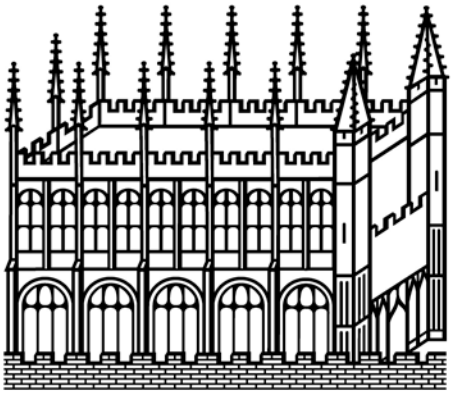

BLIND MAN'S BUFF

LOUIS HÉMON

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BLIND MAN'S BUFF

BY

LOUIS HÉMON

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BLIND MAN'S BUFF

PART I

I

THE foreman had said to him: 'You will easily find lodgings; there's no lack of them in these parts,' and Mike O'Brady had wandered aimlessly from street to street looking out for the notice-boards in the windows.

The foreman was right; there was no lack of them. Some of them had notice-boards of card-board, others half-sheets of cheap note-paper, across which an unskilful hand had climbed and slithered from one line to the next, painfully rounding the characters, making a fresh start for each down stroke, and leaving dirty finger-marks in the corners. But the notice was nearly always the same. 'Rooms for a single man,' 'Cheap Lodgings,' 'Unfurnished room,' '*Room for a single man*,' and sometimes, when the door steps were unnecessarily clean

and there were curtains in the windows, 'Room for a respectable single man.' Mike, however, merely glanced at them without stopping, and passed on with a grunt of derision.

'Respectable, eh!' He knew what that meant. An oily landlord who would not tolerate your coming in late at night, and would spend his Sundays stewing in his black clothes over a pious book; or a landlady who would expect you to wear slippers in the house and would constantly and insultingly extol the beauties of temperance.

That was not what Mike O'Brady wanted. He might make up his mind to be respectable, but he was not going to advertise it.

Other notices attracted him because they repeated the usual inscription in Hebrew. Again and again he felt astonished at seeing these surprising notices hung out in an English street, on little grey plastered house-fronts, and he would stop a moment in front of half-open doors, expecting to see strange people in the passage, wearing brightly-coloured gew-gaws.

He had never seen anything quite like this before, and it gave him the feeling that

he had done well to leave his native country, even though his principal reason for doing so had been to avoid a little misunderstanding with the Dublin police. 'Respectable, eh!' And why not, he had been luckier than many others. As soon as he arrived he had found a job that would last him a long time, he had good clothes and strong boots, a few half-crowns over in his pocket, and a clear conscience. For the little misunderstanding, which the Dublin police of course wanted to magnify, was only the result of a purely private affair—'an affair of honour,' the other fellow had said; and if honour and strength had not both been on the same side, so much the worse for the other fellow.

So Mike strolled through the streets, with his hands deep in his pockets, swaying a little as he went, wondering which landlord was to have the privilege of receiving his money in exchange for a bed, a little food, and that complete independence which any man worthy of the name considers more precious than daily bread.

Another notice! hanging in the window of a little tobacco and paper shop. The landlord was a wise man and did not require

his tenant to be 'respectable'; and yet . . . perhaps, after all, he did require it, for as Mike was glancing carelessly at the house, he became suddenly interested, hesitated, and then once more examined the notice more carefully. A very beautiful, dark, strongly-built girl with large pearl earrings was standing in the doorway of the shop gazing disdainfully at the scene in Cable Street. A Jewess evidently, and evidently too the daughter of the shopkeeper. Mike examined his tobacco pouch; saw regretfully that it was full, and decided to buy a box of matches, which cost little and would always come in handy; besides he would be able to look at the covers of the illustrated papers at the same time.

When he entered the shop, the beautiful girl made way for him to pass, but immediately resumed her contemplation, after giving him no more than an absent-minded look. With her vigorous frame almost blocking the door and the newspapers hanging against the window, but little light could enter the inner regions; yet the small ill-lit shop exhibited such prodigious orderliness as to occasion regret that the sales of the day

should disturb its harmony. The packets of tobacco and cigarettes arranged on a shelf, the jars of many-coloured sweets standing in a row above them, the weekly penny papers piled astraddle on the counter, even the bundles of children's toys hanging from rails, seemed each to have found their right places by themselves, the only spots which exactly suited them; and the old grey-bearded man who ruled over them all had in fact a look of supernatural wisdom, the appearance of a creator benevolently surveying the universe that he has brought into being.

The sight of such majesty induced Mike O'Brady to double the value of his order by buying the *Mirror of Life*, the only paper which appeared to him to be worth reading; then he took his pipe from his pocket, slowly filled it and lit it with care. His eyes wandered to the window, on which the light formed a bright lattice-work between the open newspapers, and to the tall girl who still kept her back turned towards him; the light coming in from the street shone upon a harmony of black hair and powdered skin; her white blouse moulded her sturdy waist

as she stood erect with her hands behind her back and carelessly glanced down and up the street. She was too beautiful for her surroundings, too beautiful for the grey street, too beautiful even for the exquisitely tidy shop ; she looked like an exiled princess who, too proud to complain, contemplated her place of refuge with supreme disdain. Mike felt all this and did not know what to say. No one took any notice of him ; so he stood still, leaning on the counter, watching the smoke from his pipe float up into the air, trying to appear at his ease.

' The summer is coming at last,' he said. ' It's about time ! '

The old man seemed to awaken to the fact that he was still there. He looked at him with surprise, nodded his head, and then let his chin sink down on to his chest, over which his grey beard spread out in woolly tufts. When he sat thus, with his eyes turned downwards and his eye-lids half closed, he had an air of dignity worthy of a patriarch about to see visions ; but his eye-lids opened over small, curiously alert black eyes that shone with the distrust and hatred of generations.

When he spoke it was as though the words just spoken had not been lost upon him; as though he had weighed and meditated upon them at his leisure so as to give them deeper significance.

'The summer!' he said. 'It's true, the summer is coming. No one can prevent that! But then—what?—winter again!'

As he said this he gazed fixedly at Mike O'Brady, as though he expected him to justify what he had said, as though he blamed him for the fatal succession of the months, and Mike, completely at a loss, held his peace.

After a further silence Mike said casually: 'I see you've got a room to let here.'

The silhouette in the door turned her head and looked at him over her shoulder. The old man suddenly turned his eyes away, corrected the alignment of some newspapers on the counter and said hesitatingly:

'Yes,—there's a room.'

'You see,' added Mike, 'I'm looking for one, I've just come to these parts.'

The shopkeeper said slowly:

'Well—yes—there's a room: but I don't know if it will suit you. I don't know . . . I'm sure . . .'

The beautiful Jewess was still looking at him from the doorway over her massive shoulders; the heavy pearls which hung from her ears swung gently to and fro; the light from the street framed her powdered face with a thin, white film. Suddenly Mike O'Brady felt he was just a stranger permitted to contemplate for a few moments from behind a window a vision of the life of a people he would never understand.

He mumbled, 'Oh, there's no hurry, is there? I will come back later,' and went out into the street.

It was the time of day when it was full of women returning to a neighbouring factory from dinner. Most of them were Irish, with shawls wrapped round their heads and hanging down over short skirts on which were bits of cotton.

Mike threw back his shoulders and felt at his ease; he looked insolently at the prettiest; jostled others who were blocking the pavement, and treated their invectives with an ironical smile; then he hurried down Cable Street, whistling as he went, with his hands in his pockets, conscious of that sense of effortless well-being which comes to a

strong, healthy, self-satisfied, good-looking youth.

What silly notion had made him lose ten minutes of sunshine in a dark shop with an old lunatic with a cracked voice, and a lump of a girl who, from dressing herself up like a reliquary, had begun to think her own bones were relics? His pals would have said it was just like Mike O'Brady to go prowling round a pretty woman, whether white, yellow or black, but it was not like him to go away from her like a whipped dog without ever looking her straight in the face.

II

SUMMER had indeed come. Spring-time in the East End, spring in the narrow alleys that run behind the warehouses, has little to do with the spring-time of romance. At the best, it is but an alternation of furtive sunshine and relentless rain, of tepid damp following cold damp, a succession of promising mornings and lamentable days; but beyond the warehouses the river flows right up under their walls; and spring on the river is a good thing, a thing made of gentle sunshine on sparkling water, of refreshing rains which wash the grey air and the old smoky stones, of strong fresh draughts of wind which come up with the tide and smell of mud and salt. That kind of spring is not the kind which goes to the head and intoxicates, but it fills the lungs, it makes you light-hearted and strong, and gives

to the whole great world the soul of a child.

The warehouse where Mike O'Brady worked was like every other one: six storeys piled with packing-cases, bales and casks, permeated by strange smells which changed from day to day according to the cargoes. The wall next to the river was pierced with panels which opened outwards, and when these panels were let down and held in place by chains you had only to take one step out to leave at once all those dark buildings behind you and to stand in the open air above the deep water. Looking up the river you would see the decks of steamers moored alongside the banks; solitary barges drifted sideways with the tide, carelessly charging the tugs; down the river Tower Bridge would open majestically every half hour, while all the time one steamer after another would slip her cables and go off sounding her siren boastfully, to tell those who led a homely life that she was going back to the dangerous seas by the tide which had come to fetch her.

But over and above all this was the sound of the wind. It blew with the incoming tide for hours and hours without

variation or diminution, so steadily, so strongly, so charged with smells of the sea, that it was difficult to believe that the real sea was five hours away; surely the Greenwich hills, whose outline was visible to the east, were high promontories from the top of which you would be able to see the expanse of deep waters, the free line of the horizon whence came those fresh blasts of air which had not yet passed over cities.

Mike worked for the whole of his first day on the other side of the warehouse, above the narrow alley of which the walls formed, as it were, the sides of a well, where the great van horses stamped uneasily to the sound of oaths and the grinding of pulleys. He was in a good humour and the time passed quickly enough; in the first place because it needs the skill of an artist to handle bales and casks in a narrow space—not only strength but a sense of weight and distance, an instinct for those movements which produce leverage at the cost of little effort, a cool head and right judgment to prevent accidents; and because, too, every now and then opportunities inevitably occurred for harmless relaxation—listening to the sound of vitriolic

comments poured out through a trap-door of the fourth storey on the physique, probable habits, antecedents and the true capacity of a clumsy van driver; or the partaking of cheery libation offered to him at dinner-time at the counter of a neighouring pub for the sake of acquaintance. In the afternoon work went on as it had done in the morning, just hard enough to keep him busy and give him the pleasure of using his strong muscles, and yet simple enough to spare him the humiliation of a clumsy novitiate; a good day's work which left him content without being over tired, conscious of having accomplished his task like a free man without either servile eagerness or over-strain.

Just before evening fell Mike was sent to the other side of the warehouse to lend a hand to the gangs unloading, and through a lowered trap-door the wind caught him suddenly full in the face, inspiring him with a feeling of glorious vigour and gradually too with a kind of savage exaltation. The buildings on the other side of the river were far enough off for the whole expanse of sky to be seen in all the beauty of its tender colours. The peace of evening extinguished

one after the other all the sounds of man's labours; and the whistles of the tugs kept repeating every minute that the day was done —quite done, and that every man must go home and do what he pleased. But the wind proclaimed clamorously that it was sacrilege for men to shut themselves up within four walls, to obey petty laws and mean customs, when the world was full of life waiting for them, and that to all those who wanted to live and be strong it would blow strength inexhaustible.

Mike had a curious habit of sometimes counting up one by one in his mind, and with scrupulous care, all the reasons he had for being happy. As he stood on the edge of the open trap-door which hung out over the water he felt happy, principally because he had good health, he felt strong and he had plenty to eat; because his blood coursed rich and warm through his veins, as it fought against the keenness of the wind. He felt happy at the thought that if he were sensible he would neither hunger nor thirst for a long time; happy at having to work often near the water and in the open air; and happy at the thought of having just come to a great

unknown city where he could wander through the streets as he liked, ready to take advantage of anything that offered, striding along with his hands deep in his pockets—a barbarian amid his hereditary enemies.

Three-quarters of an hour later he was indeed wandering through the streets, his hunger satisfied, and in search of an adventure. He had all London before him, and he wanted to see something more brilliant than narrow streets between low houses. So he turned back up Leman Street till he reached Aldgate, where he stopped. This was already better. The shops were still open and their lights illuminated the pavement, the street was wide and straight, the tower over the big draper's shop was picturesque and impressive, and among the crowd of people streaming along away from the city and returning to their homes were many well-dressed, well-fed people of both sexes, whom Mike could stare at insolently and curse at his ease. He did so, moreover, without any bitterness and almost without jealousy. He went and stood in front of a shop, with his feet well apart, gazing at prosperous looking men and pretty,

well-dressed women, thinking with savage joy of the fate which would befall them all if he, Mike O'Brady, were master of their destinies. Most of the time he did not go so far as to formulate any precise wishes; he just contented himself by taking their measure insolently as they passed him by, whistling between his teeth, and knowing full well that they took little heed of him. His mute defiance was sufficient revenge, but in a really free country, less outrageously policed, how he would have liked to show them how much their smug dignity weighed in his hands. The men! At the first word of patronage he would have sent them rolling in the street with their jaw in two pieces; and as for the women! ah, the women might have come off badly later on.

One of those who passed him at that moment attracted his attention and seemed to remind him of something. He said to himself: 'Hullo; that was the big Jewess of Cable Street.' Then he realised that she was not the daughter of the Cable Street shopkeeper, but another woman of the same race who might have been her sister, and a little later he saw another one go by, and then

another, and they never ceased to go by as long as he stayed there. Among them were young girls of fourteen who already showed signs of precocious maturity, and boldly made play with their eyes; while others, hardly five years older, but already stout, swung their heavy hips at each step they took and diplayed their well-developed bosoms under knowingly unfastened cloaks. All of them had the same strongly marked features, thickly covered with powder, the same liquid black or greenish-grey eyes, shining with the secret pride of their race, the same look of confident vanity, confidence in the stubborn astuteness of their men, in their own ability as housewives, in the inevitable success of their strong, well-fed and cunning brothers and sisters; vain of the costly and substantial clothes they wore on their bulky bodies.

As he watched them pass, Mike felt the savage hatred of humiliation grow within him. This procession of fine girls who took no notice of him was one long personal insult; what did they care whether a needy Irishman watched them and preened himself as he did so. All the greatness of their

race, their ambition and the provocative self-confidence of conscious virtue and rich clothes separated them from him; so that they could even allow themselves to look boldly at him as at other fine young men and pass on without turning round.

'You and your grand airs, you think yourselves princesses, don't you!' he muttered; and then there came to him all at once a dim consciousness that after all they belonged to a race which has often been enslaved, and that 'if ever we could get rid of laws . . .'

He saw himself, and a few thousand young fellows like himself, in the streets of a pillaged town between houses from which the cries of women came through gaping windows, and those women who were fighting and screaming to defend themselves from the embraces or the blows of ruffians were the same as those who were passing by here—fine girls no longer disdainful now, but suppliants with tears flowing from their black eyes down their white cheeks, while one after another the doors of their houses were broken in.

A blast of cold air made him brace himself

up, and the vision passed, quickly forgotten. He turned back up the Commercial Road, intending to go home, and after going a few yards noticed that his throat was dry, and that he still had money in his pocket. He went into the nearest pub, and found that he was the only one there. The barmaid who served him was unmistakably English, no longer very young, not very pretty, and her eyes looked tired. When she had pulled down the beer lever and wiped the counter with a cloth, she sat down on a high stool directly opposite Mike and looked at him listlessly.

'I haven't seen you here before,' she said, and he explained that he had only just arrived in London, and that he had hardly had time to turn round, although he was staying near by. She looked at him again with rather more curiosity and the superior smile of a person of experience.

'Ah!' she said. 'London is a big place . . .' Mike agreed that London seemed to be very big, and was not at all like what he expected.

'In the first place,' he said, 'it's full of Jews. You see nothing else.'

The barmaid burst out laughing, and after questioning him, explained that what he had so far seen was not, so to speak, London at all, but only a kind of excrescence of the great city, where immigrants from Poland and Russia stayed for a generation or two before moving on to Park Lane with their first million.

'You must go to the West End,' she said, 'to Regent Street and Piccadilly, that's where the shops are! That's where all these Jewesses get their Paris gowns from in the fashion of two years ago! By Friday evening they have finished their work for the week, and they go off to the swell parts of the town and try and look like real ladies. If you could see the miserable places some of them come out of with their wonderful get-ups, you'd laugh!'

Mike shook his head. The West End did not tempt him. But to learn that all those handsome girls he had seen go by were not real ladies, gave him keen pleasure. He observed that he had thought as much.

A fat man who had been going round behind the counter sat down and looked about him with an air of proprietorship.

You had only to look at him to see that this was his pub, his money, his counter and his barmaid. His complexion was apoplectic, and he smoked a cigar with short puffs, breathing heavily. He looked sternly at Mike, trying to make him understand that his twopence hardly entitled him to stay longer ; then, taking his cigar from between his teeth, he knocked off the ash and in a thick voice called out ' Winnie.' The barmaid turned round with an air of humiliated lassitude, and he beckoned her to him. When she was near him he looked at her for a moment, said a few words to her in a low voice and then went away whistling. ' Winnie ' went back to her seat and put her elbows on the counter.

In the crude light of the gas her powdered face looked tired and wan beneath her dull yellow hair. Her attitude of abandonment, with her head poised uneasily on her delicate-looking hand, the dark circles beneath her eyes, and the twist of her thin painted lips, spoke of such fatigue and disgust as all the peace of our Lord, that ' peace which passeth understanding ' would hardly take away.

Mike leaned over towards her and whispered: 'That's the boss, eh? Old blackguard!'

He was conscious of all the fierce hatred of his race for those who own houses and land, for the masters whom the laws protect, and he reflected that here was another wrong that he would never be able to redress, a wrong that he could always remember and see that it was paid for with interest; never mind when, never mind by whom, so long as he saw to it that it was paid for.

III

THE next few weeks taught Mike that he did indeed know only a very small part of London; he wished to see the rest, and when he had seen it he understood that a wise providence had taken him, immediately he arrived, into the sphere to which he belonged, and that he would do well not to leave it.

To reach the West End of which the barmaid had spoken, he had to traverse endless regions, which towards evening—the only time when he was free—were gloomy and deserted.

At that hour the doors and windows of the city were closed and barricaded, so that the heaps of money which had been tossed about all day might sleep in peace deep in their safes. Holborn looked like a dead city, in which the tall red fortress of the Prudential

stood up, melancholy and majestic, like a deserted keep. Even the Strand, when once Fleet Street was passed, had nothing much to show beyond the Gothic melancholy of the Law Courts and the Sahara of that great stretch of empty land for sale, which never will be sold.

And what lay beyond those mirthless spaces? Charing Cross, Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus, which every moment confirmed the insulting impression that he had hardly any excuse to be there. The streets were too sumptuous, the lights too strong, the people too well dressed.

In the neighbourhood of Aldgate he could take his stand on the pavement, with his shoulders thrown back and his feet wide apart, take stock of and hate at his ease the most luxuriously dressed passers-by, conscious all the time of representing a vast body of humanity there beside him who sympathised with him, shared his poverty and ought to have shared his hatred; but here he felt isolated amid the oppressors, lost in their territory, and he could not throw off a certain sense of discomfort, an instinctive fear of exposing himself to the

rigour of one of their laws by just being there among them.

And so he came to understand that those glittering regions were something outside his world, a world which, as he grew to know it better, showed itself to be greater, more diverse, and richer in all those things that lay within his reach.

In the midst of it was Cable Street, with the obscure restaurant in which he took his meals morning and evening, and the house where he slept at night; Cable Street, which ran from west to east like a continent, passing by degrees from Palestine to Ireland, countries which touched but did not mingle nor comprehend one another, full as they were of mutual distrust and contempt.

On dull evenings when he wanted nothing but peace and well-drawn beer, it was good to walk lazily down the street, stopping at the familiar pubs, passing by degrees from Shadwell to Leman Street, and to stroll quietly back, gazing with pleasure at the familiar scenes and faces; a woman going by, people sitting on the doorsteps of their houses, a brief squabble at the door of the 'Jolly Mariner,' or the interminable

quarrel of two termagants submitting their grievance to the judgment of the street.

When that did not satisfy him, he had the whole of the Commercial Road before him, and further on Whitechapel, a world of by-streets and little alleys, each one of which had its own distinct life, changing according to the day and vibrating according to the hour.

Aldgate was an isthmus, a defile down which those whom their work summoned to other countries passed every morning and repassed every evening. On one side was the station of the Metropolitan Railway; on the other the German restaurant, at the door of which you could stand when your stomach was full and read with amused curiosity the names of barbarous dishes; a little further on there were picture-houses, in front of which stood composite groups of people attracted at once by the refined elegance of the white and gold façade and by the comic or bloody scenes depicted by the crudely coloured advertisements.

Then came the junction of the Commercial Road, Whitechapel Road and Leman Street, a wide open space to which the tower of

the big drapery shop gave special dignity; further on still were on the one side the public library, and on the other 'Wonderland,' two places of importance.

After that, on the left-hand pavement were the Pavilion, which was a theatre, and the Paragon, which was a music-hall; while the right-hand pavement had nothing better to show than the London Hospital, and these two last points marked the extreme limit of the regions of interest; beyond them there was nothing but the endless straight line stretching across Mile End towards Bow Bridge and Stratford—a disinherited country.

And from Aldgate to Mile End each of the little streets which ran into Whitechapel Road was another door opening into the unknown, the threshold of a universe composed of a number of houses each exactly similar to the other; Middlesex Street where the Sunday morning market is held, Osborne Street leading to Brick Lane, and, most curious of all, Old Montague Street, which is more like an ancient ghetto than any other, a narrow artery into which overcrowded houses overflow, where tiny buyings and

sellings go on all day to the tune of fierce haggling. Even those streets which at first seemed the most colourless and ordinary often concealed unexpected revelations; a narrow passage giving a sudden vision of a dirty courtyard between cracked walls, encumbered with drying linen, seething with multi-coloured children and slovenly women; a few words of Yiddish heard in passing, full of a sense of the mystery of the incomprehensible; the figure of a woman behind a window watching you pass by with unplumbed eyes.

Day by day Mike learned to know these things, but without ever losing the impression of being in a foreign land. Nearer the docks, in Shadwell or Wapping, he recognised the features of men of his own race or of Saxons, and almost felt at home; for if the Saxons were enemies and heretics he knew them well, and more or less understood them. But as soon as he caught sight of the Hebrew notices in the windows, and the massive beauties with gold bracelets, he wavered and felt lost, while a sense of hostile timidity rose up within him. That, however, was only how things looked in the evening; happily in the

day-time they were restful and familiar and robbed of their mystery.

Week by week the warehouse exchanged its casks for packing-cases, those packing-cases for bales, and those bales for bars of metal; steamers came alongside, emptied their holds, and made off hurriedly again on the hunt for dividends, but rain or fine the strong fresh wind blowing on the water made each day like the last, and every day it was good to live so long as one had something to eat.

IV

THE foreman needed two men to take some barges down to Battersea; he had fixed on one, an old Irishman who had worked at the warehouse for a long time, and he was looking for another. A few yards away Mike was scratching his head and calculating his chances of being chosen. His fellow-countryman, who was already pulling on the hawsers, winked in his direction and said to the foreman:

'Begging your honour's pardon, but there's Mike O'Brady over there—he'd do the job for you.'

