self began, and people used to think: 'This war is not so bloody as I thought, for I am getting better money than I ever did, and the longer it lasts the more I shall get, and for the sake of this I am prepared to endure much.' The saying 'Beef and beer, for soon you must put up the shutters,' became the motto of all classes. 'If I am to be shot, drowned, bombed, ruined, or starved to-morrow,' they said, 'I had better eat, drink, marry, and buy jewelry to-day.' And so they did, in spite of the dreadful efforts of one bishop and two gentlemen who presided over the important question of food. They did not, it is true, relax their manual efforts to accomplish the defeat of their enemies, or 'win the war,' as it was somewhat loosely called; but they no longer worked with their spirits, which, with a few exceptions, went to sleep. For, sir, the spirit, like the body, demands regular repose, and in my opinion is usually the first of the two to snore. Before the Great Skirmish came at last to its appointed end the snoring from spirits in this country might have been heard in the moon.

People thought of little but money, revenge, and what they could get to eat, though the word 'sacrifice' was so accustomed to their lips that they could no more get it off them than the other forms of lip-salve, increasingly in vogue. They became very merry. And the question I would raise is this: By which of these two standards shall we assess the word 'happiness'? Were these people happy when they mourned and thought not of self; or when they merried and thought of self all the time?"

"By the first standard," replied the Angel, with kindling eyes. "Happiness is undoubtedly nobility."

"Not so fast, sir," replied his dragoman; "for I have frequently met with nobility in distress; and, indeed, the more exalted and refined the mind, the unhappier is frequently the owner thereof, for to him are visible a thousand cruelties and mean injustices which lower natures do not perceive."

"I perceive," said the Angel, with a shrewd glance, "that you have something up your sleeve. Shake it out!"

"My conclusion is this, sir," returned his dragoman, well pleased: "Man is only happy when he is living at a certain pressure of life to the square inch; in other words, when he is so

absorbed in what he is doing, making, saying, thinking, or dreaming, that he has lost self-consciousness. If there be upon him any ill—such as toothache or moody meditation—so poignant as to prevent him losing himself in the interest of the moment, then he is not happy. Nor must he merely think himself absorbed, but actually be so, as are two lovers sitting under one umbrella, or he who is just making a couplet rhyme."

"Would you say, then," insinuated the Angel, "that a man is happy when he meets a mad bull in a narrow lane? For there will surely be much pressure of life to the square inch."

"It does not follow," responded his dragoman; "for at such moments one is prone to stand apart, pitying himself and reflecting on the unevenness of fortune. But if he collects himself and meets the occasion with spirit he will enjoy it until, while sailing over the hedge, he has leisure to reflect once more. It is clear to me," he proceeded, "that the fruit of the tree of knowledge in the old fable was not, as has hitherto been supposed by a puritanical people, the mere knowledge of sex, but symbolised rather general self-consciousness; for I have little doubt that Adam and Eve sat together under one umbrella long before they discovered they had no clothes on. Not until

they became self-conscious about things at large did they become unhappy."

"Love is commonly reputed by some, and power by others, to be the keys of happiness," said the Angel, regardless of his grammar.

"Duds," broke in his dragoman. "For love and power are only two of the various paths to absorption, or unconsciousness of self; mere methods by which men of differing natures succeed in losing their self-consciousness, for he who, like Saint Francis, loves all creation, has no time to be conscious of loving himself, and he who rattles the sword and rules like Bill Kaser, has no time to be conscious that he is not ruling himself. I do not deny that such men may be happy, but not because of the love or the power. No, it is because they are loving or ruling with such intensity that they forget themselves in doing it."

"There is much in what you say," said the Angel thoughtfully. "How do you apply it to the times and land in which you live?"

"Sir," his dragoman responded, "the Englishman never has been, and is not now, by any means so unhappy as he looks, for, where you see a furrow in the brow, or a mouth a little open, it portends absorption rather than thoughtfulness —unless, indeed, it means adenoids—and is the

mark of a naturally self-forgetful nature; nor should you suppose that poverty and dirt, which abound, as you see, even under the sway of the Laborious, is necessarily deterrent to the power of living in the moment; it may even be a symptom of that habit. The unhappy are more frequently the clean and leisured, especially in times of peace, when they have little to do save sit under mulberry trees, invest money, pay their taxes, wash, fly, and think about themselves. Nevertheless, many of the Laborious also live at half-cock, and cannot be said to have lost consciousness of self."