The foreman looked Mike up and down and said doubtfully:

'But he's never been on the water yet, he's not used to the job!'

Indignation caused the old Irishman to raise his arms to Heaven as he exclaimed:

'Mike! Not used to the job! Glory be to the Saints, and him who was known in all Belfast as an experienced waterman!'

'If that's so,' said the foreman, 'let him go! Besides, any fool could do what has to be done.'

Mike smiled amiably and jumped into one of the barges. He, however, thought he ought to remind his compatriot that he did not come from Belfast but from Dublin, which is far inland, and that he had never had charge of a boat.

'Well, then,' observed his friend, 'it is time you began; and at least you're better than a Saxon.'

Nevertheless Mike acquired a high opinion of the calling of a waterman; he had never done anything that he liked so much. The chief thing, it seemed, was to smoke the whole time and to appear to be very much at your ease. It was also a good plan to go down every now and then into the hold of the barges and appear to arrange the cargo; the tug undertook the rest, and it was pleasant to sit in the forepart of the boat, far away from foremen, with your legs hanging in space and to watch London go

by on both sides of you. London Bridge and St. Pauls, the Embankment, the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben occupied his idle curiosity one by one; the wash of the tug splashed beneath his feet, and the shadow of heavy clouds made great grey stains which flew along the water. He took his pipe from his mouth, and spat voluptuously into the troubled water.

'This is what I like,' he said to himself aloud. 'Yes, it's what I like. My word, it's like a yacht.'

The word reminded him of pictures of regattas which you see in the middle pages of illustrated papers; great out-spread sails hovering over short waves, too well varnished hulls in which crews of amateurs get feverishly into one another's way, tearing the skin off their hands on the wet sheets. 'Idiots,' he muttered, and he crossed his arms with an air of satisfaction. On his boat there would have been cosy chairs, fresh drinks and sailors paid to do the hard work; and he dreamt of long cruises on the blue water, of a deck peopled with chosen friends, and of unknown coasts rising slowly into sight out of the sea.

He emerged from his dream to take part in a chorus of oaths directed at another barge which was going up the river with the tide, and had only just avoided collision.

When it was out of hearing the men shouted from one barge to another, and from the tug to the barges all the biting repartees which they had not thought of at the moment. A little later they had to stop, for they had arrived at their journey's end.

After half an hour's wait bad news came to the two navigators: it was useless to wait till the barges were emptied in order to go back in them; it would take too long. They would have to go back by land.

As he stood on the embankment at Battersea where they had disembarked, the old Irishman made an elaborate calculation.

'From here to Wapping by bus,' he said, 'costs at least fourpence a head, which the boss will, of course, pay. So if we were to go back on foot, that would make two glasses apiece.'

Mike promptly declared that he particularly wanted to walk. They drank one glass then and there, and another in Pannington Lane; a little further on they thought

they could not have taken the shortest way, and they were consequently compelled to go into a pub to verify this and ask the publican which road they ought to have taken. The publican was a genial, well-informed fellow who kept them there for some time.

Before reaching London Bridge, Mike's companion was seized with melancholy. He declared that for years he had been devoured by longing for his native country, that he had had enough of Saxons, of their country which had no beauty and their drinks which were without virtue and expensive, and his despair assumed such proportions that Mike had to take him to a neighbouring bar. There, a subtle instinct whispered to him to order Irish whisky in consolatory doses. The old man was deeply touched by this attention, and leaning with one hand on the counter he informed everybody that Mike was one of the best who had ever come out of the old country; that the saints watched over his safety and cherished him, and that if he, Timothy Sullivan, had had any sons he would have wished them to have been true as gold, loyal and good, in every respect like Mike O'Brady.

Mike smiled politely, and drank his whisky without saying a word. He was perfectly sober, and demonstrated that he was so by taking charge of affairs when they went out; he walked straight, helped his companion along and never once took a wrong turning; but he could not get rid of a confused impression that the world on that particular morning was not quite like the world of other days; that there was something changed in London, or perhaps that the passage of time had been brought up short and gone on again haltingly, somewhat uncertainly, towards unexpected goals.

He was therefore somewhat astonished to see a crowd at the foot of the steps of Tower Hill, and to notice that it was only half-past one and dinner-time.

In the crowd were dockers from Lower Thames Street, out-of-works, and city clerks lounging in the sunshine before going back to their offices. At the top of the steps was a man dressed as a workman, who was speaking jerkily and with clumsy gestures.

'They just laugh at you,' he was saying. 'They have laughed at you ever since the beginning and they will go on laughing at

you until you tell them to stop. . . . Some laugh at you as they tell you funny tales about the empire, dreadnoughts, German invasion, and tariff reform. Others slap you on the back and tell you that now they are in power everything is going to be different; that the improvement of the conditions of the working class occupies them day and night, and they are the fellows who tell you fairy tales chiefly about old age pensions, education acts and democratic budgets. And they are laughing at you just as the others are; only they are more dangerous, because now and then they throw you a bone to gnaw, or at least appear to do so; and because there are always fools who are taken in and believe the promises made to them, and accept their fate and live like pigs in the sties which are left over by the others. . . .

'If they had a ha'-pennorth of sense they would say to Conservatives and Liberals—"You've been playing battledore and shuttlecock with power long enough, and have never done anything for us; so now we're going to look elsewhere," and when they all come to swell the Socialist party, the Labour

party, you will see that the Labour party is nearly the whole country, and that the only ones left outside it are the money or land grabbers, pirates whose one wish will be to be forgotten. . . .

'What you've got to do the very first time Liberals or Conservatives come and tell you their fairy tales is to bang your fist on the table and say: "We've had enough of this. We're drunk with fine speeches and promises, and now we want something else. What we want is big, clean, convenient houses, hours of work that won't exhaust us, and will leave us some leisure over, and we only want to work just so much as each man's labour will benefit all. We want plenty of food and good, which has not been adulterated by thieves of tradesmen, and we want good clothes for everyone, not diamonds and velvet for some and rags for others!" And mind you,' he went on, 'all that is possible. There's enough money for it, if indeed we let money still go on—there's enough money in the world for all that; it doesn't matter to us where and in whose hands that money is. Wherever it is we've got to take it and use it, because that money

belongs to us since this country belongs to us. . . .'

The old fellow nudged Mike's elbow and whispered:

'It's true—what he says. But you try and make a Saxon understand anything . . .'

Mike gave no answer; as he stood with his fists clenched in his pockets, he felt a hot wave of indignation and anger stir up within him.

So that was it! He had known for years and years—almost always—that he had been robbed of something, and now he understood it all clearly. It was like something that happened on the stage; a legacy stolen by scoundrels who wallowed in purple and gold while the real heirs led lives of penury; and, as on the stage, everything would come right in the end. Only this particular play had already lasted for so many years, and the despoilers were so powerful and so rich, that some desperate stroke would be necessary to bring about a happy ending.

He looked round about him to see who were on his side in the great fight.

They were poor wretches for the most part: ragged out-of-works who listened

absent-mindedly to pass the empty time away, dockers, pert street boys, a few plump well-dressed artisans who were too much pre-occupied with digesting their dinner to attempt to understand.

Most of them came there every day during the dinner hour; every day they had heard the new gospel preached, and they had never yet done anything. Riches and honour were still in the hands of the wicked, and the rightful heirs ignorantly performed degrading tasks, with the unprofitable knowledge of their anaemic virtue as their only consolation.

'It's shameful,' he said out loud.

The old man, who was still holding his arm, looked up at him with surprise.

'Are you a Socialist, then, Mike?' he asked; and Mike answered curtly:

'Of course I am.'

As they stood there on the outskirts of the crowd, in the middle of an amused group, the old Irishman prophesied that if Mike was a Socialist things would happen, and the Saxon oppressors might be in for a pretty bad time; for he came from a country of which all the inhabitants were authentic

descendants of several Kings of Ireland, and one of them alone was worth several dozen Englishmen when it came to a fight.

But Mike was gazing at the gray walls of the Tower; he was already tired of abstract principles and great ideas, and was secretly dreaming of an immediate and personal revenge taken on the person of one of those who had robbed him of his inheritance—a revenge for the execution of which he, Mike O'Brady, would be chosen as the instrument of omniscient justice.

At the warehouse where he spent the rest of the day he turned over in his mind the truth he had just discovered, and when evening came he went forth to preach it in all the pubs of Cable Street.

Like all prophets, he at once encountered the prodigious stupidity of dense, self-satisfied people, and when he had been turned out for having done rather too great bodily harm to an incredulous member of his audience, he departed contemptuously to Aldgate, tasting to the full the bitter pride of a martyr.

Chance, or perhaps an unremembered memory, led him to the 'Three Dolphins,' where he found the barmaid with the tired

eyes who had been the first to explain to him that the East End was not London.

She was wearing a pale blue silk blouse and a black velvet bow which served to puff out her yellow hair, and she smiled mechanically a threadbare smile. Mike watched her closely as she was operating the beer levers, and came to the conclusion that, in spite of being well-dressed, she must be one of those who would rejoice to hear the good news; he, therefore, informed her of the early advent of better times.

She soon interrupted him by saying chaffingly, 'Why, are you a Socialist already? Well, you haven't lost much time; and so you want to change everything—poor boy. They've been talking for a long, long time about that Socialism of yours—I have read about it in the papers—and nothing much has happened yet, has it?'

He explained to her that a new era had opened that very day at half-past one exactly, and that the effect of it would soon be apparent. If not, he and thousands of others would go out into the streets with hammers and iron bars to take back what belonged to them by right. He tried to make

her understand that that was quite a special day, unlike any others that had preceded it; that something strange and unexpected had happened which would transform the existing order and hasten the dawn of better days, and that, besides, injustice was so flagrant and had lasted for so long that it must inevitably soon come to an end.

She looked at him pityingly.

'That's right,' she said, 'everything is going to be changed because you want it to be—you have only got to say the word! And what will happen next? What is this Socialism of yours, after all?'

Mike felt he had won. 'Ah, you see,' he said, 'you don't even know what it is!' And he began to explain.

It was very simple; Socialism was what things ought to have been from the beginning; as everybody wanted them to be. The world would arrange itself into perfect order and would move peacefully onwards to uncounted delights, with shouts of joy and paeans of triumph. Work would hardly be necessary; delivered at last from slavery, men and women would pass happily through a world bathed in sunshine, crowded with

tables ready set and bending beneath the weight of endless wealth created by easy and pleasant labour. Everyone would live as you saw the rich live, in abundance, without effort or care.

And all that was their right; it was their property that had been stolen by a minority from them and which was accumulating uselessly in safes or was being wasted in fantastic luxury.

On the day on which they resumed possession of their property, that minority would pay the price of their age-long theft, and would expiate the shame of the idleness and ease of the life they had led among a crushed and tortured people.

It seemed to him that all the splendour of the coming Utopia and the triumph of the inevitable revenge filled the dingy taproom and floated upwards in clouds of blue smoke. The barmaid watched him silently, with her mouth half open and a look of incredulous amazement on her face. Mike took a step forward unsteadily and, leaning over the counter, said:

'And I'll tell you this. When the great day comes the first thing I shall do will be to

come in here and make mincemeat of the boss. What do you say to that?'

She threw back her head and, shutting her eyes, broke into a shrill laugh.

'Oh, if you do that,' she said, 'then I am with you.'

Outside, the night was peopled with half-suffocated cries, with lights that twinkled and staggered, and gusts of air now burning hot, now cool, that blew down the streets. The people with whom Mike lodged were chatting with their neighbours at the door of their house, and when they saw him come they stood aside to make room for him to pass and gave him a kindly smile.

He went upstairs, sat down on his bed and flung his cap on the floor in a sudden access of rage. Shaking his fists at the open window he shouted hoarsely, 'It mustn't last too long. Do they think that we're going on slaving from morning till night while others roll in our money?' And then the vision of what 'they' represented overwhelmed him, the magnificent and complicated apparatus of order and justice, the magistrates, the police and the army, the royalties who drive by to the

accompaniment of the hurrahs of the people, and the clatter of the hoofs of their escort, and the solemn idiots whom millions of other idiots send to chatter in palaces. . . .

His eyes wandered round the room, one of the two chairs had only three legs and the seat of the other was broken through; the children had again been allowed to come and play there, and they had left behind them the marks of their little muddy shoes and a piece of newspaper which had contained fried fish, while bits of a packing-case littered the floor. The window panes were dirty, somebody had stolen his soap. He felt in a confused way that all these grievances were nothing, that there were many other things he should have been indignant about; many subtle humiliations which he ought to resent. His heart was as humble and simple as that of a little child, he wished that someone would take him by the hand and show him all he was not yet able to see, teach him something of the fine disdain of a noble mind, something of those refined aspirations which he could but vaguely guess at. And he was afraid of entering the new time that was coming with the soul of yesterday.

On the next and succeeding days, Mike had plenty of time to reflect on all he had just learned; and he had, too, plenty of opportunities to associate himself with the life of the party and to get to know their gospel better. What astonished him most was that he could have been ignorant of it for so long. It was so simple and so perfect, a ready-made faith sprung from the lips of its apostles, a universal and certain cure poured out in floods on a poor discarded world, which would sweep away for ever all the problems of an unjust and complicated system.

In Ireland he had never heard anyone speak of that; true, in Ireland there was hardly any room for that faith; everyone was too busy in the pursuit of the ancient struggle, too busy denouncing, cursing and hating the Saxon oppressors who possessed the land, or the still more hated Orangemen. But after all wasn't it the same thing under another name? A stolen inheritance and a long painful struggle to get it back; on the one side the rightful, hungry, ragged owners; on the other the despoilers, prosperous and grazing their cattle on the land which a

decimated population had deserted. And Mike recalled with joy one or two nights of reprisals in which he had taken part before going away to Dublin ; one moonless night in Roscommon with the cattle being driven from field to field full fifteen miles away, and the county police charging with their truncheons and pursued with showers of stones.

Only here it would not be cattle that would be driven in the streets, and something else than stones would be needed.

He could not reconcile himself to the idea, which the orators he listened to constantly expressed, that the expected change would be orderly and peaceful, a simple change-over of votes which would serve as the starting point for long progressive reforms. When he heard them advocate a peaceful revolution and point out the horror of bloodshed and the omnipotence of the new order, he shook his head sceptically and thought, ' They say that because of the police, and to avoid trouble, but all the same fur will fly.' Peace and order would come later when they had paid off old scores and settled their accounts with the swindlers,

but while the accounts were being settled there would have to be a few days of confusion and riot, when you could laugh, punish the wicked, humiliate the insolence of the fortunate, and leave here and there a very visible mark of the advent of the sovereign people.

The technical details of the great cause escaped him, and besides they did not interest him; it was a matter of indifference to him that the railways, the mines and warehouses should become the property of the State. He acquiesced, but without enthusiasm, in the proposal that everything should be managed and controlled by an all-powerful Government; he even distrusted too close supervision, and the continual and vexatious intervention of authority. But before they got as far as that, they would have to divide the spoils, and distribute the riches which had been sequestrated for so long; that was the important thing.

For all the chiefs of the party, at least for those he knew, those who spoke at the places he was able to get to, he had a profound respect; and only gradually did he learn to distinguish between them, and to separate

the mediocre from the good. The ordinary Tower Hill orator was certainly not a genius ; properly speaking he was nothing but an amateur, a working man burning with enthusiasm or perhaps thirsting for popularity, who swallowed his dinner in haste in order to find time to harangue the populace; a man who trusted less to his own eloquence than to figures extracted from the morning papers. His usual method was to cut out carefully the statements of different politicians, Conservatives or Liberals, and to prove summarily that they were bunkum—an easy task. He had a special affection for the tramway question : the cost of construction and maintenance, the return per thousand, the comparative advantages of different systems, the overwhelming superiority of municipal control ; these were the subjects of endless dissertations ; till from sheer boredom Mike would mutter :

'And the inheritance ; the inheritance that has been stolen from us. Why doesn't he talk about that a bit.'

But sometimes on Tower Hill or elsewhere he had an opportunity of hearing more eminent speakers. E. Stewart Grey,

with his escort of tattered and bronzed ragamuffins, with faces pinched with hunger; Will Crookes, jovial and humorous, preaching in a language all could understand; Victor Grayson, who had been turned out of the House of Commons for the cause, and many others who used to speak from a flight of steps or a chair or from the platform of a travelling propaganda van. Mike learned little from them; he listened to them, often absent-mindedly, waiting for the few words that always came sooner or later, for the phrases that spoke to his heart. When they came he nodded his head and pondered long over them, and then went back to Cable Street to wait.

V

The first of May was drawing near; speakers had announced it; the newspapers of the party confirmed it in big characters on their bills, and speakers and newspapers invited with one voice all the Socialists of London to take part in the huge meeting that was to be arranged in Hyde Park, in the very heart of the districts where the wealthy lived. It so happened that the first of May was a Saturday, and everyone would be able to be there. Mike learned that groups from several districts were to meet on the Embankment and march thence to Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park, and thither he went.

The procession was hardly impressive. A few hundred men of all ages, the banners of the district groups and two bands. The members of groups who carried the banners

and the musicians wore their Sunday clothes, clean shirts and a red favour in their button-holes. Round them prowled pretty well the same number of vagabonds and ragamuffins, most of whom had long left all political faith behind them, had lost all hope of better times, whether in this world or the next. For them it was just a good opportunity to rub their rags against the clothes of the well-dressed. They possessed nothing that they needed, and they wanted it to be known.

When the procession started they formed up and followed. The bands played a kind of solemn hymn. The weather was dull and cold, the tide low. From time to time strong gusts of wind ruffled the yellow water and blew the almost liquid surface of the mud banks into ripples, ruffled too the still bare branches of the trees and set rags and tatters dancing. People on the pavement by the riverside stopped to watch them pass, only moderately curious, amused or disgusted; beyond, the carriages passed rapidly on their way, splashing mud as they went. Policemen preceded and flanked the procession, giving it an almost official character—the hall-mark of official tolerance.

After following five minutes Mike broke from the ranks and went on to the pavement; he had had enough of it. People who allowed themselves solemnly or resignedly to be led like a herd of cattle, closing up at an order from the police and bending before the cold wind, could have nothing in common with him. Their docility filled him with contempt. He would go to Hyde Park alone, like a lost child without escort or band, to claim his property. So with his hands in his pockets he walked at some distance behind the procession, jostling those who had stopped out of curiosity to look at it. Before reaching the park he quickened his pace and went on ahead.

On the wide stretch of grass that extends from the Serpentine to the Marble Arch seven platforms had been set up, each with a number on a banner. Several columns coming from other parts of London had already arrived, and their bands began to play when the advance guard of the column coming from the south came into sight. The crowd, which was still scattered and, as it were, lost in the emptiness of the great park, now moved towards them with cries of

welcome. The column arrived across the open space, a slow unwieldy procession, badly arranged, scattered and too long, while above it there floated the great red banners—symbols of hope.

The 'Young Socialists of Hackney' were there, the 'Poplar Labour Party,' other 'Young Socialists' and other 'Labour Parties'; but most of them were just represententatives of trade unions, and neither the names of the unions nor the faces of their representatives foreshadowed immediate revolution. The gas workers and the dockers, the tailors and the builders, the railwaymen and the cabinet-makers were coming to demand the rights of a crushed people, dressed for the most part in clean white shirts and suits which still bore the folds of the cupboard they were kept in. Their presence in organised groups evidently constituted in their eyes an adequate protest, the bleating of the brass bands and the faded purple of their banners the extreme limit of revolt.

Mike watched them pass, and felt his contempt grow. One of the bands was playing a tune he had already heard some-

where, a tune which seemed to contain an exultation, an appeal which was trying to express itself through too slow a cadence. Behind the band came two large brakes full of children; it was some Socialist Sunday School, forty little girls carefully washed and combed, with a red ribbon in their hair and a red flower in their waistband, under the care of an old lady with a worn face. Later in the day they were to sing Socialist hymns; meanwhile they gave themselves up to the unaccustomed pleasure of a drive in a carriage, jumping about on their seats and screaming to their hearts' content.

Nothing more came after them but the ragamuffins, and no band played and no banners waved as they passed; they shuffled along with bent backs, wondering whether any revolution would be strong enough to give them back the manhood of which they had been robbed.

When the last of them had gone by, Mike turned round towards the platforms, and at that moment the music started playing again. The three massed bands attacked the tune he had already heard, and the wind scattered over the placid crowd an air which was

like the mad chant of legions rushing to victory.

The speakers now came out from the procession and went up on to the platforms ; the silent crowd pressed nearer to listen, the banners flapped and cracked like whips in the wind, while the brasses roared out the credo of an army on the march, the oath of an invincible hope.

'What is that they are playing?' Mike asked his neighbour in a whisper.

And the man answered almost indignantly, 'What ! haven't you ever heard the "Marseillaise" ? '

Mike nodded and blushed a little. He had perhaps heard the 'Marseillaise' before, but he could not remember where nor when ; all he knew was that it was a tune which had helped men of former times in other countries to make revolutions ; a tune which you sing when you want something, and which oppressors, safely withdrawn with their booty behind the walls of Jericho, defiantly and threateningly refuse to give you.

When the brass bands ceased playing the sky again grew more grey and sad, and the cold wind blew on a still-born enthusiasm.

Mike wandered for a time between the platforms, and stopped in front of the *Clarion's* van, from the box of which Comrade Shaw was speaking. Comrade Shaw had the face of an actor, long hair, and red-hot views which he spat out from between his tight-set teeth. He began by extolling the glory of a cause which could thus bring an immense number of different kinds of workers together for a single object, and then he preached on the ideal which brought them there. They came, he said, to protest against capitalism, against the unjust distribution of wealth produced by labour alone, against the exploitation of the weak by the strong, against competition between nations, against the spirit of rivalry and hatred which the privileged classes, the only ones which had something to lose, fomented for their own advantage.

'We want peace,' he cried. 'Peace which will allow us to enjoy life, to improve our lot, to repair one by one the flagrant injustices of our social system, and therefore we must resist with all our strength, without allowing ourselves to be either intimidated or distracted, those who at this moment are trying

in this country to excite against Germany the hostility which, at other times, they have excited against other nations; their interests are not ours, their quarrels do not concern us, and we will refuse to let ourselves be armed against our brothers, and to pour out their blood and ours in order to make a little gold flow into coffers which are already overflowing.'

So long as he spoke of the shameful exploitation of the proletariat and of the inevitable revenge Mike listened eagerly, pressing forward to hear better and shouting louder than any at the proper moments. When the speaker began to talk of universal peace and the brotherhood of peoples, all his interest evaporated. That was not what he wanted to hear; he hardly even believed it. Peoples were, after all, like individuals, and would any man boast of living without quarrelling? He felt like a wise man listening with an incredulous smile to fairy tales in an audience of children. Peace and brotherhood, indeed! Why! what would life be like if it were not healthily interspersed with an occasional fight and not varied by joyous evenings, when—just for once—a man let

himself go, painted the town blue and laid up a stock of virtue and bruises to last for some little time?

He wandered off to another platform where the speaker was a fat man with curly hair. He was haranguing the crowd on the subject of infant mortality in the centres of industry; he was armed with statistics and figures and he quoted them with an air of conviction that was sometimes tragic as he called down the curse of heaven on a social system which caused and tolerated such massacres.