"Then democracy is not synonymous with happiness?" asked the Angel.

"Dear sir," replied his dragoman, "I know they said so at the time of the Great Skirmish. But they said so much that one little one like that hardly counted. I will let you into a secret. We have not yet achieved democracy, either here or anywhere else. The old American saying about it is all very well, but since not one man in ten has any real opinion of his own on any subject on which he votes, he cannot, with the best will in the world, put it on record. Not until he learns to have and record his own real opinion will he truly govern himself for himself, which is, as you know, the test of true democracy."

"I am getting fuddled," said the Angel. "What is it you want to make you happy?"

His dragoman sat up: "If I am right," he purred, "in my view that happiness is absorption, our problem is to direct men's minds to absorption in right and pleasant things. An American making a corner in wheat is absorbed and no doubt happy, yet he is an enemy of mankind, for his activity is destructive. We should seek to give our minds to creation, to activities good for others as well as for ourselves, to simplicity, pride in work, and forgetfulness of self in every walk of life. We should do things for the sheer pleasure of doing them, and not for what they may or may not be going to bring us in, and be taught always to give our whole minds to it; in this way only will the edge of our appetite for existence remain as keen as a razor which is stropped every morning by one who knows how. On the negative side we should be brought up to be kind, to be clean, to be moderate, and to love good music, exercise, and fresh air."

"That sounds a bit of all right," said the Angel. "What measures are being taken in these directions?"

"It has been my habit, sir, to study the Education Acts of my country ever since that which was passed at the time of the Great Skirmish;

but, with the exception of exercise, I have not as yet been able to find any direct allusion to these matters. Nor is this surprising when you consider that education is popularly supposed to be, not for the acquisition of happiness, but for the good of trade or the promotion of acute self-consciousness through what we know as culture. If by any chance there should arise a President of Education so enlightened as to share my views, it would be impossible for him to mention the fact for fear of being sent to Colney Hatch."

"In that case," asked the Angel, "you do not believe in the progress of your country?"

"Sir," his dragoman replied earnestly, "you have seen this land for yourself and have heard from me some account of its growth from the days when you were last on earth, shortly before the Great Skirmish; it will not have escaped your eagle eye that this considerable event has had some influence in accelerating the course of its progression; and you will have noticed how, notwithstanding the most strenuous intentions at the close of that tragedy, we have yielded to circumstance and in every direction followed the line of least resistance."

"I have a certain sympathy with that," said the Angel, with a yawn; "it is so much easier."

"So we have found; and our country has got

along, perhaps, as well as one could have expected, considering what it has had to contend with: pressure of debt; primrose paths; pelf; party; patrio-Prussianism; the people; pundits; Puritans; proctors; property; philosophers; the Pontifical; and progress. I will not disguise from you, however, that we are far from perfection; and it may be that on your next visit, thirty-seven years hence, we shall be further. For, however it may be with angels, sir, with men things do not stand still; and, as I have tried to make clear to you, in order to advance in body and spirit, it is necessary to be masters of your environment and discoveries instead of letting them be masters of you. Wealthy again we may be; healthy and happy we are not, as yet."

"I have finished my beer," said the Angel Æthereal, with finality, "and am ready to rise. You have nothing to drink! Let me give you a testimonial instead!" Pulling a quill from his wing, he dipped it in the mustard and wrote: "A Dry Dog—No Good For Trade" on his dragoman's white hat. "I shall now leave the earth," he added.

"I am pleased to hear it," said his dragoman, "for I fancy that the longer you stay the more vulgar you will become. I have noticed it growing on you, sir, just as it does on us."

The Angel smiled. "Meet me by sunlight alone," he said, "under the left-hand lion in Trafalgar Square at this hour of this day, in 1984. Remember me to the waiter, will you? So long!" And, without pausing for a reply, he spread his wings, and soared away.

"*L'homme moyen sensuel! Sic itur ad astra!*" murmured his dragoman enigmatically, and, lifting his eyes, he followed the Angel's flight into the empyrean.

1917–18