'At Bolton,' he was saying, 'out of a thousand children born in one week one hundred and seventy-two died before they were a year old. If you compare those figures with the death rate in a district inhabited by the privileged classes you will see that for each child of the rich that dies under a year old nearly three children of the poor die. . . . I am not afraid of stating . . . ' and he shook his curly head, waved a sheet of paper that he held in his hand, and assumed an air of proud discovery; 'I am not afraid of stating that out of a thousand children who are born to you there

are at least one hundred and twenty who ought to live and who die, killed by the Society that governs you and pretends to protect you. One hundred and twenty children ! If instead of sending a petition to the House of Commons—a roll of paper covered with names—we could bring them the corpses of those hundred and twenty children who had the right to live and who had it stolen from them, perhaps then they would decide to do something. One hundred and twenty children out of every thousand ! At this very moment at which I am speaking to you, at this very second, a child is dying that ought to have lived, and another is being born who is condemned beforehand to die.'

Mike shrugged his shoulders and went away. Children ! as though there were any time to lose sentimentalising over children. He was beginning to have had enough of all this sentiment, of whimperings over international quarrels, or the corpses of new-born infants. Ah, if they could only find a man who had the courage to break away from all this foolery, who could translate into words all that was thundering

in his heart, who would plead the great cause in words of fire, who would voice, not timid requests or tearful protestations, but the cries of those who are hungering for something different !

What were a few hundred thousand dead, soldiers or children, in comparison with the thousands and tens of thousands who had gone before ? What were the sighs of those who were left, beside the dreadful sighs of those who, since the beginning of generations, have passed away without having tasted real life, and cry for vengeance beneath the feet of the living ? Vengeance ! Vengeance ! for all the joy of which they have been robbed.

With his hands in his pockets and swinging his body slightly from his hips, Mike wandered round the edge of the crowd. How difficult and complicated everything was to understand ! A whirl of new, half-formed ideas was seething in his head, now, as it were, breaking for a moment into light like the beam of a lighthouse, and then once more returning into the circle of darkness. The Sovereign State ! The Brotherhood of Peoples ! Milk for little children ! Ought he really to wish for all that ?

Of course he wished no harm to the workers of other countries who were struggling like himself beneath the yoke of those who exploited them; but, after all, they were foreigners, people who were not altogether his equals, whom he would not understand, and whom he could only think of as being separated from him by unfathomable differences. And the little children; it was not his fault if he could not feel much pity for them. The stout curly-headed man had spoken of the voices of the little murdered children; it was all very sad, but in a way he, Mike, did not hear those voices. He only heard his own voice shouting for all that was denied him, and he could hear too, when he thought of it, the voices of millions of fellows like himself, to whom all had been denied, and for whom it was now too late. A child hadn't much to lose; it hadn't yet begun to live! But he wished them no harm . . . no harm at all—why, of course, he didn't want to see the little children die!

Standing there under the grey sky with the clouds flying across it, Mike dreamily scratched his head: 'Look here! I'm no worse than anyone else,' and he went and

mingled in the crowd collected round the nearest platform.

It was labelled 'International,' and the speaker who occupied it was of a strongly marked Semitic type and wore gold-rimmed spectacles.

He was speaking Yiddish, of course, and among those who were listening to him there were many who would have understood no other language. It was a piece of the East End which had been transferred bodily to Hyde Park to testify to its convictions, to raise the cry of Whitechapel and Bethnal Green beside that of Hackney, Southwark or Poplar, to countersign the protest of men of another race bent beneath the same yoke.

A few old men were there wearing worn overcoats and the long beards of prophets, and beside them stood their sons with suits which were almost too English and the shaven faces of unbelievers. As it was Saturday and the law of the Sabbath does not forbid listening to speeches, their daughters, sisters, or sweethearts had come too, and were sitting in groups of two or three on the grass discussing dresses and admiring the eloquence of their men.

Mike watched them for a time; so these people were Socialists too! He would never have thought it. But as he was tired of listening he too lay down on the ground and munched bits of grass as he listened absent-mindedly to the distant voices. He felt strangely alone in the midst of this crowd as he realised that he would find no one there—nor indeed elsewhere perhaps—who thought just as he did, or wished for what he wished for; and a feeling of disappointment came over him.

He had pictured to himself a wild procession surrounded by a body of angry policemen, and the reality was more like a picnic of members of a mutual aid society dressed in their Sunday best.

The police were represented by a few constables only, who stood in groups of two or three near the platform, and their look of quiet confidence was one insult the more. They were tolerated; they were allowed to play about on the grass, talk, and make music; all that was expected was that they would be good, and when they had acclaimed the red cause to their hearts' content go quietly every man to his home.

The sharp note of a bugle rent the air, and a great hubbub responded to it.

The programmes announced that at five o'clock each speaker was to submit a common resolution to those in his immediate neighbourhood, which would be put to the vote and, of course, enthusiastically carried. The moment had come, and on the seven stands seven men were gesticulating and trying in vain to make themselves heard amid the shouts of approval.

In a moment Mike was on his feet. Was something going to happen at last? He walked towards the 'International' group, which was nearest to him, and without expecting it was suddenly caught in a violent turmoil.

All round him people were pushing, some were good-humouredly cracking jokes and laughing, others protesting and shouting, and a few running away or trying in vain to get out of the press; policemen were running up from every side, and round the empty cart which had served as a stand people were swaying blindly to and fro, crushing one another by their own pressure, like panic-stricken cattle.

A voice said jeeringly behind him, 'Hi, look at the old Jews! Now then my lads—push!' A section of the crowd was thrown against the cart, on which a few persons were still standing, and with a crash of broken boards it too swayed and then turned over on its side. A sudden hole formed in the crush, people tottered and fell, the terrified cry of a woman who was being trampled on rang out, and then Mike was in the middle of a wild tumult pushing like the others, and when he was pushed resisting furiously with all the strength of his back and shoulders. He was intoxicated with the warmth of all those squeezed bodies. He wanted to hit out and bite, and there ran through his veins from his feet to his shoulders sharp spasms of old awakened impulses.

He hurled himself forward, forced his elbow or shoulder between two closely jammed bodies and crushed them with all his strength against others to make way for himself. A man who was struggling to hold up a woman who had fainted worked one of his arms free and dealt him blow after blow, shouting inarticulately while his face worked hysterically. Mike only laughed,

and, pressing one of his hands against the man's terrified face and the other against the compact mass of people behind him, he bent his whole body forward, and as he slowly pushed it back into the crowd it became stained with blood. A little further on he stumbled; for a whole minute he struggled with his feet on something soft lying on the ground; then he touched ground again and once more began to plough a furrow through the piled-up bodies. All of a sudden the crowd seemed to give way before him, and as there was no resistance to the effort he was making he was thrown forward and nearly fell.

In the middle of the crowd a few policemen had succeeded in clearing a space, and were searching in vain for the promoters of the turmoil. One of them saw Mike break head foremost into the open, and threw himself upon him. But before he could touch him Mike had regained his balance, seen the hand stretched out, and struck. He struck at the jaw quick and hard with the cry of a man felling a tree and a savage jerk of his body, felt the muscles of the man's neck tighten beneath the blow, saw the great inert

body sway for a moment before the knees gave way, and was already back once more in the crowd like a boar in the jungle.

Well; that was always one Saxon, one representative of law and order who would not be able to boast of his day; and he chuckled as the crowd closed once more about him and opened before the strength of his shoulder thrusts. He chuckled too as he felt the ease with which he cleared a way through that tossing mass of humanity, and saw the skinny tailors of Whitechapel flinch panic-stricken and breathless from the weight of his pressure. Only a few more lines to break through—but there in front of him was a woman in her Sunday best, who with her head thrown back was feebly struggling and seemed on the point of fainting. He bellowed into the crowd with a great burst of laughter. 'Ladies first, if you please,' he cried, as he seized her by the waist, and lifting her up pushed blindly towards the open space.

When they had emerged from the crush and he had put her down, he noticed that she was the beautiful Jewess of Cable Street, and

that her father, who had followed in the passage he had made, was indulging in grateful and reiterated jerks of his head as he struggled to regain his breath.

VI

THE street was waking up slowly, lazily and by degrees, as befits a Sunday. For when you come to think of it, Sunday is less a day of rest than a day on which you must do the opposite of what you do on other days. So Mike woke up as he habitually did at the very moment when half-past five was striking at St.-George's-in-the-East, turned over voluptuously, inflicted several punches on his pillow, and declared to a silent universe that he would stay in bed till ten o'clock, or even later if he wanted to.

He did not want to sleep any more; but compelled for six days out of the seven to get up earlier than he wanted to, he felt equally compelled on the seventh day to get up too late in order to assert his independence. And besides, what is there to do on a Sunday morning?

He stretched, and as the arms of his shirt fell back from his bare arms, he gently and thoughtfully stroked his biceps. He felt in a good humour that morning, rested and light-hearted, like a man who had gone to sleep laughing at a good joke which on waking he cannot remember. What on earth had happened? Oh, yes—the policeman—Yes! it had been one bright spot in a dull day . . . but . . . something else had happened . . . And then he remembered that he was invited to go and take a cup of tea that afternoon at Mr. Hydleman's, of 37 Cable Street. He sat up and began to whistle cheerfully, breaking off now and then to laugh. One Mike O'Brady by name, a chivalrous and brave young man, had, at the peril of his life, saved from a terrible death a young lady of great beauty, who wore a dress of puce silk and pearl ear-rings, and the father of the young lady, a very well-to-do tradesman, wished to thank him again and entertain him to tea and shrimps in his back shop and to talk to him of the new era.

Quite a romance! He lay back without giving it another thought and went to sleep again.

When he awoke for the second time, the street was wide awake. A small boy, endowed with a supernaturally sharp voice, was crying the Sunday papers; and the children of his landlord, no doubt seized with emulation, took advantage of some futile pretext to yelp to their utmost capacity. The paternal voice thundered threats, the maternal hand distributed smacks, and after a minute of heart-broken howls, calm was gradually re-established, broken by stifled whimpering.

Mike sighed, got out of bed and began to dress.

'How many did that fat curly-head say died? One hundred and fifty per cent? It's not enough.'

The cheerfulness that was his at six o'clock in the morning had left him. Each stage of his toilet gave him a new grievance; his box of cigars had become mysteriously empty; his brush had disappeared and he guessed that he would find it in the kitchen, still damp from having been used for washing up; and finally his towel, besides not having been changed for a long time, was worn to such a point that his fingers made holes in it.

At each new discovery his ill-temper rose by a degree, and when he went downstairs and found that the tea was bitter and cold, ostensibly because he was late, he disdained from breaking anything and contented himself with wishing with all his heart for the social revolution.

In the front doorway his landlord was sitting astride a chair, and stopped Mike as he was going out to discuss the news of the morning. He spread his paper out on his knee, knocked the ashes out of his pipe and told Mike the troubles which were accumulating.

'It can't go on like this,' he said. 'All the papers say that we haven't enough battleships, and here you are with foreign airships flying over England all night. It's all very fine to laugh, but if the Germans were to land one fine morning . . .'

Mike interrupted him roughly:

'Well, let them come! When they have blown up the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace and the Tower, it will be soon enough to think of chucking them into the water.'

He ran down the steps without further comment and went off to Leman Street.

He noticed that as far as Watney Street the women wore their hair drawn back and in curling papers, beyond it they wore it puffed out and built up with art. This detail and the names above the shops marked the approximate frontier between Erin and Israel. The men had one characteristic in common from one end of the street to the other—they spent Sunday morning in the same way, sitting on their door steps or on the window sills in their shirt sleeves, devoting themselves to the joys of tobacco.

As he passed in front of No. 37 he thought someone was near the door, and feeling suddenly awkward, without knowing why, he chose to go back and turn down a side street. It brought him into Commercial Road, which he followed as far as Aldgate. Now, when you happen to be at Aldgate on a Sunday morning it is impossible to resist the attraction of Middlesex Market, and Mike did not even attempt to resist it.

Everybody knows that up till one o'clock amusements on Sunday are rare, and it is better to listen to the patter of Jewish dealers than to a long explanation of the views of one's landlord on the defence of the United

Kingdom and the iniquity of foreign powers.

The vendors of ices, buttons, bananas, pearl necklaces, postcards, or pick-me-ups at twopence a glass, who encumber the entrance to Middlesex Street, are, for the most part, poor devils without either eloquence or originality; they can only bellow or squeal the name of their goods, and proclaim its quality in unconvincing terms. The two well-groomed young men who, every Sunday morning, set up their trestles opposite the paternal place of business and sell for six shillings, solely for the sake of advertisement, 'wool and silk' shawls which can be bought for four shillings on week-days, are too well-bred to be amusing. The dealers in ready-made clothes are hardly any better; their usual procedure being to stop and draw to one side any young man who looks innocent and capable of appreciating the exceptional merits of a suit of clothes priced twelve shillings and sixpence, which 'wears like iron.'

There was one, however, who was making a praiseworthy attempt to raise the level of his profession. He was a short, thick-set man

with a strong blond moustache, whose opulent torso showed off to advantage the suit that he tried on incessantly the whole morning for the purpose of attracting customers. He showed off successively the three component parts of the suit, praised the material and the cut; pointed out facetiously which was the front and which the back, so that there could be no mistake; then put on the waistcoat, turned right round, and in the utmost good humour started the bidding at 'five hundred guineas.'

The crowd roared with laughter. He at once lowered his price to five guineas, then to ten shillings, and at this price found a purchaser; but a perverse fate willed that those for whom the suits had proved too strong a temptation were invariably men of abnormal proportions, carelessly built, on whose backs the most elegant garments were nothing but living jokes and the source of discourteous comments.

The philanthropist who announces every five minutes that he cares nothing for money and sells, for the sake of humanity and to occupy his leisure, watches of guaranteed reliability, in cases of the rarest metals, for

the sum of eight shillings or even less, is not a man to be listened to incredulously or to be laughed at. His dignified bearing, detached from every sordid consideration, his gold eye-glasses, and the enormous value of the jewels which he displays so carelessly, impose respect.

But when you simply want to spend an amusing quarter of an hour you should go and listen to the dealers in purses.

For easy wit, strength of the vocal cords and capacity for business, they carry off all the first prizes and only leave consolation prizes to the dealers in shawls, ready-made clothes and pick-me-ups. An impartial observer would feel conscientiously obliged to go to and fro between one of them named Rubinstein and his colleague a little further up, in order to compare them at leisure ; and even after several séances he will probably class them *ex-æquo*. Rubinstein is perhaps more ingenious in his use of gesture, and more subtle ; but his colleague is certainly more vigorous, his illustrations from life are bolder, and his indefatigable repetition of the adjective makes his speech into a curious mosaic.

Mike already knew by heart every method employed in Middlesex Street to increase the price of goods for sale, including most of its jokes, but after all if a thing is funny it is funny for the hundredth time as well as for the first. Perhaps it is even better when you recognise it as an old friend and can laugh without any previous effort of the understanding.

Anyone with nothing better to do, armed with the prudence which is born of experience, and resolved to buy nothing, may pass an extremely pleasant morning between the two rows of trestles and handcarts. He will find everything necessary for happiness—a spectacle which changes continually but never surprises; quiet corners in which he may solace himself with a plate of green peas or a portion of eel in jelly; and if he be one of those who burn with spiritual hunger, the never-ceasing miracle of words in full flood, dexterously strung together, magical, fascinating, released broad-cast upon a wondering assembly by men divinely gifted.

A clock struck, and every male being in the street suddenly lost every kind of interest in

the proceedings and resolutely made his way towards one end of the street. By these signs Mike knew that it was one o'clock and that the pubs had just opened.

At the ' Three Dolphins ' he encountered a tired and ironical Winnie, who asked him if he could not hurry up the new era a bit, just to please her. She was fed up with this one. He protested that if it depended upon him the new era would be here already, and they went on to talk about Middlesex Street.

' Have you noticed,' she said, ' the names of those who sell and the faces of those who buy ? Those who sell are Cohens, Hyams, Reubens, Goldbergs, and those who buy are poor English folk like you and me, innocents who let themselves be caught by the stories of bargains, reductions and sales of bankrupt stock. Ah ! there's no doubt they are too clever for us. What wonder that they come here in their thousands! A fortnight after they get here they send for the grandfather and grandmother and the little sisters who stayed behind in Poland, and at the end of the year they begin to buy houses ! '

Mike said sententiously : ' That may all be true, but it won't do them good for long ! '

She scoffed at him. 'Not for long? That will go on much longer than you or me! And besides, they are quite right too. I would do the same in their place and so would you. And if you had stocks and shares and houses you would not want to be changing everything!'

He did not hear the end of her sentence, for he was brought up short by her first words. 'Much longer than you or me!' he repeated. 'If I thought that I would make a revolution by myself without waiting any longer.'

VII

'THAT will last much longer than you or me!' He repeated the words as he lunched, and was filled with a vague discomfort.

The phrase accompanied him on to the top of the Bow Bridge tram, where he took the air after his meal. And it went on sounding in his ears when he passed the doorway of No. 37 Cable Street. That would last much longer than he would. The bitter tea, the torn towels, the bare-faced robbery, the dismal, joyless life, the tumble-down rooms where children screamed, and the ignorance that you could only feel, the ignorance of all that might have been different, the ignorance which could only struggle like a blind man kicking the empty air and cursing like a swindled cripple—that would go on for longer than he would! Random words, no doubt; but could it be possible that they were true?

He saw Hanna Hydleman draw herself aside in the doorway to let him pass. She directed him to the door in the back shop with a smile of majestic grace. The old man half stood up to shake hands and laid down on the table the paper he was reading, *Justice*. Mike sat down, placing his cap on his knee, solemn and innocent, as a man would sit before the tripod of an oracle. The old man would explain it all. He had great experience and no doubt great learning. A sage of a race renowned for cunning. And if he himself had disdained to buy houses and live in opulence, it was certainly because the cause of an oppressed people burned in his heart like a flame.

When Hydleman had spoken of yesterday's demonstration and what the Sunday papers said about it, and had asked some questions, Mike answered him as he would have answered a confessor or a master, one of those who disseminate knowledge and faith. Yes ' ' : was a Socialist. Not of long sta g but with all his heart. He had not st d much from books, he had only heard a few speakers belonging to the party, those who spoke in the streets, and he could not be

sure that he had understood everything. He had never been much of a scholar, and at school he had been bottom of his class when he happened to go at all. Generally complications were beyond him, but he fully understood that things were all wrong and could not go on as they were very much longer. No! He was not out of a job. He had a regular job and the wages were nothing to complain of. The foremen did not trouble him, and so far as he could remember foremen never had troubled him for long. What did trouble him was the iniquity of things, and the idea that there were people who had more money than he had, and more of everything that matters, without having to work for it.

Hydleman looked at him thoughtfully, as he gently tapped the table.

'Yes!' he said, 'that's all so much to the good. You feel the injustice of the system. You are dissatisfied, and that is the chief thing! Everyone must begin by being dissatisfied! Those who are satisfied with themselves, satisfied with all about them, deserve nothing better, but they keep the others back! And they are the less to be

pitied, in that the rich pat them on the back and commend their virtues, the many virtues out of which one single evil fortune is built up; while the priests give them their blessing and promise them the kingdom of Heaven. It really seems a pity to waste the kingdom of Heaven on men who are completely satisfied to live on earth like pigs!'

'Of course,' said Mike. 'And Heaven must be a place where people have everything they want. And people who want nothing . . . well . . . that's their business!'

On the other side of the glazed door he could see Hanna Hydleman seated in the shop behind the counter, with her chin in her hands, looking towards the street door by which the light entered. The window of the room where he was looked out into a dark courtyard, bounded on the other side by a high grey wall, the face of which was crumbling away. All who came into this room instinctively turned their backs to the window, and sat sideways at the round table facing the glazed door, through which the life of the world without came in. On Hydleman's side the fire-place occupied nearly the whole of the front of the wall. On

Mike's side there was just room for two chairs, a gas ring placed on a chair draped with some yellow stuff, and a little cupboard of painted wood. Everything seemed horribly old. It was a room in which you could imagine a man waiting day by day, month by month, and year by year for innumerable years without end, the arrival of news which never came, but must come in the end; it was a room that was dark and low like a crypt, shut off on every side from light and noise, where you could easily understand the futility of all the struggles of all the generations of man.

Mike felt his courage ebbing, and the chance phrase that the barmaid had thrown at him that morning came back into his mind—'It will go on for much longer than you or me!' That old man who was seated in front of him had perhaps begun to dream of better times, seated in his worn velvet armchair, when he was still young and full of strength, and now that he was old what did he think of it all? Did he still continue to hope?

Somewhat hesitatingly Mike asked, 'Do you believe that this will go on for a long time? Yes! Just as it is now! Things

don't look like changing ! People don't understand, or perhaps they are afraid ! '

Hydleman shook his head.

' Yes ! That's always the trouble ! They don't understand ! They have always seen things as they are now and they are incapable of imagining them different. And when you talk to them about it they recite the catchwords they have been taught at school or in church. It's the law of things ! It's natural ! A body must have a head, and so on, and so on ! As if all law, human and divine, commanded us to respect men who have grown rich by selling beer or whisky or sensational newspapers, building tumble-down houses or lending money on short-term loans ! A lucky bit of swindling and your sons will have titles and your grandsons will build churches or make presents to museums of old, mouldy pictures. And as for the sovereign people ! All they have to do is to go down on their knees and dutifully give thanks because of all that has been stolen from them five per cent. in money or in some useless form is given back to them. Still there's a beginning —a beginning. Look at the last elections !

And then just now times are hard; business is bad, and when business is bad it means that workmen are dismissed; that employers shut their factories, selling one motor car instead of two, and go off whining about their poverty to the Riviera; while here there are empty bellies; no coal and children die; then people begin to see that everything is not as it should be. But when people get angry they do not know how to do things. They push in every direction at once like a flock of sheep. Then the shepherds send their dogs to yelp lies at them. "What you want," they say, "are tariffs, protection," or "it's the fault of the Germans." And the sheep begin to push one another into the quagmire.'

Hanna came in and took from the painted wooden cupboard the tea things—cups of white china, hardly chipped at all, plates with a line of gold, bread and butter, water-cress, strange looking cakes.

Her father still sat in the armchair nodding his head, gazing downwards, and with his grey beard crushed against his chest; one of his hands rested on the table, and every few seconds his fingers rose and fell

together with a dull sound, marking the flight of inexorable time and still so little done.

Mike looked from one to the other and melancholy crept over him. The golden age lay infinitely far away ; the Gate of Eden was held by a powerful and rapacious enemy, strong with a million artifices, and there was nothing left for poor fellows like themselves to do than to glean here and there, sometimes secretly, whatever was graciously left over for them.

When everything was ready Hanna sat down with her back to the window. With the light behind her her sallow complexion had a quality of astonishing delicacy. Her ear-rings swung gently to and fro ; the eyelids rose and fell languidly over the great placid eyes ; every indolent gesture spoke of massive strength and health, of the opulent beauty of a royal concubine, or of a captive for whom nations have gone to war.

She poured out the tea and they drank and ate in silence. Hydleman mused and shook his head ; Hanna watched the glazed door which opened into the shop, and nibbled a cake with gestures of infinite refinement. Mike mourned over his vanished dream and felt the barbarian within him slowly return

to life. What use was it to speak of freedom to slaves hardened in their degradation? Those who had power were too strong and too clever; the people could do nothing but yield to pressure and go their way tottering towards the quagmires, stopping at street corners to stone their prophets. He felt no thirst for martyrdom; nor had he any desire to sacrifice himself for others, or to grow old in a dark hole nursing a dream. He preferred to walk alone on the flank of the driven herd, choosing his pasturage, taking his own share and, if he could, another's too, full of guile and subtlety, and the watch-dogs would have no terrors for him.

The old man spoke again.

'The most astonishing thing,' he said, 'is that those of our adversaries who are really sincere call us visionaries, speak of us with pity, as of poor misguided creatures who are full of illusions about humanity, who cheat themselves with insensate dreams, and build Utopias on foundations of non-existent virtues with a mortar of universal good will which is not of this world. If we did believe in all this virtue, in this universal good will, what need should we have to

change anything? Even the present laws would be useless. There would be no judges, no prisons, no insolent wealth, no terrible poverty. Men would live in equity and peace. It is just because men are essentially bad, unjust and harsh to one another, that laws are necessary, and what we complain of is that the present laws are not enough. They have allowed a few people to gather all the joy of the world into their own hands and to sift it out parsimoniously and reluctantly to those who spend their lives in their service. That is why we want other laws.'

Mike watched Hanna Hydleman indolently going to and fro, clearing the table with the movements of a queen. The words reached his ears as though they were muffled; the phrases were empty of meaning. The laws! The laws! Who ever wanted laws? Strength rose in him like a spring tide. He thought of things which happen only in books or in dreams; in the heart of miraculous countries where there are no laws; a cry in the night; a charge and a rape; women carried off in strong arms, just as he had yesterday carried one off in his arms.

VIII

NEXT day the sky was still grey and sombre, and there seemed to be no place for insurgent spirits in a universe that was organised, adjusted, and as unconscious and brutal as a machine. All men and all things seemed to be arranged by some over-ruling hand; the things set in order, each in its place ready for some ingenious use; the men, tamed and docile, tied to their unnoticed duties like sentinels at their posts, heirs by instinct of ancient traditions which proclaimed resistance to be futile. To get up in the morning at a certain fixed hour, to proceed to a certain place between houses ranked as if they were strung upon a string; to see all day long other men, with the animals which obeyed them, and the machines which they have constructed, carrying out blindly orders coming from some mysterious

plane, expressed and transmitted by almost supernatural means—all these are so many stages along the way of the humble, leading slowly towards that state of complete slavery which is their destiny.

On Thursday evening Mike returned to 37 Cable Street.

Hanna Hydleman had gone out; her father was alone in the shop seated behind the counter, with his hands stretched out flat before him on the piles of newspapers.

He received the young man with a familiar nod of the head, as if he found his visit quite natural, like words exchanged in passing between two friends who have the same views and are naturally inclined to foregather.

Mike sat down, and as the silence continued he turned over absently the leaves of an illustrated magazine. Then he closed it, put it in its place with care, gave a sigh and looked about him without saying anything.

When seen from behind the counter and with the door into the street in front open, the shop was not so dark as it seemed at first. The perfect order with which it had been arranged made it look much the same as

when he had first seen it on the day of his arrival in London. Since then he had always thought of this space of a few square feet as of a model of a world, in which everything was ingeniously dovetailed together and trimmed, where there was no place for any disorder, no uncertainty, no error in property or time. And yet the old man who ruled over this world sat there in the half darkness, stretching out his empty hands before him and gazing at the luminous rectangle of the door with questioning eyes. To his surprise, he found himself formulating a silent vow—if only this time the oracle were propitious, if only this time he might be allowed to carry away with him some definite answer instead of fresh and insoluble conundrums. But the fingers of the old man began to rise and fall with a dull sound on the papers which covered the counter—a gesture of tired impotence, of hopeless strife against crushing forces, almost of despair.

He said: 'There were some fine things in the paper this morning. Yesterday evening some members of the royal family graciously consented to honour with their presence the ceremony of opening a co-operative work-

men's restaurant. The Duke declared that the enthusiasm shown along the route taken by his carriage by the population of the East End had profoundly touched him, and he adjured all loyal citizens of His Majesty, however poor they might be, to continue to sustain with all their strength the Throne and the Empire. The Duchess tasted the soup and the meat, which she found excellent, and she patted also three small children on the head. Now go and complain after that ! I wonder what the people in the suite, who filled the carriages and said nothing, thought about it all ! I suppose they said to one another with amiable smiles : " Delicious! I should not mind dining here every day in the year! " And the poor devils outside who had come to cheer royalty, while they wasted the two portions of beef, I wonder what they said! Probably : " I should not mind dining every day either, but unfortunately there are other things to do." And those people of the suite, too, must have looked at the dark streets which smell of poverty, and have shuddered a little as you do at the Zoo when you look at the wolves on the other side of the bars, and they must have said to themselves that

the people who lived in these streets must be curious folk, and funny things must happen there. And even in thinking that they were wrong ! The most terrible thing is just that nothing does happen there ! Now and then a woman is kicked to death or a family dies of hunger, but apart from that nothing happens there from one year's end to another, nothing whatever, nothing but poverty and dirt and ignorance; Paradise—a bed in the gutter when a man's lucky enough to be drunk. Hell—Home sweet home ! Let Royalty come ! '

Hanna returned, greeted Mike with a queenly smile, passed into the back shop to take off her hat, and came back to take up her station leaning in the doorway. She watched the belated passers-by with a look that was at once inquisitive and disdainful, as though she were looking at an ant heap. You felt that she considered herself elected for a special destiny, marked out by Jahveh to lead His chosen people to a new stage in the journey, and it was therefore part of her duty to be beautiful in order that her beauty might encourage the men of her race to the achievement of great deeds.

'There were many other things in the paper,' continued Hydleman. 'Among others there was the report of the annual meeting of a Provident Society, presided over by a real lord, and the real lord made a speech. He told his hearers that they were the cream of humanity, the last hope of the nation, and the only barrier left to withstand the assault of an unprincipled democracy. He regretted that a Government devoid of all dignity had made itself the slave of this democracy and attempted to propitiate it by overwhelming it with undeserved benefactions. Old age pensions for instance, which were calculated to sap the moral fibre of the people. The working population would cease to take thought for the future and would live carelessly and extravagantly now that their old age opened to them a prospect of unjustifiable luxury and senile dissipation upon the Government's five shillings a week! The noble lord set before his audience his idea of what a proletarian should be. A good proletarian goes to the pay box on Saturday, receives his twenty-five shillings and returns, full-speed, to place them in the hands of the housewife. She puts a

good proportion of this into the savings bank, and with what is left she takes delight in paying the rent, in buying coal, bread, meat, tea, vegetables, clothes and shoes for five persons. It is a delight to her because, naturally, the good proletarian is suitably humble, and does not aspire to the food, the clothing, or the pleasures reserved for those whom an intelligent Providence has set above them ! The good proletarian and his wife balance their budget and make savings because they are careful and economical. They keep a close watch on tradesmen, and every time they spend a penny they take care to get its full value, or even a little more. They are full of respect for established things, the Constitution, the House of Lords, doors with pillars, and people richer than themselves. On Sundays they put on their best clothes and go to Church, where they hear a religion preached which recommends them to take their savings out of the box and distribute them in charity ; to love the tradesmen like themselves, and to worship virtue in rags. I imagine the good proletarian must have clutched his head and tried vainly to understand what all this meant. If so, he

gave himself a good deal of trouble for nothing ! He need only have remembered a single maxim — that those who have the lightest purse have the most duties, and that they have only one right, that of helping to keep things as they are.'

Mike, leaning forward, with his elbows on his knees and his eyes on the level of the counter, watched the open door which framed Hanna's silhouette. He listened attentively ; every word came through to his mind and he clearly grasped its meaning. He saw the noble lord, benevolent but protesting, explain to the working class how he wished them to live, and assure them that he and his like were quite ready to ameliorate their lot by every possible means and to rescue a considerable number of poor from starvation, provided that they were docile and obliging.

All this he understood, and for the moment felt no indignation. It all seemed inevitable. It was but a little thing, a tiny part of a system which appeared indestructible in its complexity, of a universe built up of injustice and misunderstanding. Since the beginning of the world men must have

exerted endless ingenuity in devising for themselves innumerable cells, over the walls of which they looked at one another with hostility and distrust, so that now the world was altogether cut up into compartments, bristling with fortifications, from behind which fanatical tribes gazed fiercely out, and refused obstinately to understand one another.

Looking over the counter, on which the many coloured magazines were piled, he saw Hanna Hydleman standing, leaning against the door post, with one hand on the broad hip that her position made prominent. Above her ample waist, girt by a leather belt, the full lines of her figure curved towards the heavy shoulders; her thick arms, wide chest, and the animal equilibrium of a healthy body reminded you of those women you imagine existed in the dawn of humanity crouching round smoking fires on the sea-shore, as simple as their lives, and grave with the sense that within them flowed the strong tide of life for generations yet to be.

Mike thought on; his thoughts were filled with images which were half ideas and half instincts as old as the world. If this

woman and he had met in other times, long before the birth of towns, before the joy of human strength had been stifled under the futile apparatus of laws, religion and convention, he would have taken her silently in his arms, and silently she would have thrown her arms round him, because they were both young and hungry for life and there was nothing to keep them apart. But now—. As she stood there in the doorway he knew by instinct that she was full of prejudices, of contempt, distrust and of imaginary duties, a slave to her race, a slave to her religion, and a slave to subtle distinctions of caste, which she heard condemned every day but which nevertheless were part of her essential self and could not be ignored. In her eyes he was nothing but an idolater hardened in error, the child of a people that had persecuted her people; moreover, he was nothing but a workman, a labourer condemned to remain a labourer, as poor in ambition as in ideas, lacking the patient astuteness of the young men of Israel. And even if all these obstacles had not existed, what would their union have been but one more restriction, one new submission to

rigid laws, entry into a trap watched over by malevolent powers—unless, indeed, the arrival of the new era changed all that, making everything possible in a world grown young again, ready to start once more from the beginning.

The voice of Hydleman rose again.

'And at another meeting another lord, or perhaps he was only a mere baronet, had declared that the continual growing spoliations of a Government of demagogues, the iniquitous burdens which were imposed only on the shoulders of the well-to-do, were rendering life impossible to them, so that he, personally, found himself constrained considerably to reduce his expenses, to curtail his household staff, and to withhold, among other things, those sums which he had been accustomed to consecrate to charitable works. Conservative papers quote the words of the baronet and proclaim to the poor: "Now you see how you have been caught?" In the villages situated on the lands of the baronet there would therefore be no more distribution of skimmed milk and blankets, housewives would curse the Government, but it will be we Socialists who will laugh best and laugh last. The simple-hearted

villagers will begin dreaming of a state where skimmed milk and blankets will be a right, not a grace, and the baronet will do well to stop spending altogether, because his capital will begin to totter. As for their charity, that is but half virtue, and half a measure of security and propaganda. The sooner it stops the better for us. It enslaves or degrades us too much already. It is no more than a single drop of balm on the countless sores of the poor, a safety valve for their anger. When the valve is closed and bottled down and the whole of the aristocracy is sitting on it busily crying to the people, " This is what happens," we shall have nothing to do but to wait at a safe distance in order to pick up the pieces.'

This was something Mike could understand, and he expressed his satisfaction by thumping the magazines with his fist.

' That's right,' he said. ' That's how it will come ! There will be hard times ; factories will close down ; rich men will put padlocks on their safes ; thousands and thousands will die of hunger ; and then it will come ! We shall be saying to one another : " We have nothing, and there is so-

and-so, and so-and-so, and so-and-so who have too much, and we will all go and take it." Ah ! There will be plenty of misery before that time comes, sure enough, but for those of us who will be left the time will have come to laugh ! '

When he went away he stopped a moment on the threshold, and, leaning against the door-post on the other side, looked with a smile at Hanna. He felt strong with the coming revolution, which would make everyone equal, strong too with his broad shoulders, and he continued to smile without taking his eyes off her. She looked back at him, smiled too out of politeness, and, leaning her head against the brick wall, looked up at the black sky. After a moment of silence she yawned, and said in a tone that was full of distinction, 'It's very mild this evening !' Mike answered, ' Yes ! ' and all his bravery fled. Twenty revolutions could not fill the abyss that lay between them nor wipe out the stamp impressed by past generations. The splendour of her light blouse, her silk scarf and ear-rings was nothing. What kept her so far from him was her race, expressed in every line of her body, the

majestic indolence of her posture, the oriental splendour of her jewels and ornaments, her large calm eyes full of the mystery of thoughts which he would never understand.

He nodded vaguely, went down into the street, and made his way to 'The Three Dolphins.' He was thirsty for speech that was simple and unmysterious; he wanted to be among men like himself, expressing familiar ideas in words easy to understand, joking and laughing noisily, thumping the counter with their fists.

IX

In the course of the following weeks Mike returned several times to 37 Cable Street. He would often be five or six days without going near it or thinking about it, almost without thinking about anything. His work occupied him the whole of the day, while in the evening he was content to foregather with his comrades in the taverns of the neighbourhood, or to smoke astride a chair in front of his house. At such times he wished for nothing beyond illimitable quantities of beer, the jovial conversation of fellow-drinkers, and the indefinite sense of well-being which results from the two combined.

Towards the end of the week, when funds grew low, he was even content to listen to the monotonous lamentations of his landlord who, every day, devoted a halfpenny to

the purchase of an evening paper, partly to see the racing results and partly to find fresh arguments with which to support his declared opinions. An unscrupulous street boy who sold these papers as he ran, breathlessly impelled by the double hope, always vain, that he would be first in the field and would not be asked for change, often gave him the *Star* instead of the *Evening News* which he had asked for. When he found out his mistake there was nothing for him to do but to read throughout the evening the opinions of men he hated, which were so cleverly expressed that he was quite unable to answer them. On those evenings he would shake his head interminably, let his pipe go out, and remain almost silent as he felt his political faith tottering within him.

But after these periods of calm an evening always came when Mike awoke once more to the intolerable reality, feeling ashamed at having allowed his just anger to be assuaged, and yet penetrated by the vague hope that in the interval one step more might have been taken towards the obscure and longed-for goal.

He would be roughly shaken out of his almost satisfied torpor by some incident of

the day which reminded him, generally indirectly and in an unexpected way, of the iniquity of things and his own state of servitude.

The little current injustices, the acts of malicious tyranny which he was able to see or undergo at the warehouse, left him unmoved. The foreman generally left him in peace, and he felt only contempt for those who allowed themselves to be bullied. Besides, all that was outside the larger scheme of things, and had no connection with the inequalities and injustices the idea of which made his heart hot within him. When a man of his own class, resembling him in almost every respect, whom occult powers had invested with a certain authority, took advantage of it to annoy him, he felt neither astonishment nor indignation. Revenge was simple, and easily attainable; it was a personal affair which he knew how to settle; and if he had to wait for some time he did so without rancour and without impatience, certain that he would not forget.

But the sight of the first-class passengers on the Dutch mail boats, lying luxuriously in their deck-chairs, or of the *Kohinoor*

taking tourists to Margate, in flannel suits and in light coloured dresses to the sounds of a German band, or simply of a bookmaker, driving his trap and a rakish pony with an air of smug satisfaction down Commercial Road, holding the reins in fingers loaded with rings, and a big cigar in his teeth, was enough to make him flare up in revolt, or to fill him with confused resentment and endless doubts.

Hour after hour he would ponder, even while busy at his work; but soon the effort of thinking dulled his mind, and he would struggle vainly to understand what it was that so moved him; what it was that he wanted; how it could be that all these things were possible; what would be the end of it all; and when would it come. That a revolution must come, and that an unjust and imperfect system must collapse, he understood well enough; but he never succeeded in seeing how it would apply to him; how it was possible that he should enter fully into his heritage and become in a moment transformed, henceforth enjoying all those spiritual and material good things which had previously been reserved

for the fortunate of this world and which he tried in vain to picture.

Then as soon as evening came he would hurry off to Cable Street, to the shop where Hydleman, no doubt, kept the key to those riddles he was always meditating over, as he sat behind the counter, with his hands spread over the rows of magazines, or in the little dark room where he would sit facing the door, with his back to the melancholy disintegrating wall. But when he had got there he found that he could not express his thoughts, and that his ideas were nothing but vast indefinite shapes which no words could express.

So there was nothing to be done but to hold his peace and listen, waiting until some words of the old man should explain his own heart to himself, and give an answer to questions which he himself did not know how to put. And thus he waited, evening after evening, and then went out into the night without ever carrying away the thing he had come to find.

When Hanna was out he would remain in the shop with Hydleman, listening while he spoke, and when he was silent pondering

his words and trying to understand them, turning over listlessly the pages of magazines and watching him serve his customers. These were all people of the neighbourhood, whom Mike knew by sight and who had ceased to be surprised at finding him there; Jews mostly, giving their custom by preference to a co-religionist, although he was 'Epikouros' and suspected of heresy; or else men of like opinions with himself, who came in to exchange a few words in passing. Mike listened to them as they talked, and when they said nothing he watched them attentively wondering, 'What does that fellow know, and what could he explain to me?'

But he learnt little from what they said on all he thought about, and he learnt nothing about them because they were of a foreign race, a race he did not understand.

One evening he went into the public library of St. George's in the East, and stayed there some time turning over the pages of an illustrated review. It was a 'Grand Summer Number,' packed with photographs and drawings illustrating the divers pleasures of people who took a three months

holiday, for the benefit of those who only get a fortnight and, incidentally, of those who have no holiday at all.

On one page were gentlemen, with irreproachably tidy hair, clothed in spotless flannel, a silk sash about their waists, in punts upholstered with cushions on which young women were stretched voluptuously as they coquettishly sheltered their bare necks under Chinese parasols. On the following page the same gentlemen and young ladies had exchanged their river-boat for a singularly ill-designed yacht which was flying with all sails set over a surging sea; the wind had somewhat ruffled the hair, and the dresses were different, but the chivalrous elegance of the men and the refined grace of their companions were the same. A little further on, impelled by some incomprehensible madness, they had ventured among precipitous mountain peaks, where, unaffected by giddiness, they maintained their serene good breeding in an apparently desperate situation. Other pictures represented fashionable watering places, Scotch lakes or Norwegian fjords, which served only as the setting for the ceaseless happiness of houris and heroes.

Mike turned over the pages with rage in his heart, and stopped at one on which there were portraits. The text announced all the latest fashionable marriages which were to take place during the season, and on one side three slightly different portraits of the 'charming daughter of Mr. X, the charming daughter of Mr. Y, the charming daughter of Mr. Z,' with expressions of chaste refinement and low necks vaguely indicated, gazed across at three portraits of their betrothed. The girls were all pretty, and the photographer understood his business. They averted their eyes in a pose full of unalloyed distinction, or levelled upon the reader a look that was at once dreamy and gentle, free of all roguishness, secure in the conviction that life could never bring them anything offensive or degrading. The gentlemen had that look of perfect good form, health, and dullness which is the mark of the true English aristocrat. Mike ground his teeth and grumbled out prophesies of calamity. But as he sat for a few moments vaguely contemplating the open page his hostility melted into discouragement, and he looked at the portraits afresh—

humbly—to ask of them the question to which he was seeking an answer.

No revolution could ever make him their equal or bring them down to his level, and now he was not even certain that to do this would be just. They seemed so strong in their rights, so far from suspecting that anyone could resent their being what they were. He felt that they were furnished with well-established ideas upon all matters that count, well groomed in mind and body, surrounded by endless refinements, and a great wave of despairing envy flooded his heart. Those who had been stripped and despoiled were his unknown ancestors for innumerable generations back. They had lived as he lived, they had been able to leave to him only what they possessed, a soul shrivelled and blind, close to the earth which had borne them, where the season's first sowing could produce nothing but a harvest of ill-directed impulses and incomprehensible aspirations.

He went out and made his way to Hydleman's shop, and as he walked he marvelled greatly at being so troubled, at perceiving in himself the confused play of unknown forces—forces which jostled one another,

combined for a second to shape something which seemed to be an idea, or a strong burning desire or a fit of sullen anger, and then faded away, leaving him like a man who, with bandaged eyes, mocked at and hustled along, stumbles over obstacles he cannot see. This was something new, and when he had realised that it was not a symptom of any bodily ill he began to think of himself with an astonished respect. For the moment he had lost his former happy self-confidence and peace of heart, but something else was awakening in him whose existence he had never suspected.

When he reached 37 Cable Street he found Hydleman in the back shop and, as usual, established in the great velvet arm-chair, with a paper spread out upon his knees. A bottle of rum and two used glasses stood upon the table. As he sat down Mike intuitively felt that something was happening, or had happened, and that if he had come sooner he would have interrupted a scene of modest festivity, some family ceremony which was no concern of his. Hydleman was nodding his head with an indulgent smile, and appeared to be thinking over a

piece of good news. Through the glazed door he could see Hanna leaning against the counter, playing with her fingers.

Mike was the first to break the silence, but a kind of delicacy made him say nothing of what he had in his heart. He said something about the weather, on the coming of summer, and on matters about which he had heard people talking. Hydleman adjusted his cloth cap and continued to nod his head. He seemed more cheerful than usual, as though he had just reached some happy solution of at least one important problem.

A few moments later he clasped his hands upon the open newspaper and said absently, 'Well, well! It's life! One mustn't think of oneself, and it's a thing one ought to be glad about—a good thing! Yes, a good thing!' He lifted his eyes and appeared all at once to remember that Mike was there. He called Hanna, told her to give him a clean glass, and poured a little rum into it. Then he poured a few drops into his own glass and smiled afresh.

'We've had a little celebration to-day,' he said, addressing Mike. 'A happy event! Yes, a happy event!' He looked towards

Hanna, who blushed a little, and lifted his glass. Mike took his own and half stood up with a movement of vague politeness, then sat down again, as he did not know what to do or to say.

He did not at once understand to what event Hydleman was alluding, but he divined that the fair Hanna was going somewhere beyond his horizon, emigrating probably into superior spheres, and this he confusedly resented. Why did all the people whom he came across seem to follow an untroubled course of life, to find sufficient joy in it and aims which were worth attainment, while he, Mike O'Brady, looked on at them, expecting everything from them and getting nothing.

He had no reason whatever for being there; he never had had any reason for coming; he had never been anything but an intruder; perhaps an importunate, and certainly a ridiculous, one in their eyes, so stupid that he could find no better means of attaining comprehension of his own heart than by listening to and contemplating foreigners. And what had he learnt?

Hydleman was smiling and nodding his head. Hanna had gone back to lean against

the door-post and look at the passers-by, to breathe the night air and dream about the new time coming. In the back shop the light of the gas seemed warming and pleasant, full of friendliness, of evenings spent in peace, of an intimate circle closed against the outside world, and Mike felt more than ever that he was an intruder. He emptied his glass, murmured a few words of excuse as he got up, and when he had passed the threshold and gone a short way down the street, he stretched himself and muttered, 'That's finished—quite finished!' And what he was denying himself was not only the evenings in the back shop, the voice of Hydleman filling the sombre little room with a story of irremediable sorrows, Hanna's silhouette in the doorway, but it was also the vision of perfect days which had faded away in the distance, the great hope with which he had fed his hungry heart and which now no longer satisfied him.

PART II

X

WINNIE was not to be seen at the 'Three Dolphins' and the man who served Mike was a poor fool, new to the work, who was kept in a continual state of flutter by the surly reproofs of the landlord. He hurried awkwardly from one customer to another, invariably confused their orders, and in his desire to appear alert and at his ease, leaned his elbows on the counter whenever he had a few moments to spare, and propounded ineptitudes about the weather and the sporting events of the day to unresponsive customers. From the neighbouring compartment arose a tumult of harsh and confident voices, coupled with gross laughter; the aristocracy of the neighbourhood were there, partaking of special Scotch and smoking cigars, and the landlord, who had joined them, listened attentively to their

jokes and guffawed deferentially in the background.

Mike tossed off a pot of beer and leant against the partition. Force of habit made him assure himself mentally that it would soon be his turn to drink expensive spirits and to smoke cigars with gold bands, but immediately he remembered that he was no longer really certain of this, and at the same time he realised that this would not suffice to make him happy. He longed for—but after all what was it that he wanted? He looked at the ceiling for an answer, then at the bottles ranged upon the shelf, then at the panels of tarnished glass on which were thrown the shadows of the passers-by, and again the only thing he discovered was that he was surprised at himself. One part of him, all that was not of his body, seemed to have been changed without his knowledge, the boundaries of his dreams of happiness had been extended, and now melted into a mysterious twilight which filled him somehow with apprehension.

When he had gone out he walked slowly down Commercial Road, pondering over this incomprehensible phenomenon which

was overtaking him, and went as far as Limehouse Church before he realised where he was. As he was turning back to go home, he stopped a moment to look at a poster which announced for the following week a 'Grand Gymnastic Display, Boxing, Wrestling, and Weight-putting,' with the assistance of a chorus of girls and a band. The poster was hung near an open door, through which came a confused noise of words of command and feet tramping on a floor in time. His curiosity was roused and he remained there a few minutes, until, moving away to look at another poster on the other side of the door, he saw that it announced sermons and religious meetings. 'Now I see what it is,' he said to himself with a contemptuous laugh.

The Christian youth of Limehouse were combining gymnastics and religion, the horizontal bar and the Psalms. An ingenious subterfuge of ecclesiastics, to whom every means is good which diverts an ever-thirsty humanity from the abodes of Perdition.

On the entrance steps stood a perfect specimen of the kind of being who would resort to a place of this kind; a sickly

and self-satisfied looking young man, whose large round spectacles adorned a singularly expressionless face, unindividual and unfinished, in which every feature, mere incompetent sketch as it was, embodied moral excellence.

As soon as he saw that Mike was looking at him he went down the steps with an affable smile, and took him by the arm.

'Hullo! old chap,' he said, 'Don't you feel inclined to come in? I'm sure you'll be welcome! Let me take you round inside, just as a guest!'

With his hand on Mike's shoulder, he smiled encouragingly. He seemed completely at ease, cordial, and slightly patronising. His rudimentary features had assumed an expression of playful good fellowship; his round glasses distilled the benevolent indulgence of virtue. Mike looked at him with astonishment, wondering whether to laugh at the narrow shoulders and the unformed face or to resent his patronising tone as an insult. He decided for laughter, and answered with a snort:

'Go in there! No, thank you! No sermons for me!'

His friend shook his head without the least discomposure.

'That's where you are wrong, old chap; no one will preach you any sermons; no one will force you to do anything or ask you for anything; you can put in an hour here reading the papers or a good book; or you can use the gymnasium; or you can have a turn with the gloves with one of the others. You look a stout fellow, I'm sure that a few lessons would soon make you no end of a dab!'

Mike burst out laughing again. The idea of a young be-spectacled abortion like this offering to teach him the noble art struck him as supremely comical. There was something about it all that he could not understand. That affable assurance, that tone of confidence and superiority from a being who evidently had no right to be alive, must have some source which he could not even guess at; and still shaking his head, he continued to look with curiosity at the entrance to the sanctuary. Just then a girl appeared and came down the steps. The proselytiser saw her, and became more pressing.

'Come now,' he said, 'pluck up your courage and have a look inside just as a matter of curiosity; you shan't be bothered, I promise you; shall he, Miss Gordon Ingram?'

She answered immediately, 'Certainly, you will be most welcome without any conditions, and I am sure that Wilkins will be the best of guides.'

Mike looked at her and understood what had hitherto escaped him. The right to speak familiarly to a creature of an essence so manifestly divine must be enough to give the humblest of mortals a feeling that his share of the goods of this world deserved envy. There was nothing ethereal or unreal about her; her being was revealed in the form of a body, healthy and clothed with flesh, which no essential feature differentiated from that of other women. She probably had blue eyes, which were luminous and gentle, fair hair, the colour of all things fair, that is to say, of dried leaves, fresh butter, corn, and of shining polished bronze. Her mouth was neither a strawberry nor a rosebud, but a real mouth, sufficiently wide, with soft lips which often formed a kind of

pitying pout that was none the less full of courage, half a smile and half the beginning of a prayer as of one making intercession. But it was impossible to think of her eyes when she looked at you, or of her mouth when she spoke. Her words, like her glances, made a direct and frank appeal that you could not evade. Her honest and fearless eyes shone when she looked at you, as though you yourself, what you were thinking, what you were saying, were for the moment the most important things, and the most worthy of attention in the whole world. And what she herself said did not seem to be merely a series of words put together in the ordinary way and meaning this or that, but the expression of an interest which, at the moment when she spoke, was the whole of herself and a well of infinite kindliness. Indeed, when you knew her better you came to forget all the rest and to see nothing but that alone; a kindliness which could take the place of all the virtues and all the graces, as wide as the world, straight and simple as a knife; the incessant, dominating desire to balance the scales justly, never to neglect the humblest suppliant or the most

insignificant request, to accord to everyone all his due, all his desire, and if the desire was an impossible one the suppliant would at least know that she would be as sorry for it as himself. To understand this boundless kindliness was to lament that cruel fate had not put into her hands the ordering of all things, the kingship of the earth, to which she would certainly have brought peace.

Mike was not able to see all this at once, but her just standing there and speaking to him, with the engaging and natural air of a great lady speaking to her equals, was enough to arouse within him a swarm of innocencies, of unsuspected virtues, which jostled one another as they sought to rise to the surface of his heart. The bright eyes that looked at him were full of sincere interest. She was descending the steps to go away, and she had stopped because of him and had neglected all the rest of her marvellous life to stand there and talk to him.

'We really shall not force you to say prayers or sing hymns if you do not want to,' she said. 'Perhaps you are not very religious; and rather an unbeliever? Well it makes no difference to us, so long as you are not an

utter ruffian you will be good enough for us. You will come in ? That's right ! Now I shall leave you with your friend, but I do hope I shall see you again ! '

Wilkins whispered with pride, ' She talked to you like that because she thinks you're a friend of mine ! No pride about her, eh ? '

Mike let himself be led in, went up two steps and turned round again. She was going away towards Aldgate, treading the dirty pavement with a free and elastic step, just as though it were worthy of her instead of belonging to a district where her presence was a continuous miracle. She was followed at a short distance by a man of whom she had taken no notice, a servant evidently, well dressed in a serge suit and a bowler hat, in which he appeared ill at ease. He kept his distance carefully, punctiliously, and he watched people and houses suspiciously and contemptuously. His whole bearing expressed mute disapproval of these visits to the common herd to which he found himself constrained.

The young man with glasses showed Mike the different rooms which composed ' The

Limehouse Christian Institute,' and did not fail to emphasise the many advantages which it offered to its members. The subscription! Nothing, or practically nothing. A shilling now and then. Just enough to keep out people who only wanted to play the fool.

'You can understand,' he said, 'that that does not bring in enough to pay for the rent and gas, and the rest of it! We could never carry on if we had no one to help us, but we have patrons, rich people, philanthropists as they are called, who founded the Institute and pay most of the expenses. And they are not content with finding the money; they come too, often, and they are not a bit proud. You've seen Miss Gordon Ingram, eh! Well, she's not the only one. There's the Captain, who comes several times a week to look after the gymnasium and the boxers and to show them what to do. It was he who paid out of his own pocket for the whole of the apparatus and the dumbbells and the gloves. Swells, all of them, with houses in the West End and servants and horses and carriages, but not proud. Just like Miss Gordon Ingram!' He adjusted his glasses the better to look at Mike, jerked his head

violently, and said with conviction, ' None better ! None better ! '

The reading room was furnished with tables and benches, on which papers and magazines were spread out. The games room contained similar tables and benches, but the papers were replaced by draughts and chess boards and dominoes. The gymnasium was in the basement, its floor was covered with straw mattresses, and it was furnished with a few rudimentary pieces of apparatus and dumbbells of different weights. The other rooms were all furnished in the same style. But the crumbling walls and the make-shift furniture had acquired a subtle prestige, the fresh glamour of a glorious presence. And Mike listened to his companion and looked about him with respect. Even the canteen, where, naturally, nothing was sold but temperance beverages and hot decoctions, did not move him to contempt. As they went through this last room his guide put a hand on his shoulder and said confidentially, ' Look here, my friend, if ever you want a really good cup of cocoa you'll find it here. There's not another place in London where you can get. better cocoa ! '

His eyebrows, raised above his round glasses by the wrinkling of his forehead and the knowing wink with which he accompanied his advice, gave an idea of the acute voluptuous ecstasies which the imbibition of this liquid was capable of producing. Mike repressed a grimace and confessed that up to then he had never been intemperate in the use of cocoa.

It was getting late, the Institute was almost empty; before they left they saw two other rooms reserved for girls, and a third where, as Wilkins revealed with a confidential smile, the two sexes were authorised to meet, under due chaperonage, to exchange agreeable and friendly conversation, and to get to know one another.

When they reached the entrance steps he adjusted his spectacles afresh, took Mike's arm and gave it a genial shake.

'Well!' he said, 'We've everything that a man wants, haven't we? And you can see that we aren't up to the neck in religion. I won't say that now and then we don't have a little address or a serious talk, but never anything formal, just as it comes along, man to man, and if you don't care about it, well,

there's no compulsion to attend.' And while they were shaking hands he added, 'And as for the subscription, you know, no one will bother you about that. Whenever it suits you; so now we understand one another. You will be one of us; don't say no! Besides, Miss Gordon Ingram said that she was hoping and expecting to see you again.' He raised a solemn finger to emphasise the enormity of any disobedience. Then, as Mike did not answer, he went a little distance away, turned round to wave a final friendly adieu, and whispered, 'And don't forget what I said about the cocoa!'

In the Commercial Road the shops were nearly all shut, passers-by were becoming few, the electric tramways followed one another on the road, stopped to take up or put down travellers, and plunged anew into the night to the sound of their gongs. Mike buried his hands in his pockets and followed the pavement absently. He did not try to think, he allowed all the images which had come before him that evening to dance in his head and move as they would. They passed before him pell-mell, ideas and faces mixed together. 'The Limehouse Christian

Institute!' of which he was going to be a member; he, Mike O'Brady!

What on earth had happened? The young apostle in spectacles, the gymnasium and the cocoa, and then—and then that girl. When he came to her he stopped short. Nothing else counted; the rest was of no importance whatever; but that girl, her appearance, what she must be, what she had said—this was indeed important. That was something worth thinking about, thinking about at length, and thinking about only, something to be turned patiently over in your mind like a precious puzzle the solution of which would make everything easy.

He had remembered her name and he said it over twice, but her name did not mean anything to him yet, and could not make him see her face. He realised that it was a splendid name, one of those glorious names which you read upon monuments and great stone tombs; one of those names which, from immemorial times, have been announced in drawing-rooms with a loud voice, or have been shouted upon fields of battle. Nowadays a name like that represented a pillared mansion, set far

away in the west, hiding behind its decorated blinds and lace curtains a wealth of thick carpets, mahogany furniture and powdered servants. It represented too all kinds of spiritual luxuries, of refinements imperious as laws, to which the common people had no access, which served as countersigns to the elect. Her name meant all that, but it could not call up to his mind's eye the person of whom he thought. Then he tried to see her as she had appeared to him, to recall her feature by feature and as a whole, descending the steps and stopping in front of him. And again he found that he could not recall her in this way either. He could not recall her eyes or her hair or her mouth or the lines of her figure, but he felt again the miracle of her presence, and again was penetrated by the feeling that it would be useless to seek further or to ask for more; that he could do nothing better than to follow her and to refer to her everything which he did not understand.

For the first time in his life Mike tasted the delight of being ignorant and simple, when you know someone in whom you can trust. It becomes useless to battle

on among doubts and the shadows and failures of a tangled life when one can empty it all into just and compassionate hands, within whose marvellous crucible shadows dissolve in light, failure in success, and where doubts only reveal the blazing truth which has been there from the beginning.

Commercial Road became a triumphal way, at the end of which beings of a higher nature awaited him, offering magnificent gifts, beings certainly above ordinary life, filled with all the good and all the beauty which the Creator has kept back from others. They descended from their pedestals, or indeed issued living from the pages of a magazine, and came towards him because he had been waiting for them without knowing it.

'Now! Now things will be better!' said Mike.

He did not want to say more than this on account of the ill luck which lies in wait for those who express their hopes too openly. He just stopped, followed abstractedly a tram which was vanishing in the darkness, and repeated with a jerk of his head, 'Now I think things will go better.'

XI

Next evening Mike arrived in good time at the Institute, and when he got there felt perfectly ill at ease. He could not find either Wilkins or Miss Gordon Ingram, or anyone he expected to meet. In the reading room and in the games room young men whom he did not know looked at him inquisitively but did not speak to him. In the gymnasium a youth was awkwardly brandishing dumb-bells, and two others, wearing boxing gloves, tried vainly to reconcile Christian brotherhood and an imitation of pugilism. He strayed from one room to the other and stood for some time in wait near a door behind which he heard the voices of women. It was that part of the Institute which was reserved for girls, and Miss Gordon Ingram was probably there, but he could not go in. He waited for some minutes without stirring, when it

suddenly occurred to him that perhaps he was doing something not quite delicate, and that she might surprise him at any moment and conceive the greatest contempt for him. He therefore returned to the reading room and took possession of an evening paper, which he glanced over absent-mindedly. 'Catastrophe in a Welsh Mine, 14 Lost,' 'Austria Constructs Dreadnoughts,' 'The Australians Start Badly'—what did all that matter to him? The results of cricket matches! battleships! catastrophes! The papers were always full of things that did not interest him in the least. He was about to throw it down upon the table when he was seized with a sudden scruple. Perhaps after all he ought now to read all that, think about it, and even try to find some interest in it! He was just entering upon a new path and he did not exactly know what was expected of him. He therefore took up the paper again with more attention and ran through the columns of news. Out of all it contained what ought he to leave alone and what ought he to read? Cricket was out of the question; battleships, being instruments of bloodshed, were a part of prepara-

tion for war that Christians could not approve of; and yet, what would she have thought of them? She belonged to the upper classes, who declare war and conduct it and maintain in a heroic state of exaltation the people whose duty it is to defend their possessions. She was a near neighbour to the lords who make speeches to the poor upon their duties and do not recognise that they have any rights, and if she thought as they did, that would then be the truth. This was a difficult question to solve. But its solution would be easy, since all he had to do was to ask her.

The catastrophe remained, and there could be no doubt whatever as to what she would think about that. For her it would not be an impersonal and distant event, almost inevitable and largely compensated for by a subscription; it would be a terrible disaster over which she would herself mourn with the mourners, the source of tears which she would shed with the bereaved wives and mothers, a certain number of individual misfortunes which she would long to relieve at any cost. And in thinking of her grief Mike felt full of pity.

A grey-headed man came up to the table, gave him a sidelong glance, took up a paper, which he put down again after making a pretence of looking at it, and ended by sitting down close beside him. He was dressed like a small shopkeeper or a superior artisan, very tidily, but with noticeable simplicity, as if everything which could possibly resemble an ornament had been scrupulously eliminated.

He asked: 'Are you not a new member of the Institute? I thought I noticed that you did not yet feel quite at home here.'

Mike had to admit that he was there for the first time, for his visit of yesterday could hardly count. He spoke of Wilkins, whom he was surprised not to have found there.

His friend repeated 'Wilkins!' and nodded his head. 'Yes!' he continued, 'Wilkins is a good fellow, deserving and religious; I'm glad that you know him. If it's he who has brought you here, that's a point in your favour.'

Mike felt bound to confess that his relations with Wilkins dated only from the previous evening, and had been limited to a

quarter of an hour's conversation during a visit to the Institute.

When he heard this the grey-haired man appeared to consider him with greater interest; he drew a little nearer to him, lowered his voice and congratulated him on having allowed himself to be enrolled.

'So you don't know Wilkins! No! No! And it's he who helped you to make up your mind; a good fellow, Wilkins; deserves well, and is full of zeal. Well, you're really welcome, and you'll find friends here, young folk of your own age and all good fellows, whom it will do you no harm to know; and then there are newspapers and chess and the gymnasium. Yes, the gymnasium. And tell me,' he leaned forward a little and lowered his voice still more, 'if you don't know Wilkins perhaps you have not the same views; I mean in religious matters? Perhaps you've not thought much about it until now? No! That's it! That's it! And then you noticed that it was a something worth thinking about, eh? and that it was about time too.' He leaned still further forward, till he nearly touched Mike, and put one hand upon his shoulder.

'You're young and strong! True! True! But still, anything may happen to you—you never know—and if you should be taken without being ready to go what would happen to you, eh? You see that it was quite time to be thinking about it.' He looked round and whispered, 'One can't talk here, it disturbs the readers; come into the next room; we shall be quiet there and can have a little talk between ourselves. Just a little friendly talk, eh?'

He took him by the arm and led him away, saying as they walked, 'Perhaps you're surprised to see me here, eh! I'm no longer a young fellow; I'm just an old ruin, nothing but a ruin; but I'm fond of being with young men. I'm older than they; I have more experience, and so now and then I am able to give them advice, a little friendly advice. One just talks, that's all, one talks, and nothing but good can come of it. They call me Father Boulter; yes, Boulter, John Boulter; that's my name!' He pushed Mike into one of the corners of the room, installed him at the end of a bench against the wall and sat down beside him. He rubbed his hands, stroked his grey moustache

with an absent-minded gesture, a little nervously, and carefully selected his words. His rather colourless face had taken on an ardent and wily expression, the mask of the hunter who sees his prey cornered before him and chooses his weapon with care. As he prepared his attack he continued to talk kindly and paternally, taking pains to use only simple phrases, familiar expressions, free of all solemnity and calculated not to awaken distrust.

'I see,' he said; 'I see how it is. You are young, aren't you? You have lived like many others, not worse than they have, nor better, and you have never given much thought to religion. Hey? Partly because at your age one has so many things to do, and so many things that one thinks one must do. The world is full of temptation; the Evil One is full of cunning, and the flesh is weak when one has not Christ to help you. You say to yourself that other people do the same things, or even worse; you say it without thinking, as though Hell weren't large enough to hold them as well as you; and you have your fun, and you call it fun, and see no harm in it. I know! I know!

I've been young myself, a long time ago, before I found salvation.'

He stopped a moment, with his eyes far away, and his own words recalled his past iniquities, a desert of vice and perdition, strewn with games of skittles, bottles of lemonade, and secret walks with the daughter of a chemist, in those sad days before 'salvation.'

'And then when you're young you think there'll always be time enough; you say there's no hurry, that there are years and years before you to think about it; you feel strong; you think you will go on being strong for a long time, and that when you are old and tired it will be time enough then perhaps to think about things. And all that time death lies in ambush and the flames of Hell are waiting. Think of everything that may happen; people who are found dead in their beds; yes, people like you, young and strong. Ah! You don't believe it? It makes you laugh! Well, read the papers and see the accidents that happen.' He waved his arm vaguely, and seemed to include in what he said the benches and tables, the walls with their coloured prints

and texts from the Scriptures, the shut window behind which could be heard the confused hum of the Commercial Road broken by the gongs of the trams. 'Think of the motor buses!' he said, looking threateningly at Mike.

The effect he produced did not appear to answer his expectations. But, full of resource, he changed his front, and brought fresh troops into action.

'I don't know if you're like me, but I always like to be on the right side, the side that wins. Well, there's a great battle going on, a battle which has gone on for centuries and isn't yet finished, between the hordes of the devil and the forces of Jesus. On one side the troops of sin, the world and the flesh, the temptations and traps of the Evil One, and on the other the soldiers of truth and holiness and of good, marching to victory under the banner of Christ. Yes or no! Do you want to be upon the winning side? The army of sin may be a thousand times the stronger, but it has not the shadow of a chance, young man, not the shadow of a chance! All is up with it!'

Speaking familiarly as well as prophetic-

ally, and borrowing the language of the enemy the better to overcome him, he appeared to be giving his lucky friend an exclusive 'tip,' advising him to put all upon Christ, and Christ, and still Christ, no matter at what odds. Then he waved his hands in the air, as though to call from the void the certainty of inexpressible rewards.

'And the troops that win will enjoy such glory as no conquerors have ever won. In this world the bliss of perfect faith and of duty done, and in the other world other unspeakable blessings which shall endure as long as eternity endures.'

'Hullo,' said Mike, 'Here's Wilkins!'

Wilkins came up with little hurried steps, adjusting his glasses and smiling affably. He shook hands and sat down by them. 'There's two of them now,' thought Mike. 'Now I'm in for it! But what on earth do they want me to say?' He expected them to make a combined attack, but to his surprise he noticed that his two companions remained silent, and looked at one another uneasily. Wilkins was the first to speak.

'Have you been here long?' he asked. 'I'm a little late this evening, and I wasn't

sure that you would come. So you've already made the acquaintance of Mr. Boulter ! That's capital ! That's capital ! ' He levelled his glasses at the latter and addressed him, ' It was I who brought him here,' he said. ' He was just passing and . . .'

Boulter quickly interrupted him, with a shade of impatience.

' I know ! I know ! He's told me ! '

The spectacles remained levelled at him for several seconds, then turned slowly away. Their rights were not going to be contested.

After a further silence Wilkins leaned forward, put a hand upon Mike's knee and broke into a tempting smile.

' How about a game of draughts, eh ? '

Boulter rose with a sigh and went back to the reading room. Over the draughts board Wilkins became confidential and intimate.

' Boulter is a capital fellow,' he said, ' devoted and most deserving, but he's a little too—what shall I say—a little over insistent ; he's worked with the Salvation Army, and it's left its mark on him. The Army is a most admirable institution, but their methods are in my opinion a little—a little crude. They can get magnificent

results, but not with everybody. No! They don't succeed with everybody. Now I believe in good influences. When one has led a man into the right way one mustn't bother him; one must keep him there gently without forcing matters, almost without his knowing it himself, and allow influences, good influences, to do their work. Instead of passing his evenings in a stifling, badly ventilated bar, full of smoke, among fellows who are half drunk and spit on the floor, he's brought here, plays a game of draughts with a pal, and has a chat. I am not referring to you, remember. I don't mean that you spent your evenings like that. Not for a moment. Instead of drinking filth which gives him rheumatism or turns him into a beast, why, when he feels inclined he has a nice cup of cocoa; and on Sunday, instead of loafing in the street waiting for the 'pubs' to open, he comes here to hear an informal address, something really interesting, something worth hearing, by a man who knows what he's talking about. Influences, you see, good influences; and all one has to do is to let them do their work. A man can't help changing, even without

knowing it; he can't prevent it.' The round spectacles swung from side to side like the beam of a lighthouse, concentrated in absorbed attention on the draughts board, or looked up to convey to his adversary a message of encouragement, a look which was a sample of the blissful wisdom to which he might aspire. Their possessor suddenly reflected that he was perhaps wrong to show his plan of campaign so openly, and changed the conversation.

'Not many here to-night, are there? The Captain was to have come, but he's not been able to, and it's, of course, not Miss Gordon Ingram's day. She'll be here the day after to-morrow, Friday. Tuesday and Friday, those are her days, without counting Sunday, of course!'

Mike glanced up at him quickly like an animal taken unawares and as quickly looked down again. It was his turn to move, but his thoughts were elsewhere. With his elbows on his knees, and bent over the table, he rocked backwards and forwards on his bench and felt a flood of savage anger rising within him. Was something still making game of him? Something? Occult powers,

which played with him, peopled the world with deceitful faces and threw him to and fro from one lie to another; a decoy, thrown down in front of him and as quickly snatched away, a cleverly devised trap which left him at the mercy of contemptible underlings, flunkies who could do nothing but comment upon and disfigure the message from on high. This creature, for instance, who was appropriating the merit of having captured him, and spoke of 'changing' him by his influence. How would it be if he drove his spectacles into his skull.

Wilkins placidly continued.

'She can't come more often because she has so many other things to do, so many people who have claims upon her. But she's here regularly every Tuesday and Friday from half past eight till ten, and on Sunday afternoons. I'm sure you'll like her. She's very popular here. Most popular!'

Ah well, he would see her in a couple of days after all, and he need not come on the days when she was not there, at least unless she wanted him to; and she would tell him what to do, what to believe of what these people talked about. Wilkins! She had

said something about Wilkins, he couldn't remember what; that he would be a good friend for him probably, a fellow whom it would be a good thing to be with, or something of that kind; so that he had to stay there, and perhaps even listen to what he said. Two days more and she would explain what she wanted of him. Meanwhile, he must do like Wilkins, sit, nod his head and move his pieces about the board. . . .

XII

When he got there on Friday evening he met Wilkins again, who took possession of him without more ado. They passed through the reading room and the games room, but this time Wilkins had other distractions for him than draughts. As he led Mike on, he said, 'Friday is one of our best days. The Institute is always full on Friday. Miss Gordon Ingram and the Captain are both here, but Miss Gordon Ingram always spends a good deal of the evening with the girls, and we don't see her much before half past nine. I'll take you to the gymnasium; I expect the Captain's there.'

The Captain was a man of about thirty, tall, slight without being thin, distinctly good looking, frank and easy in his manner. His sunburnt face made his blue eyes look still more blue and his short fair moustache

still fairer. He had taken off his coat and collar, rolled up the sleeves to the elbows, and was standing among a group of youths and young men, among whom he appeared perfectly at ease. They were in different stages of raggedness, which left room for doubt as to whether they were in their ordinary costume or in a special dress for games. They had one characteristic in common—profound respect for the Captain, probably based partly on his athletic prowess and partly on his social superiority, which, however, he appeared anxious that they should forget.

Wilkins introduced Mike. He was greeted warmly. 'Very glad to see you,' he said, looking at him appraisingly. 'You look like a stout fellow, eh! All the better for the gymnasium; and Wilkins caught you did he? all by himself? A regular triumph of spirit over matter!'

Wilkins laughed decorously, and confessed that Miss Gordon Ingram had lent him a hand for a moment. The Captain stroked his moustache to hide a smile, and observed simply that he was no longer surprised.

Under this play of repartee Mike felt sulky and hostile. What did he care about the Captain anyway? An aristocrat who cadged for the respect of poor devils by mingling with them, and for their gratitude by pretending to treat them like equals. He watched him stealthily, on the look-out for any note of condescension or derision which he would make into a pretext for resentment, and as he found none he resented his good looks, his air of being well-groomed and almost smart in clothes which were carefully unconventional, his well-balanced strength, his clear and healthy complexion, and the air of breeding which made him so different from those who were about him. The anger he had felt a few evenings before persisted. It was always the same story; he thought he was going to get somewhere, he stretched out his hands and he was being made game of.

He firmly refused to try the weight of the dumb-bells or to make use of the apparatus, but when the Captain invited him to put on the gloves and show what he could do he accepted without hesitation. That at any-rate was not one of the arts of which the

upper classes had a monopoly, and in that the fine Captain would not be more than his equal.

To feel the hard lumps into which long months of use had pressed the horsehair of the gloves, to slip his hands into gloves which were still moist with sweat, to feel the grip of the fingers and the play of the well-protected thumb,—each of these sensations did him good and reconciled him with himself as he remembered the good times gone by.

And when after shaking hands he had turned round, side stepped, feinted twice and missed an attack which brought them into a clinch, he felt months younger, grown simple and calmly animal, freed from complicated problems that were too obscure, and desires which he could not understand. This was a game indeed, a real game for a man, with mistakes that leave their mark, and hurt, and with moments of absolute joy.

To be patient and watchful, to advance inch by inch without ever losing the perfect balance of the body, strained like a spring ready for the trigger, always alert for retreat or avoidance, to feint, to be wary, to deceive

your adversary, suddenly to strike hard quick blows which make you feel the stricken bones through the flesh and the hair of the gloves, to feel the glow of in-fighting for the few seconds before a side step or a clinch arrests it, to begin again with patience and care, with the clear mind of a good workman, with an expressionless face behind which burns the savage instinct of contest—ah ! that was as satisfying as a meal, as vivifying as a strong drink, a delight so keen as to be at times voluptuous.

But the pleasure grew fainter and dissolved into impatience, the impatience into surly resentment when he found that the Captain was sparing him. Even in this game this smooth-skinned aristocrat was his better, and the fact that he did not take advantage of it only aggravated the offence. Making the most of his longer reach the Captain watched Mike attentively, ignored his feints, and received his attacks with straight quick lefts, full in the face, hard enough to stop him but not enough to shake or knock him out. He evidently only considered this as a demonstration which he was making for the benefit of his pupils, as they stood against

the walls, on an animate dummy which it would have been useless and injudicous to damage.

Mike understood this, and the double resentment he felt as a humiliated boxer and a jealous proletarian condensed into a spasm of cold violence which made his cheeks go pale and sent a shudder down his shoulders. He abandoned his open and playful style and had recourse, one after the other, to every device of the game that he had learnt to put into practice in the halls of Dublin, when the umpire was looking elsewhere and the temptation to win the two sovereigns, no matter how, became too strong. The Captain would never have learnt that kind of thing—pressing with the forearm on the throat, a hit on the back with an open hand in a clinch, an apparently unintentional trip-up, the art of tiring out an opponent by making him support all his weight, an unexpected punch at the moment of breaking away, a weak attack delivered with feigned fatigue, and a fierce punch on the stomach when the opponent has been lured into carelessness and gives an opening.

But while some of his dodges succeeded

others did not, and every ten seconds the left glove of the Captain hammered his face without unnecessary violence, courteously, as though to give him a gentle reminder that he was not so formidable after all. He began to get winded, his movements grew slower, and, the more frequently and lightly the condescending taps rained upon his face, the more anger and humiliation blinded him. Oh! if he could but find a gap in that brilliant defence, only a few square inches, only for a fraction of a second, just enough to give him time to put in a drive with his right, and perhaps, before his opponent fell, one or two vicious hooks on the side of the jaw, something that would make that fine clean face of his look speckled for a week or so. He took no trouble to guard or dodge the blows now, he followed his man inch by inch, slithering his feet over the floor, waiting for the right moment and already sure of victory; he was like an animal on the hunt, as, looking down on its prey from the branch above, it waits for a moment as though fixed in a dream, tasting in advance the delight of the hot blood upon its gums.

And when he saw the Captain driven to

the wall and trapped in a corner, he leapt forward blindly, striking with both hands in a savage desire to feel something yield and give way under his blows.

Suddenly a voice rang out behind him which he remembered, a voice which was so clear and distinct that it seemed it must always bring good news. The Captain seized him by the arm and stopped him, still smiling, and he turned round just in time to see Miss Gordon Ingram come in. She stopped for a moment on the top step of the staircase, saw the two men bending over one another in the corner, and laughed with genuine amusement.

As long as she was there there could be no further question of resentment, jealousy, or violence; her presence was a cure for all these things, both in the present and in the future, as well as absolution for the past. Mike drew off his right glove, warmly shook the hand which the Captain held out to him, and turned to look at her with an expression that was as innocent and simple as a baby's. At last he saw her again, and as soon as he had fully realised that she was there, that she was looking at him, and that perhaps she was

going to speak to him, he felt at once that his impatience, his irritability of the preceding days and even of this evening had been a monstrous example of presumption, almost of sacrilege. What ! he, Mike O'Brady, had dared to rebel against the invisible powers because they refused him access now and whenever he wanted it to a creature who, in the scale of beings, was nearer, much nearer to those powers than to him ! Once more he gazed upon her, and while his memory of her had been good and sweet and comforting, to see her was something more and far better. It was a gracious gift which it would have been impudent on his part to discount, an inestimable privilege to which one ought to go treading on tiptoe with Sabbath clothes and a Sabbath heart. He had only to think of her and of himself side by side to feel humble and full of remorse. 'A woman like her and a man like me !' That was all he could manage to tell himself, and as he let this phrase form itself in his head it seemed more incredible than ever that she was really there, that she was looking at him and remembered him—'A woman like her and a man like me !'

She did not see all this in the eyes that were fixed upon her, or perhaps she would not see it. She held out her hand and said with a smile, 'I am very glad you have come; and so you have already begun to annihilate the Captain; you have made a good start!' She looked at the latter and added: 'Happily he is big enough to defend himself, but when you box with the others you will be careful with them, won't you?'

Mike nodded 'Yes' without turning away his eyes.

After she had gone round the room, giving a friendly word or two and some mark of interest to each, she stopped and called out 'Boys!' Everybody stopped what he was doing and turned towards her.

'Boys,' she said, 'I've come to tell you what I have just told the others upstairs. I should like you all to come to the Institute on Sunday afternoon. This week I have arranged for the Rev. Mr. Keeling to come and talk to you. If some of you have never heard him I can assure them that they will like him. He is a very remarkable man, who is doing most admirable work in Lambeth and Southwark; I am most grate-

ful to him for having been so good as to give you a little of his precious time. You ought to be grateful too, and to show it by all coming. I am sure you will like him.'

On her way to the door she stopped once more when she came to where Mike was, and asked him with a half smile and a little hesitatingly, 'Will you come too?' Again he nodded 'Yes' and watched her as she went away.

Wilkins took him familiarly by the arm. 'Ah!' he said, 'You see she hadn't forgotten you! She's like that with everybody here. She has houses and motor cars and all sorts of things over there in the West; but she doesn't make any fuss when she comes to us, eh!' He adjusted his spectacles, gazed dreamily at the door by which she had gone out, and said in a muffled voice, 'She's what I call a Christian, a Christian and no mistake!'

Mike did not listen, he was too busy fixing in his memory the first words of the gospel of which he had come in search.

XIII

The Reverend Mr. Keeling was a man who was still young, powerfully built and yet of extreme thinness. What struck one most in him at first sight was the contrast between his big bony structure and the lack of flesh, the look of a man worn by asceticism aud incessant hard work. This contrast was still more accentuated by the strength and resolution of his jaw, and the clearness and gentleness of his eyes. He talked with an almost exaggerated simplicity, taking care only to employ words that were common or even vulgar; in short sentences which were easy to understand and to remember. Sometimes he would forget himself for a moment and would launch out into the bejewelled and well-balanced phrases of a style which at some previous time he had evidently been taught to cultivate. But as soon as he

became aware of what he was doing he would stop short with a gesture of apology, and start afresh in more ordinary terms.

His theology resolved itself into a belief in the indisputable existence of a divinity, not very powerful but full of tolerance and compassion. This divinity seemed itself to be struggling in a network of innumerable restrictions and interdictions. It looked down from above with an immense pity upon the poor of this world, unable to give them material help but encouraging them secretly, and promising to intercede for them with other inexorable powers. It understood and made allowance beforehand for temptations; it realised the injustice which presides over the distribution of earthly goods, and implored the unfortunate to resign themselves, while it guaranteed a future reward. When the unfortunate refused to be resigned, and succumbed to irresistible temptations, this divinity regretfully put into force a law which was evidently stronger than itself, and condemned them with a bleeding heart to an eternity of nameless punishments.

By the voice of its minister this divinity

prayed and commanded alternately the members of the Lewisham Christian Institute to avoid certain vices which were particularly hateful and pernicious; drink, gambling, the use of over robust expressions in speech, and of useless and coarse adjectives.

Most other vices, they were given to understand, were happily beyond their reach, a thing for which they ought to thank Providence upon their knees. To those who triumphed over the Evil One and over themselves the divinity guaranteed somewhat nebulous delights, to those who allowed themselves to be overcome it promised most real and definite torments, the prospects of which were calculated to make a man think.

Mike listened attentively and was astonished.

It was not the first time by many that he had listened to preachers of every persuasion, frantically condemning various pleasures which appeared to him quite natural, and the enormity of which he was in no wise able to comprehend. A glass of beer when a man is thirsty or has met a friend; a glass of something stronger when your pocket is

full and you are treated by others; the two shillings 'win or place' which brings a little interest into a dull life; and the healthy coloured language which alone expresses adequately certain states of mind. He had never considered that the condemnation of these things was anything but an excuse for the tiresome eloquence and lucubrations of harmless fools, and he would have put the Reverend Mr. Keeling into this category but for the fact that he was supported by . . . After all what did she think of it all?

She sat a little sideways on her chair, raising her face to the preacher who was standing near her, now and then nodding her head approvingly. So it was true, what he was saying! There lay the path that he, Mike, must follow if he was to earn praise and draw a little nearer to those who were above him! He took to looking at her for whole minutes together, following the effect upon her face of the inspired words, and when he saw her nod he would pull himself together in a desperate effort to imagine the phrase which he had not listened to, and which had thus earned her approval. So he must not swear or bet any

more, and practically not drink. Good ! Good ! He was determined to do it, but at the same time he felt growing within him a feeling of intense disappointment because what she asked was no more than that : a question of vulgar pleasures whose mention in connection with her seemed almost to degrade her.

And then . . . And then she stood up, and nothing else mattered. It was the first time that Mike had seen her standing, at a little distance from him, while everyone else was seated, serene and gentle and simple, preparing to deliver her message, without knowing that before having uttered a word she had already delivered at least one miraculous message.

' She has left behind her far in the west-end her mansions and her horses and carriages, and she has come here to speak to me ! ' This was the thought that filled his mind.

Before she had uttered a word he felt ashamed. It was not only the swearing, the gambling, and the drink—those things of which the previous speaker spoke ; but it was the whole of his life up to that very day, every minute of it, every petty or ugly act,

every transgression, even unconscious, every error and every ignorance, which welled into a flood of shame and humiliation, into something that burnt him and which he would have liked to blot out from the past.

He did not know what she was going to say, but he knew that she wanted to speak of something which she felt deeply and which she wanted to communicate to others, something which could be in common between her and him, some subtle bond which might draw him nearer to her and help to create the new heart she wished for him, which he would show to her without shame.

She began: 'My friends,' and at once he felt ready to weep. 'My friends!' This was no empty formula, it was evident that she loved those who were listening to her—sinners all whom these first words had already raised a little higher.

He lent forward and confidently awaited the revelation.

'We ought,' she said, 'to do what is right because it is right, and avoid doing wrong or repent of what we have done wrong because it is wrong; but the flesh is weak: temptations are many, often cunningly disguised,

and it is a good thing to carry constantly within one the memory of the rewards that God reserves for the just in the Kingdom of Heaven; thus the weak shall be made strong; those who weep and blame an imperfect world shall taste beforehand the perfection of the joy which awaits them, and all shall understand that they must strive with all their strength, and live in patience and in faith. But the divine compassion is so great, my friends, that the rewards which it promises to us are not only those of the other world; the world we live in, of which so many of us complain, becomes a thing of joy and beauty to those who have found salvation; and those who totter and grope in the darkness, if they take Christ for their guide, march in a path of glory with no fear of losing their way. And that is what I wish to speak to you about above all things. All those will understand me who have long struggled in doubt, who have wrestled, sought, failed, tasted without profit the pleasures of the world, who have erred in the labyrinth of life, stopping at every turn to doubt afresh, to call upon their false gods and await their answer in vain. Indeed,

for all those who put their hands over their eyes and say it is dark there can be no light, and they struggle in nameless anguish without understanding why. In their folly they think they can send their pain to sleep by drinking at the cup of empty pleasures, and they empty the cup and see that it contained only dregs. But when the voice of Christ has reached them they withdraw their hands, the scales fall from their eyes, they see the light, and perfect peace descends upon them.'

Mike kept his eyes upon her, his throat was dry and burning, his breath came a little quick, he felt that he was on the threshold of that kingdom of peace, awaiting only a signal from her to enter into it.

She had spoken in an even and gentle voice, hardly making a gesture, she let her arms hang down before her, and her open hands, which rested on her dress, now and then made a very faint movement like the merest suggestion of an offering. And, giving, as she did, to all those who listened to her the grace of her presence and the succour of her faith, she appeared to be asking forgiveness for not having more to give.

She said : ' Christ will lay upon you no harsh or lengthy penances, however great your transgression may have been, He will only ask a sincere repentance and a will to do better. Think what He gives in return ? He gives his constant support, consolation, and a great hope, and He gives to all who believe in Him and who take shelter in His love that peace which is a foretaste of future bliss, that perfect contentment which is a balm for troubled hearts ! '

When she ceased speaking Mike felt that he was already on the threshold of the wondrous kingdom, trembling with feverish anxiety and wondering what still remained for him to do ; salvation ; peace ; the state of joyful sanctity to which she summoned him ; consolation and great hope ; that was what he desired, whatever its name might be.

A voice gave out a number of a page, and fifty other voices rose in a hymn. Its refrain was :

' What shall the answer be,
What shall the answer be,
What will you say to Jesus,
What shall the answer be ? '

Mike's neighbour obligingly passed him a leaflet on which the words were printed, and he opened his lips and made a show of singing. The fifty voices spoke to him, asked him insistently what he was going to do, what answer he would give, and when he saw that she too was singing he felt aware of some imperative duty which he could not quite understand.

The hymn ended, the Reverend Mr. Keeling rose again.

Mike only heard somewhat confusedly what he said. Certain phrases reached him: 'Among you there are visitors, or perhaps newcomers'! . . . 'If one among you has submitted and has found salvation' . . . 'repentance' . . . 'A new path' . . .

Someone behind him half stood up, leaned on his shoulder and took him by the arm. It was Boulter who was whispering in his ear:

'Now is the time, my friend, why wait? Find salvation to-night and live in peace with yourself, eh? Which are you going to choose, eternal glory or eternal damnation? Don't wait any longer; it's to-day or never; perhaps to-morrow it will be too late!'

Mike paid little attention, he was waiting for more definite orders, for an inspiration from on high. She was sitting down, with her eyes on the ground, her hymn book between her hands, and she looked first at one corner of the room, then at the ceiling, then at one of the texts hanging on the wall, then up at the padre who was standing at her side. She seemed to be taking care not to look at Mike.

Boulter was whispering in his ear threats of inextinguishable flames, promises of ineffable bliss; calling upon him to wait no longer, to take salvation while it was offered.

Amid these divers voices Mike felt what a martyr must feel who is commanded to perform a rite which he does not know. He wanted salvation, but cared little about the flames; he wanted everything that she had spoken of, but now she was silent; suddenly, however, she looked up at him, hurriedly, furtively, her eyes met his, and as quickly turned away again. In the midst of silence he stood up.

He stood up and did not know what to say. He did not quite understand what was

expected of him, and even if he had understood how could he have found the words he needed. Erect, and shifting from one foot to the other, he looked without seeing over the rows of heads and plumbed the darkness in his heart. What did he want? Ah! Yes! Peace, utter peace. When he felt sure of this he tried to recall phrases, like those which he had heard on Sunday evenings in the streets or in churches, or had read in tracts during idle moments. What he had to say could not be expressed in language of common use, it called for solemn and sacred words. And yet to clothe what he felt in these sacred words seemed strange and incongruous.

He began: 'I have lived in darkness and in sin.' That was true at any rate, he had been in darkness for a long time, and as to sin, there could be no doubt about that now. What more could they ask of him? To repent, to swear to be virtuous in future? Yes; he ought to say that, and say it in a becoming and devout manner worthy the holy state which he was entering.

He repeated: 'I have lived in darkness and sin,' and then words suddenly came to

him. He declared that throughout his whole life he had piled up errors and iniquities without number, that now he understood their hideousness; that he had ignored God and put his trust in idols which had betrayed him; that he had thought he was happy, but now he understood that he could never have been so. There had been a time when he had felt a great desire awake within him, an ardent desire which he did not know how to quench; evidently it was the thirst for salvation which burned within him! Now he heard of a fountain of life, whence believers may drink deep draughts of the profound peace and perfect contentment which possess the hearts of those whom faith has touched. Therefore, he came to seek salvation and enter into this inheritance.

When he ceased speaking Boulter called out loudly from behind 'Alleluia,' and here and there voices repeated more gently 'Alleluia.'

The Reverend Mr. Keeling took him by the arm and led him into the next room, where he talked to him at length. Through the doorway came the sounds of another

hymn, sung doubtless in honour of his conversion :

'Oh there will be
Glory for me,
Glory for me
Glory for me,
When by His grace
I shall see His face,
Oh there will be
Glory for me.'

The voices rose and rose in an ecstasy of faith to a paean of thanksgiving for promised joys.

The padre exhorted him, with a hand on his shoulder, never to weaken, to keep constantly before his mind the insignificance of the task and the grandeur of the recompense, to fortify his heart for the small necessary sacrifices by the thought of Christ who had sacrificed Himself for him. He said to him : 'You will see how happy you will be, the weight of sin will have been lifted from your heart, the torments of doubt and remorse will end. I am sure you must feel it already, the happiness of the elect, the great happiness of those who have found the

path and who have been delivered from a heavy burden. And as long as you praise God and observe the law, as long as you put your trust in Christ, this happiness will never leave you.' He looked him in the eyes with a brotherly smile.

The hymn in the next room seemed to be sung expressly for him, to celebrate a splendid promotion, a formal and solemn opening of the gates of the heavenly kingdom; now he had passed over the threshold and was among the elect, and like them absolved from his sins, delivered from his burden, the equal in virtue of all those whom he had hitherto looked up to from afar. He had to think of it continuously in order to believe it. It seemed to him almost impossible that so short a space of time should have been able to transform him, and so he looked for some tangible sign of his new sanctity and could find none. Then he repeated to himself in a low tone, 'Saved! There! It's done! I'm saved!'

All the obligations for the future which salvation imposed upon him, and which the padre had enumerated to him, could not be so very important; at anyrate they

were not the things about which he thought just then. Above all, he wanted to think of the stage which he had just completed, which, by his own personal avowal, he had ardently desired. And when he had said over to himself two or three times that he was at last saved he said no more, and tried to look into himself in order to experience the state of perfect contentment and of blissful faith appropriate to his change of heart.

The padre continued to talk and he could not help listening.

'A pure life, a soul raised above the needs of the flesh; the constant thought of Christ, who is our model and our support . . . dangerous companionship . . . scorn of vulgar pleasures . . .'

Mike understood very well what all that meant, and he grew somewhat restive. Whatever he might have done in the past did not matter, since it was now washed out, and as to the future . . . why, he was saved! He had been summoned and received into higher spheres where he would move among beings who were half divine, whose presence and example would sanctify the least of his actions. This was no time for small-

minded exhortations. He wanted to repeat that he was saved ! and he did repeat it; he wanted to understand thoroughly all that salvation meant for him : a new world open to his steps, a glorious stage accomplished, light and peace, the possession of all that counted for anything here below; and when he had repeated it sufficiently often, and understood it sufficiently well, his sanctified heart would sing of its own accord a hymn of desperate gratitude to the God who showered His benefits upon him.

In the passage he encountered his new friends getting ready to go, but some of them seemed to be waiting for him. Boulter, mopping his forehead, with his eyes shining and avid with faith, shook him vigorously by the hand, and declared how happy he was; Wilkins came up to him with little nervous steps, fixed his spectacles in place, and he too shook him by the hand; and then Miss Gordon Ingram smiled upon him and said in a voice full of feeling : ' I am so very glad.'

The others had greeted him in a manner full of solemn emotion, as one would greet a man who has just escaped a great danger or passed through some terrible experience;

but she met him with a sympathetic smile upon her lips and a look of sincerity in her eyes, a smile that was beautiful with comradeship and welcome; she witnessed his entrance into a life which would be better and happier than in the past; she was happy on his account, and she told him so.

She had said: 'I am so very glad'; and he sighed with relief. He had done then what he ought to have done, what she had expected of him; now he felt himself nearer to her and able to look upon her without shame, on the infinite tenderness in her face, a tenderness that made one understand that you could not hope to share more than a morsel of it, but a morsel that was nevertheless great enough to bring peace and consolation and healing. He could read too in her face many other things that did you good and warmed you, to which he could put no name. Among the people who knew Audrey Gordon Ingram many could have described in appropriate terms certain characteristics of her face and her body, some particular beauty, some harmonious curve formed by a chance gesture, one of the delightful expressions that often passed over

her face : Mike would not have known how to describe them ; he had difficulty in even understanding them. But they represented more to him than to others though he perceived them less clearly, they represented all that which up till then he had never known, the adornment of lives more favoured by fortune, the wonderful gifts which on earth are apparently the traces of vanished divinities.

She had said : ' I am so very glad ! ' and then she appeared to wish to add something, hesitated, and said no more. Mike waited patiently before her, looking at her with eyes full of ingenuous intention. After a few moments he said to himself, ' I ought to go ! She won't say any more ! ' He thought he noticed that she was a little embarrassed by his standing there motionless and still. He made a step backwards, awkwardly, and looked away. She would say no more, and Boulter was bearing down on him again.

He went down the steps and out into Commercial Road.

Two hours later he found himself in Aldgate, feeling rather hot and not knowing

what to do. The 'Three Dolphins'? . . . No. It was not in that way that a man who had recently been converted should pass his Sunday. After thinking a moment he decided that the only place which was not obviously impious in character, except the street, was the public library in Whitechapel Road, and he betook himself thither.

On a Sunday in summer this library is dull, well swept, and calculated to rejoice the heart of those philanthropists who believe in the beneficent influence of printed words. In front of papers spread out on lecterns groups of different sizes are stationed. One reader stands firmly planted, strong in his right of priority, and takes a tyrannical pleasure in turning over the pages exactly when it pleases him to do so; others, reading bits of paragraphs over his shoulder, lift up timidly the corner of a paper when the man in possession allows them, and wait patiently until their turn comes to succeed him. To read papers on the day of issue calls for exceptional good luck or meritorious perseverance. Those who have no faith in their luck, and distrust their perseverance, resign themselves to running through yester-

days papers or technical magazines some days old.

The weekly illustrated magazines are particularly sought after. They come out on Friday; on Saturday the right lower corner of every page already bears the imprint of many a dirty thumb; on Sunday the dirty marks begin to encroach upon the illustrations; by Monday awkward and heavy hands, in turning over the leaves, have torn off the piece of paper on which were the dirty marks; and on the following days dirty marks and tears climb gradually up the page, until Friday comes to replace the solid mass of fragments by a new number.

But philanthropists would have many more reasons to rejoice their hearts if they were to visit the library on a winter evening when the weather is cold and rain begins to fall in the streets. Legions of ragamuffins come hurrying in, hobbling on their sore feet, which, wrapped in sooty rags, peep through the innumerable openings in their muddy boots. When they have reached the shelter of the corridor they proceed less hurriedly to the reading room and make for the fires. There are two

fireplaces, one on each side, which are fed generously, and the very sight of which is enough to warm the heart. But ropes, stretched in a half circle, forbid too near approach, and you have to enjoy the warmth from a distance as you let your soaking rags slowly dry. There the tatterdemalions stretch themselves over the ropes, as near as may be to the ruddy glow and ample comfort of the flames, gaze into the flicker, investigate again the infinite dilapidation of their garments, and of the leathern fragments about their feet, while, with anguished eyes, they watch the hands creep over the face of the clock.

On the upper storey there was a stove, but no fire; chairs there were, however, and in these the regular visitors would doze over scientific periodicals whose very names were an irony in that environment, sitting up now and then to give a restless and apprehensive glance at the superintendent, or to look at the falling snow without, or the hands of the clock racing over the dial. Both storeys were pervaded with the same complex smell of damp rags, uncleanly humanity, asphalt, fog and soot, but none the less there

was warmth, and when you have read an article on the European Concert, the Balkan Question, or the four extra Dreadnoughts, or have inspected photographs of aviators or of royal weddings, it is hard to leave this Paradise to go back into a world towards which neither Town Councils nor Mr. Carnegie have yet extended their enlightened benevolence.

In summer evenings, when it is fine and dry and a big fire is no longer an essential condition of well-being, the library loses its pathetic aspect and becomes once more a library rather than a refuge. It was thus when Mike entered it; a spacious dark room where pallid newspapers were laid out on desks, or drooped sadly. And yet, even at that season and hour, most of the visitors were of the vagabond class, for whom the open air had no appeal, inasmuch as they had their fill of it from year's end to year's end—in winter, open air and cold; in spring, open air and rain; in summer, open air and the sun scorching the pavement; and then in autumn, open air and cold once again. Thus those who preach of the value of open air leave them indifferent.

They would stoop over a German paper or the 'Iron Industries Review,' fidgeting uneasily when their feet hurt them, and pondering over torturing problems. Should they stay where they were or go to sleep on a bench by the Tower ditch? Was it worth while to tramp across the city to the west end on the chance of begging fourpence for a bed? And whenever a journey was in question counsel must be taken of their boots—Yes or No! and every time the boots infallibly said No!

Thither it was that Mike conveyed his recently sanctified heart. He found his new born virtue not a little embarrassing. If you harbour merely an ordinary soul, of no great value, you may live without taking thought unduly or considering consequences; but when, by virtue of august interventions, your soul has become unexpectedly immaculate, you pick your steps carefully and keep guard over this inestimable and probably fragile jewel.

Mike strolled carefully through the room, with an apprehensive sense of powers in ambush about him, turned over the pages of various uninteresting papers, and then

ascended to the upper storey and settled himself down by a window with an American magazine. It was one of those magazines which publish, in addition to articles of current interest, numerous stories by little known authors, and one or two serials which a single artist sows impartially with illustrations. These depicted men and women pursued by fate, pale, and with tortured features, who appeared to be undergoing the decisive crisis of their lives in a world of hazy unreality; dream-dramas, heart-wrenching tragedies, viewed as through a veil, attitudes of anguish, stricken bodies rigid with repressed emotion, sinister gestures, staring eyes set in livid masks of faces that told of unspeakable sorrows, of cruel and irrevocable decisions, all on a sombre and vague back-ground, which was barely suggested in grey half-tones, and expressed overwhelming melancholy. Mere hack-work as the stories were, the illustrator had thrown about their characters a certain austere, remote and puritan grace, and he must have conveyed into their strange heroism the melancholy of a soul that was restless and hungry for unreality. This at any rate was the effect his work had upon

Mike O'Brady. He turned the pages over, looked at the pictures and felt stirred. He did not think of reading the novel or the short stories—that would have taken too long, and besides, to read their history would have deprived the characters of their mystery—but to look at them as they stood arrested on the page, remote and strange, shaken by vehement emotion and instincts deep and dark, made him again dimly feel the complex mystery of the world. He read the legend under one of the pictures—

'So,' he said 'I have lost you ! . . . He read her answer in her eyes. . . .'

The sun had set behind Aldgate, and the line of roofs began to be no more than a shadow; in the east St. Mary's, Whitechapel, lifted her grey stone steeple up into the colourless sky; in the street one by one the lamps came out, the rare lamps of Sunday evening, few and far between, and on the pavement the Sunday crowd went by.

Mike looked back again at the picture—'So' he said, 'I have lost you !' And he thought how hard and complicated life was, even to judge from a magazine written for people who were well off. The lost lady was

beautiful, and the gentleman was beautiful too and exquisitely well dressed. The settings of the stage on which the two played their parts seemed rich and choice—and he had lost her ! Mike shook his head and gave up the riddle. There must be some unsuspected refinement, some emotion appertaining to rich people which was too deep for the poor to plumb. They both appeared to be in earnest and respectable too. 'Surely he could never have been playing the fool with her,' he thought, and again he fell into melancholy.

Night had fallen when he left the Library, and this time, without a moment's hesitation, he made his way to the 'Three Dolphins.' His Reverence was nothing but an ass—Miss Gordon Ingram had never preached abstention from honest refreshment, and he realised more and more clearly that questions of this kind had nothing to do with salvation as he understood it.

He proceeded to establish himself against the partition in his favourite place, nodded amicably to Winnie who was busy at the other end of the bar, and drank peacefully as he looked about him. After a time his

melancholy faded away and gave place to a kind of solemn satisfaction not unmingled with complacency. How many of those at whom he was looking were assured of salvation ?—undoubtedly very few. Most were ignorant of the truth, perhaps had never heard of it—and were proceeding blindly towards a precipice below which lay endless torment. He experienced no desire whatever to enlighten them as to their destiny ; first, because he felt himself too great a novice in sanctity to snatch with impunity their just prey from powers of terror ; and secondly, because he savoured his own security the more keenly in the contemplation of this unregenerate multitude. And even keener than the certitude of recompense to come was his pride in having accomplished one stage of his journey. He knew now what he had been hitherto, and that never, all his life, had he been for one moment, that which he should have been, or that which he would have wished to be. His past was dark, blackened with deeds of shame, which he had not yet all fully understood. He preferred to forget it altogether and to think of it only in order the better to realise one by one all the

degrees of virtuous felicity which he had been promised.

With his hands in his pockets he leant his head back against the partition and looked at the people about him through the thread of smoke which floated up from his pipe. He had seen them before a hundred times, them or their doubles, either in the same frame or in others exactly like it. The long counter which made a rectangle with the wall, in the middle of the wall a door, on each side of the door shelves and on the shelves to the right liqueur bottles and wine decanters, on those to the left biscuit jars and little piles of sorted change carefully arranged.

Behind the counter the handles of the beer-levers receded in perspective. On its wooden surface glasses had left damp circles which a rapid stroke of the duster soon lengthened into streaks. Of the whole room he could see only his own compartment, or by bending over the counter he could see other compartments like it, and at the end the inaccessible luxury of the saloon bar, furnished with a piano-player and a settee covered with garnet-plush.

Men would come in, give curt orders, empty their glasses, wipe their mouths with the back of their hands and go out. Some came in couples and stayed talking in low voices. Others who were alone would exchange a word with the barmaid and linger on after they had had their drink, looking absently at the shelves or contemplating their empty glass with a pathetic expression of regret. They seemed to be saying to themselves ' Another good moment over, twopence less in my pocket, and now it's done and I've got to get home.' The light played pleasantly on the glass and pewter, the little screened-off compartments gave an impression of homely comfort, the thought of cellars crammed with bulging casks opened up a vision of endless leisurely sippings, and the walls were beautiful with advertisements and brightly coloured almanacks. Yet a man had to leave it all in exchange for the lawful ugliness and worries of home. For a moment such melancholy thoughts as these would pass through their minds and then they would go away with a look of resignation. The scenery, the faces, and the play of those faces and all that their

expression meant were familiar to Mike, but this time he saw them under a new light. He looked at the men drinking, half shut his eyes and said to himself ' Hosanna, I am not like them.' Everything that had happened since noon, the congregation, the hymns, the sermons, his act of repentance and of faith miraculously effacing years of sin, the decisive approbation of those who could intercede for him with the Divinity—all these things he began to appreciate more and more vividly and with greater and greater pride.

Humanity was clearly divided into two classes, those who had obtained grace and the others. The latter had nothing before them but the prospect of a confused, harsh life devoid of beauty and joy, and of an ignominious death which would throw them as a prey to the powers of cruelty. For those who had found salvation was reserved everything noble and pleasant that the world contains. For them alone were accessible the privileged graces of life, they alone were heirs of all that is desirable on earth and in the heaven which awaited them hereafter.

Beer did not seem to be worthy of so solemn an occasion—he ordered whisky—

and his heart sang praises to God. Life was not such a bad thing after all. For the just it was full of innocent pleasures and of glorious presences which spread about them an enchanted air of light and peace beautified by splendid hope. He would stay there half an hour longer in quiet thought before going home to fall asleep in the arms of the Lord. Texts full of strength and beauty, august biblical phrases came into his memory. It is a pity, he felt, that they had not occurred to him before. However, he would get another chance. Next Sunday at the latest he would arise afresh in the congregation and reveal in appropriate terms the enthusiasm that he experienced. He counted the coin remaining in his pocket and gave a fresh order. The amber liquid which caressed his throat was a magic philtre, the material symbol of the grace which flooded him. Verses of psalms, fragments of the Litany, detached phrases, rose to his lips, powerless to express the immensity of his faith. He had visions of outstretched hands offering him supernatural rewards, of continuous support which would make all ways smooth before him,

of an infinite love which awaited him. He gave his orders again and again in a confident voice and abandoned himself to his dream. The clinking of bottles upon glasses, the ringing of coins thrown upon the counter only served to mark the stages of a wonderful ascent. The favour and protection of the Divine enveloped him like a cloud, created for him a universe apart where he moved in bliss. Audrey Gordon Ingram, too, formed part of the divine generosity. She was the necessary complement and the symbolical image of a life of pious virtue, lending the succour of her touching grace to the appeal of Christ. He thought of her eyes which overflowed with promises, of her beautiful mouth that preached the Holy Cause, of her simple gestures which expressed the merit of a life in which all is harmony.

Mike suddenly became aware that he was fervently gesticulating and repeating in a loud voice 'Hosanna, Hosanna!' At the same time he saw that the landlord was standing in front of him on the other side of the counter and staring at him. He stared back, boiling with an ancient rancour which was now aggravated by disgust. His

bloated face with violet bags under blinking eyes, his discoloured beard covering flaccid cheeks which alternately tightened and slackened with the painful task of breathing, the details of his dress and bearing, the pretentious vulgarity which Mike could but dimly feel, had all now taken on a new aspect, hideous, offensive, and vile. This man was a living insult to the beauty of the world and to the indulgence of the Creator who tolerated him.

In accusing challenge Mike lurched to the counter and solemnly stretched out his hand towards him. The landlord continued to stare at him, and then, with a shrug of contempt, said very definitely, and stressing each word, 'You are drunk!' The infamy of this accusation forbade any answer. Mike picked up his glass, some truckling adversary seized him from behind, pinioned his arms, and half carried, half pushed him against the door which opened, swung backwards and forwards two or three times till it stopped, and left him standing upon the pavement. A few yards off a policeman with his hands behind his back was watching him. Mike had to stifle his feelings of revolt

and resign himself. He cast back a look of disdain at the door which sheltered his enemy, and after shaking his fist he started, staggered, recovered his balance, and proceeded down the street at a run. The pavement undulated and meandered maliciously. Carts and omnibuses seemed every now and then almost to touch him, idiots turned round and watched him. With no thought for the dangers which encompassed his way, full of pitying indulgence for the vulgar curiosity of the passers-by, he made his way down Commercial Road with a heart overflowing with joy, and stopped at every street corner to repeat 'Hosanna!' The landlord of the 'Three Dolphins' was a hog, some day he would make him expiate his insulting tyranny. Meanwhile it was some consolation that the man was proceeding inexorably towards the downfall of his pride and to certain fiery furnaces, while he, Mike O'Brady, with his heart filled with the sweet influences of grace, and his eyes with tears of gratitude, was joyfully walking in the way of the just where angels showed the way.

The next morning there re-awoke in him

the glorious memory of the salvation which he had achieved. What he had said at the 'Three Dolphins' he kept on saying to himself at the warehouse with the same feeling of confidence and pride as he cast his eye over his comrades—'God be praised, I am not as they are!'

That all the workmen, including even the foreman, were doomed beforehand to the flames could admit of no shadow of doubt! What was their life but a tissue of sin and error!

They swore all day, and at night in the various 'pubs' where they foregathered with their accomplices in vice, their only idea was to kill time with songs, or vulgar jocosities or interminable political discussions. On the Sabbath, far from redeeming their week-day debauches by a piety in any way exemplary, they would spend their leisure loafing in shirt-sleeves or reading the profaner press, while their souls slid down swiftly to perdition.

Over and over again Mike would pause in his work to savour the secret sweetness of being, alone among them, the elect of God, the sole repository of truth, and consequently

the superior of them all. When a foreman spoke roughly to him Mike no longer entered the offence in his list of accounts to be settled later on, but left it to be dealt with by the Divine powers which were watching over him, with sure conviction that the punishment would be no less inevitable and more complete. Sometimes, indeed, he did dream of a tangible proof of protection from on high, of some overwhelming disaster after which, in a world of ruin and agony, he alone would be left serenely celebrating in suitable terms the bountiful goodness of God.

Nor was he content with this Christian humility, he also cultivated an attitude of generous modesty which went so far as to conceal from his comrades the fact that he was different from them. For six days of the week, until the evenings, his language and his manners were modelled upon theirs, outwardly worldly, but sanctified within by his inner knowledge of salvation achieved. On the seventh day alone did he cast them and their works behind him and revisit the higher sphere to which they had no entry. This sphere naturally had its centre at the 'Limehouse Christian Institute.' There the

general tone of joyful piety put him at his ease, or at all events sufficiently so to enable him to dispense with the protection of Boulter and Wilkins and to fly with his own wings, those half angelical wings, which his conversion had given him. He had to spend an hour or two there regularly on Tuesday and Thursday evenings to fortify his faith.

With a little good luck he found it possible to evade Wilkins and his receipt for a virtuous life,—a game of draughts, cocoa, and good influences—Boulter was more formidable. In his case zeal was sharpened by a curiosity which nothing could fatigue. There was something essentially mean and insinuating about his conception of salvation that to Mike was intolerable. He asked him unnecessary and almost impertinent questions, he would pause and look doubtfully at Mike as though he were wondering whether his conversion had been real and complete. Then, tentatively and with some embarrassment, he would hesitatingly recite bits out of sermons or out of the Bible, or propagandist phrases, pausing after each experiment to estimate the effect produced.

At other times his doubts appeared to have left him and he congratulated Mike warmly on having so promptly quitted the path of error.

Mike bore these questions, congratulations and doubts with none too good a grace. If he could not evade them he remained silent and unforthcoming. Still they were more bearable than the gymnasium, and the humiliating courtesy of the genial aristocrat who was in charge of it.

Mike used to wait patiently, fingering some evening paper and absent-mindedly reading and re-reading the headings, and he never waited in vain. At a quarter to ten, sometimes a little earlier or later, Audrey Gordon Ingram would come from the quarter reserved for the girls and make her round of the Institute before leaving. She seemed conscientiously to visit everybody in turn, careful to neglect no one. She would suddenly appear before some shy and awkward boy sitting alone in a corner, or a couple of men playing dominoes behind an open door, or a pair of friends, talking in the shadow of the staircase, rapidly examine every nook and corner, notice their presence and

give them a pleasant smile and a friendly word or two. Sometimes she would announce the name of the preacher for the following Sunday, discuss some meeting or service which was being organised, or distinguish with a word of encouragement some one of the sections of the Institute. At other times she had nothing more to say than to assure them of her interest and her infinite goodwill. But always those who had seen her and upon whom she had bestowed a smile or a word felt that they had received something, something of inestimable value, at once conforting and welcome, a breath of spiritual perfume which they could carry away and keep with them for some time. At the top of the steps she always made a last pause to say 'Good-night all,' and to send a smile of regret and tenderness to any who might be feeling that they had been neglected.

Mike was never able to divest himself of the obscure feeling that he had something to expect from her which would fulfil some need in him, and help him to regulate his life and grasp clearly whatever still escaped his comprehension. Whenever he saw her he asked himself whether this time she would speak the

word. Every time he was disappointed, yet he never left without feeling that he had gained some new light. In beholding her he had for the first time grasped the reality of God's love for His creatures and the wide munificence of His gifts; so that to follow even for a few moments the play of her features, her movements and her words, or just a brief incident of her harmonious life, filled him with the conviction that he was right to listen and obey. The vision of her eyes when she spoke and of her profile made him feel the world was truly the work of God. How natural and incomparable was the frank and simple way she had of holding out her hand. Who, when he saw her, could have any doubts of the Divine Compassion! And how wonderful the incomprehensible grace that her presence spread over all things! Clearly there was no true joy but in the peace of God.

On Sundays he was able to look at her more at leisure and to listen to her at greater length, and when the Meeting was over he would depart from the Institute in a state of exaltation which filled him with an imperative need to give further proofs of his faith. He learnt to know every crossroad in the

East End where on Sundays the Gospel was preached between 6 and 7 in the evening; every mission scattered along the length of Commercial Road between Aldgate and Blackwall, in Mile End, Bethnal Green, Hackney and Victoria Park. He even ventured once or twice as far as Oxford Circus or the Marble Arch on the top of an omnibus to follow the loud music of the Salvation Army proceeding to Regents Hall through the streets of the West End, or to join the attentive and melodious semi-circles which shared the open spaces on the borders of the Park with political orators of every shade of opinion.

The little portable platform of varnished wood across which the name of the Mission was set out in sombre letters of black, the acetylene lamp, the Lilliputian organ played by a spectacled musician, hunched upon a tiny chair—these were the inevitable properties of the more prosperous Missions. Others had to forgo the organ or even the acetylene lamp, some had not even a platform and just met under a street lamp when darkness came on, but these were generally the ones that sang the loudest.

For Mike names had no great significance. He serenely ignored the rivalries of sect with sect and the gulfs which questions of interpretation or ceremony opened between two neighbouring street corners. He had a certain lack of faith in those preachers whose praises were too exclusively reserved for their own small creed. They reminded him that he was after all a Catholic and that these straiter doctrines must be somewhat tainted with heresy. He greatly preferred those who did not season their worship with rigid distinctions or petty exclusiveness. What he liked to hear about was the glory of salvation, horror of the sin which blackened so many lives and ordained them infallibly to a terrible end; the surpassing merit of defying Satan and leading the life of the just, and the bliss beyond words reserved for those who achieved victory—He learnt therefore to avoid certain Missions whose doctrines seemed to him too egotistical, whose apostles tactlessly preached the particular excellence of their own temple as blessed beyond all others, and the aggressiveness of whose sanctity could never be kept out of their sermons. Happily there were

others ! And there were solitary preachers, outcasts from the flock, who zealously propagated religions which were somewhat vague, but nevertheless entirely different from all others. Their eyes were inspired and their brows were ravaged with faith run wild. Around them would be a circle of humble and meek admirers who gave them the support of a complete and uncritical devotion.

Mike would join these groups, withdraw his hands from his pockets and lend a respectful and receptive ear. When the preacher described and deplored the impious past from which he had had the happiness to emerge, Mike nodded his head sententiously, full of silent and sympathetic approbation. When one of them celebrated the pure joy which fills every moment in the life of the elect he raised grateful eyes towards the impassive sky and recapitulated with gratitude the divine gifts which had made beautiful all the days of his conversion, and when the sermon was over or interrupted, and the faithful intoned a hymn, he did not go so far as to sing himself, but he would nod his head in time to the music while his heart soared to God.

The Salvation Army suited him best of all. It had no complex and subtle dogmas, no meticulous prescriptions, no exacting ritual; just an elementary theology within anybody's grasp. Its classification was as definite and simple as a rule of arithmetic, leaving no territory unoccupied, no dangerous and troubling borderland between damnation and salvation. The allocutions were more direct, convincing and lavish in promise and in menace than those of other congregations. The men, dressed in their red tunics, sang with a simple fervour, and an impressive air of beatitude; the women in their great sun-bonnets spoke to the crowd like suppliants begging them not to delay, to listen to reason, no longer to refuse the benefits and joys which the speakers were able to confer upon them. There was no more need of sects, sacraments and ceremonies; repentance was enough, repentance and a sincere intention to reform. Here was a quick and certain remedy for everyone, sovereign, of almost disconcerting simplicity, and within the reach of every conscience. Salvation guaranteed while you wait, something like the advertisement of 'a charitable offer

inspired by a vow ' which year after year is published by some unknown philanthropist.

Yet sometimes moments came when sincerity of intention and even repentance seemed to diminish in importance ; the real duty of duties appeared to be comprised in attendance, in swelling the circle of singers and in joining them in song. And to walk in the way of virtue, of the virtues which they often omitted to define, was less essential than to follow the procession, walk in step with the flag flying in the wind, every foot marking time together on the pavement, while the band trumpeted through the deserted Sunday streets the simple and triumphant strains of the legions of the blessed.

The band and the tunes it played—popular airs sung in music halls or whistled in the streets till at long last they had become sanctified by association with words of devotion—constituted a more efficacious propaganda than any sermon.

When the procession started off from the chosen street-corner and formed its ranks for the march, Mike would invariably follow, shortening his strides to keep step and sway-

ing his shoulders to the rhythm of the music. The music rose and fell between the sombre houses captivating, defiant, drowning all doubt beneath a cataract of sound ; passers-by took up the step and followed for a while, horses reared, the flag hung down from its staff and swung to and fro to the rhythm of the march, martial and glorious, while the rest of the world seemed to stand in rows upon the pavement to see the conquerors go by.

They marched to a splendid goal, to the certain triumph of good, to the bliss reserved for the just in this world and in the next, to the unspeakable glories of Paradise, and Paradise seemed to be almost round the next corner.

And then musicians and procession were swallowed up in the Hall, and there Mike stopped. He never went in. Outside he was safe from idle and importunate questioning and the all too zealous pursuer of proselytes. Once inside with them he would never have felt quite safe. They might have tried to question his faith or to dispute the salvation which he had duly achieved. Or else he might have felt compelled to perform the same rites as they did, and thereby

perhaps to offend against one of the rules of his own faith. At any rate he experienced a vague distrust and preferred to remain outside. But these few hours of exalted faith were enough to adorn the rest of the week with pride and satisfaction.

That bellicose piety, symbolical of strife and victory, the potent appeal of uniforms and bands and banners, the confidence and pride which every human being feels when he enrols, even for a moment, in the ranks of a great army, filled with enthusiasm and the certainty of victory, all exercised a powerful influence upon him which did not at once disappear.

And since in the course of the week he would return to the Institute to renew his convictions and discover further evidences of divine approbation, Satan could do nothing but grind his teeth and reserve his arrows for weaker brethren.

XIV

One Sunday he was persuaded by Boulter to go to one of several special meetings which the Salvation Army was organising at the Holborn Empire at a time when one of its own Halls was under repair. He had partly let himself be persuaded to go by a promise of a splendid ceremony and partly by his own curiosity to see the Army at home elsewhere than in the street, and actually engaged in one of the battles of which hitherto he had only witnessed the preliminaries. Boulter's presence would give him security and support. The Army official who distributed programmes at the door had a family resemblance to the be-uniformed dignitary who fulfilled similar functions on other evenings, and the staircase by which they climbed to the auditorium was no different from what it had been the evening

before and what it would be on the evening after—bare, lighted by gas jets enclosed in globes of wirework, strewed with untidy, trodden scraps of paper and marked by muddy footprints. Even the huge volume of sound which, as they climbed the last steps, greeted their ears, could well have been the voice of some audience raised to enthusiasm by Vesta Victoria or some other comedian and taking up the chorus of some new creation. The audience was no different, at any rate in appearance, from the ordinary audience of a music hall. Only the Salvationists of either sex who took the place of programme girls and pages struck a distinctive note. Yet the stage still remained a sight worth looking at, a thing to pass away the time in watching, if by chance the addresses, the hymns and the music began to lose their charm.

The scenery represented Venice, and in front of gleaming water, palaces and gondolas, a somewhat mixed company was seated on chairs arranged in serried rows reaching from one wing to the other. On one side was an orchestra, on the other a chorus of women, and in between Salvationists in uniform.

In the first row sat some twenty people of both sexes in noble and glittering garments who represented, as you soon realised, the national costumes of different countries. Most of them were, in truth, nothing but simple Cockney souls disguised in the woollen robes of the Touareg or the silken draperies of the Oriental. But well in front at either of the two ends of the line sat some authentic foreigners, two Japanese women, a Russian, a Persian, and perhaps one or two others. Behind the footlights a kind of parapet had been erected, evidently for the purpose of protecting some of the too ardent apostles from their own enthusiasm.

As Mike and his companion entered the hall the last words of a hymn were being sung. Looking at the programme he saw that since 11 o'clock in the morning, at three successive meetings, hymns, addresses and music had followed one another, graduated with art in such a manner as to culminate stage by stage in the holy frenzy which would presently burst through the barrier, crush errant souls beneath the burden of their sin, and throw them in despair into the arms that waited to snatch them from the horror of

their own unworthiness and the danger of imminent death.

The principal mouthpiece of the sacred legions was Commissioner Higgins, and those who had chosen him for this post of honour had known what they were about. Commissioner Higgins was tall, solidly built and fair. He was endowed by nature with a frank and happy expression of countenance, which from time to time was clouded by a look of sincere despair at the terrible spectacle of vice.

He had chosen as his subject 'The Feast of Balthazar,' and he had not spoken for more than a few minutes before Mike was listening to him in complete absorption, with his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped together and his breath coming quick with excitement.

The Commissioner described the scene of the miracle. From the first words that he uttered the imminence of the doom of heaven seemed to weigh upon the ungodly. The magnificent feast, the splendid marble and alabaster palace, the prodigious luxury, the whole picture of a court in which were to be seen men of noble bearing and half-naked

women of miraculous beauty, with shining shoulders and glistening jewels, emphasised the terrible meaning of the mysterious words which were written in letters of fire. The cruel destiny which befell the King seemed in truth to be a just revenge, as well as conclusive proof of the existence of the God whom he knew not. The hand of the Lord had just issued from the clouds to annihilate the faithless when the Commissioner stopped.

It was one of the standing rules of the Army never to put too high a strain upon enthusiasm which was still tepid. Addresses of more than a certain length were always broken into sections and cleverly distributed and interspersed with hymns and solos. Thus the mind was relaxed and for a moment the progress of divine retribution was arrested only to thunder again somewhat later.

There was therefore first a song from a Salvationist dressed as an Italian, then a seductive medley from the orchestra; after that an address from one of the Japanese women. She came forward with mincing steps to the front of the stage and described her conversion, the state of blind idolatry in

which she formerly lived and the happy serenity which Salvation had given her. When she could not find some word she wanted, or feared that she was not being understood, she bent over the rail in timid trepidation, screwing up her round little mouth and making charming little gestures with her tiny hand. She dwelt upon the pitiable condition of a whole nation living in error, worshipping false gods and content to do so; of millions of lives wasted in pagan delights and passions, in pleasures and duties wherein Christ had no part; of people who had never seen the light, the true light, and who were clearly wrong to be happy.

When she had done, after another hymn, Commissioner Higgins spoke again and began the final attack. This time he only dwelt upon the feast of Balthazar to illustrate by contrast the tragic issue and to draw from it a lesson to strike terror to the heart. If the great ones of this world, if tyrants at the very summit of their power were thus inexorably cast down, what might not ordinary people expect? They might and indeed ought to expect a speedy end to this ephemeral life, and when the hand of the

Lord, even now poised above them, struck, what avail to them would be their little possessions and their little vanities and their infidel contentment under the lash of the divine wrath? Fear of the implacable judgment to come made his voice shake and pervaded the silence of the hall. All the pains of life here below, the whole of the anguish, suffering and grief of poor mortal beings were as nothing compared with the torments which awaited the rebellious. Imagination could only picture the appalling effects of those torments —the burning tears, the shrieks of agony, the grindings of teeth, the sighs and groans echoing incessantly in a world of darkness and horror throughout the innumerable and endless aeons of Eternity. Visions of bottomless abysses, of atrocious judgments from which there would be no appeal, paroxysms of supreme pain indefinitely prolonged, took almost concrete form, filling with panic-stricken expectation a universe ready at any moment to fall into ruins.

Mike wiped his forehead, gasped and felt despair of escape from that inexorable hand creep into his heart. Assuredly his salvation must be too recent, perhaps not sufficiently

complete to allow him to pass through the divine sieve. Might it not be that certain of the apostles were right? that it was really necessary to give up the world altogether! To give up enjoying the air and the sun, and the strength which one felt within one! To give up speaking like one's fellow beings! To give up smoking and drinking innocently, while praising the Lord! Condemnation with no appeal! Torments enduring through all eternity!

It seemed impossible to avoid the celestial thunder-bolts. The anger of the Lord of Hosts came down on him like a dark cloud . . . but Christ entered and all was pardon and infinite love.

A human heart that was merciful to the weaknesses of men and full of superhuman tenderness; the noblest of sacrifices made without a regret for the sake of generations yet to come, the pierced Hands which opened to welcome the humblest and most hardened of sinners with the welcome of a brother, a voice of pity uttering words of calm and peace which, far from imposing penances, spread blessings and precious gifts. Yes! That was the way, so easy, so sweet to tread.

Once more Commissioner Higgins stopped and gave the signal for a hymn, and all raised their voices together, voices of panic-stricken transgressors lifted in ardent supplication, imploring the Eternal to spare them for a moment of time, enough for them to repent in and to cleanse their tarnished souls. Voices of the servants of God uttering passionate thanks for their holy security and happiness, and praying and interceding for their brothers who were still black with sin; voices of lukewarm believers and of sceptics singing because they felt compelled to sing, carried along by the wave of faith which surrounded them, losing foothold and stretching out their hands for something to cling to.

And when the voices were silent the Commissioner recapitulated all that he had already said in a few short phrases, instinct with grief and emotion. He drew up the inexorable balance-sheet of sin and salvation, threatened, promised, supplicated, stretched out his arms pleadingly towards the audience, emphasised once more the immensity of the danger and the wonders of the haven of safety; begged, prayed, wept, worked up

the entire audience to the same exaltation that inspired him, and stepping backwards stretched out his arms in the form of a cross, and adjured those who felt crushed beneath the weight of their sin and hungered for forgiveness, to seek salvation at that very moment and declare themselves without delay.

In the great silence that followed, broken only by sobs and ecstatic murmurs, a hand was held up, then another, then more, and each hand which was held up awoke throughout the hall exclamations of distracted gratitude and voices which exclaimed 'Praise be to God! Ah! Praise be to God!'

Salvationists went up to the penitents and led them to the first rows of the stalls which had been left empty, and there, facing the audience, and kneeling before the seats, shaken with sobs and with their heads resting on the red velvet backs of the chairs, they made their escape from the divine wrath and knew Truth.

Seen from the upper seats of the theatre these new converts in their posture of crushed humility appeared infinitely pathetic. The first to declare themselves had been a

man and his wife, old and venerable looking and obviously in their Sunday best. Up till then they had no doubt believed themselves safe from chastisement from on high, but now, prostrate before two chairs, they were weeping hopelessly, shattered by paroxysms of newly born remorse. A Salvationist had knelt down by the side of the man, and with one arm round him, whispered in his ear words of encouragement and consolation. The old man's face was hidden in his hands, his bald head bent beneath the weight of the judgment he accepted. Close by, his wife, in like manner tended by one of the sisters, had also buried her head in her hands and in her despair was crushing her best Sunday hat with its ornaments of jet against the red velvet of the seats.

Commissioner Higgins counted his converts; 'Six, seven!' 'Is that all?' he said, 'Surely there are some others who feel themselves stained with sin and already damned? Do not they too wish to cleanse themselves in the love of Christ?'

He beckoned kindly to those who hesitated to come and seek refuge in pardon and peace.

He ran his eyes over the hall, then turned and gave a signal with his hand. Once more the hymn arose. All the Salvationists on the stage were now upon their knees before their chairs, trailing their uniforms and oriental draperies in the dust of the boards. They all sang, drunk with faith, conscious of a marvellous atmosphere of miracles about them, imploring the Lord to listen to the words of repentance and to open still more eyes. When the hymn ceased other hands were held up and other sinners yielded themselves up to be led forward to salvation. These for the most part were women and even young girls who had been overcome by the harmony of voices raised in exaltation. The Commissioner counted them one by one: 'Ten! Eleven! That cannot be all! Oh, my brothers and sisters, we want to save you, we desire ardently to save you! Where are you, then? You who hesitate to come forward? You who at the bottom of your hearts feel athirst for God's Word? . . . Eleven!—We want to save you! We want to lead you to the arms of Christ! Yes! You! and you! and you! and you!' He pointed from the boxes to the

balcony and from the balcony to the amphitheatre, indicating imaginary sinners to the divine persuasion, and in a tone full of tenderness called out 'Twelve, twelve! Where are you?' As number twelve was slow to appear he made another sign and the Italian woman came forward to the footlights and began to sing.

Her voice was shrill and pure, like a note upon the flute, shrill, but of wonderful volume. A voice which seemed to issue from no throat of flesh, but to be born supernaturally of a wave of faith and love and ecstasy. It penetrated to the remotest corners of the wondering hall, broke against the walls, ran over the nerves in a sharp thrill, then seemed to rise higher still and fly to regions inundated with light, leaving poor human beings far below in shadow and longing.

Mike leaned upon the parapet of the dress circle and rested his head on his hands. Oh, that song! That voice that seemed the symbol of some great appeal, of that hunger of the heart that at times devoured him, died down or disappeared, returned and went again, ever incomprehensible. It scorched,

it tormented, drove him forward blind and tottering towards supports in which he felt no trust. What was it asking of him now ? He forced himself to think and the image of Audrey Gordon Ingram issued from chaos clear and pure and precious, holding marvellous gifts in her hands. That was one thing that was good ! One thing that was certain ! One that at least admitted of no doubt ! What she spoke was the truth, and what she wished was that all things should be as they ought to be.

This voice which soared beyond the bounds of life was the voice of the great and tender heart that she opened to all, and when Mike had grasped this the ethereal notes which rose so high hardly sufficed to express his grateful belief. He too desired to bear witness. He wished to take part as an actor in this sacred enthusiasm, to proclaim aloud that he too had received his portion of the heavenly benedictions which in truth had been showered upon him, to confess aloud that there was but one God, one God Almighty who, in his lovingkindness, sends to us sometimes one of His creatures. . . .

The voice died away and converts flowed

in. Men, women, quite little children left their seats sobbing, overwhelmed with repentance. Commissioner Higgins watched them come up and counted them one by one in a voice that was faint with gratitude.

Behind him the Salvationists on the stage were kneeling, bowing their heads and praying, or gazing over the hall with supplicating eyes. He counted: 'Nineteen! Twenty! Ah! God be praised! But there must be more! Oh my brothers and sisters, let yourself be saved! You! and you! and you!' As his finger travelled over the theatre, it pointed by chance to the place where Mike sat and he stood up. The hall seemed very far away, veiled in a thin fog, but the appeal still sang in his ears and his heart was still hungry. A Salvationist hurried towards him, his face lit up with joy, shook his hand fraternally, and putting an arm about his shoulders, led him to the stairs.

People seated near him turned round. Boulter was taken aback. For a moment he did not understand, and then called out, 'What is he doing? What is he doing? He is already saved, I tell you; I saved him myself!'

Kneeling in the first row of the stalls with his face buried in the red velvet that was still damp with the tears of another penitent, Mike hardly listened to the words of encouragement a trembling voice was whispering in his ear. On the stage behind him someone was singing a hymn and the audience beat an accompaniment by clapping their hands in time. He was not sure that what he was doing was what he ought to do, but he would ask. Yes ! The next time he saw her on Tuesday evening he would ask. Then it seemed to him that he had still so many things to ask. The voice beside him became more earnest, it's prayer more urgent, more definite. With closed eyes Mike began ' I have lived in darkness and sin. . . .'

XV

And now the powers turned away from him. The Salvation Army meeting, the singing that had moved him to the depths, the eloquence that had carried him away, and the wave of emotion that had swept him to the chair of repentance, Boulter's amazement and reproaches, filled him now with trouble and anxiety. His universe, which had at last appeared to him firm and stable, solidly built upon a foundation of eternity, in which he had conquered an enviable station rich with many hopes, was again quaking treacherously beneath his feet. He had intended merely to strengthen his safety, to make assurance doubly sure; while at the same time he publicly gave credit to those who had interceded for him and had saved him. And instead of that he found that he had already transgressed the

laws of a code which was secret and difficult to understand. Worse still, he had probably given offence to those to whom he had wished to do honour. Boulter had said in a tone of indulgent contempt 'Yes! Yes! Of course you meant well, but if you come to think of it, it was perfectly useless; and for us who had taken you up and put you on the right road, it was—well—I won't say insulting—but it wasn't very decent, was it?'

'Us!' consisted of Boulter on a gigantic scale, and on a much smaller scale Wilkins and the padre, but Mike could not swallow this. Even when Boulter went on to say that they would remember that he meant well, and that they would think no more about it, Mike's doubts remained. Boulter's word was not enough. He would ask her . . . He had so many things to ask. And then, when he reached the Institute on Tuesday evening he ran up against Wilkins, who began to talk futilities. 'Splendid weather, eh! Good thing for those who are having their holidays!' Wilkins fixed his glasses more firmly on his nose and reflected that God in His wisdom generally made fine weather coincide with the holiday season.

He reflected too that no doubt He reserved other compensations for those who had no holidays and he rejoiced in them in advance. 'Yes!' he went on, 'People are going away! There's Miss Gordon Ingram who has gone to the seaside somewhere on the Continent for five or six weeks! Ah! She needed a holiday!' He mopped his forehead. 'A game of draughts? No? You don't care about it? Too hot perhaps —I have already had three lemonades this evening.'

Mike left and went back along Commercial Road. As he walked along the pavement which he trod almost every day of his life and passed by the houses which he knew almost by heart, he felt as though he were drifting away to unknown, uncharted seas on a raft manned by shadows and phantoms. And the voice within him which was preparing to ask certain timid questions grew intolerably urgent, clamouring, accusing, bewailing a cruel injustice, as soon as he grasped the fact that these questions would get no answer. He wanted to know, to be sure, and now he knew that he would never know. The great matters which no man can do

without, the fixed rules without which a man cannot live as he should, must always remain beyond his comprehension, external decorations luxuriously hung in the sight of all, one beside the other, but in no ordered sequence, and so complicated and mysterious, that simple men can only stand and gape and wonder.

Five or six weeks ! What did they know what that meant ? She had gone back to her own world, the world of yachts and motor cars, reserved railway carriages, of great portmanteaus crammed with things unimaginable, and obsequious servants. How could anyone dare to say for certain that she would ever leave it all and come back again.

And if she never came back who was there that could help him? Boulter and the others ? For them he had nothing but contempt.

He had stopped without knowing it, and as he stood on the pavement he looked at the masts of the vessels in the docks which stood up above the house roofs. His world tottered and was crumbling about him. Assurance of salvation, the glories of the world to come, the sacredness of this world,

sanctity and virtue, had become hollow things—hollow things from which there issued at a touch a note of consolation which was as quickly quenched in a great silence of discouragement.

And even the silence was not complete: it was filled with perverse murmurings, sardonic and tempting whisperings, while persistent voices cried and moaned distractingly. Whenever he thought of her the voices started. Some of them were old and others new. Some seemed just to have been born to lament over new sorrows; others awoke from long slumber to cry for relief from the pain of old wounds.

Mike lowered his gaze and looked round for the nearest 'pub.' He could always silence those voices. The powers were withdrawing their support and leaving him to totter in the labyrinth alone—alone he obviously could never get out of it, but as long as he had money in his pocket he could always silence the voices.

The voices were stilled and seemed to have been stilled for good. Next day and the following day Mike went about his work, ate, drank and slept as usual, and found that the

catastrophe made no difference to the essential functions of his life. The world of reality, colourless and drab as he had always known it, had opened out for a moment and had now closed upon him again without shock or sound, like a well-oiled trap. Yet he felt none of the wild exasperated revolt of the wild beast suddenly caught; he found he was shut up in a cage that he knew by heart.

Resigned, disdaining to walk round and round the familiar walls, he contented himself with looking through the bars at the contour of the hills which he could never reach.

He worked till eight o'clock at night, and therefore did not think; and even after that hour he hardly ever thought.

Only when he found himself alone in the streets, sober and at a loose end, a vague disquiet would come over him, a sense of irreparable loss and of failure which must at all costs be stifled. And there was only one way to stifle it, only one and that was expensive and not even infallible.

Day after day and week after week that disquiet came and went and came again and went again. It was never very acute. It

was as though some malevolent genie just gave a knock at his door, looked in and whispered a reminder of his heart-breaking disaster, in case he should forget. Mike's only defence against these treacherous attacks was that other genie who lives in casks and bottles. The first week he made a mistake in tactics. He put the enemy to flight, exterminated him, floated free for three days in an ocean of reckless stupefaction, and found himself on Tuesday evening without a penny in his pocket, and defenceless against the ingenuity of his tormentor. For the whole of the rest of the week he had to face that world he had been cast back into, a vast black desert, peopled with melancholy shadows, which were for the moment vague and ill-defined, but were before long sure to become hostile, terrible and skilful in giving pain.

After that he was more careful, and kept his money and his remedy for the bad evenings.

When he was with friends or kindly and jovial strangers, he was quite well able to content himself with a few glasses of beer and cheerful talk. On the bad evenings,

when he felt solitary, discontented, depressed and overwhelmed by a too vivid sense of what he had lost, he waited as long as he could, walking quickly through the streets, trying to be interested in what he saw. But when this failed he had only one resource left, to enter a bar promptly, and cunningly absorb those drinks which stupefy best and cost least.

There again thought and calculation were called for. Beer was no use whatever. Whisky in sufficient quantity was out of reach. The only thing left was gin, and he had to keep to that. With a little economy elsewhere he found that he could make sure of four nights of peace and happiness a week. With systematic practice too he developed a kind of skill. With a little imagination, aided by recollections of faces and voices, he was often able to shape his felicity almost as he pleased ; sometimes he could dream that good things were showered upon him in incredible quantities, at others that he had never known what it was to have any. Both forms of dream were infinitely consoling, as evening after evening they gradually grew before his mind, amid the clink of

glasses and in one of a number of similar sanctuaries, each of which was enclosed by two wooden partitions, a door and a counter.

Unfortunately one of these dreams revived on the morrow all the bitterness of his fall and of the terrible void, while the other made all too vivid the humiliation of a useless and inglorious life. After a time Mike only drank and gave up dreaming dreams.

Once or twice he went back to the Institute and listened to the Salvation Army at street corners, but he could only recapture odd bits of faith, passing convictions which excited him anew for a moment, swept him away to miraculous heights, and then, suddenly fading, let him fall back to every-day level, where there was nothing which it was worth while to have faith in.

A little later the powers gave him a new proof of their malevolence—they attacked him indirectly, almost treacherously. One night he fell asleep as usual and woke before dawn. His first glance at the window told him that it was still night: little by little the shades of night withdrew and gave place to day; but day took an eternity to arrive, waiting, loitering, sulking behind the horizon,

and sending on before it a dim reluctant twilight. It was the dread hour when a man feels that he has no excuse to be alive and awake, that he ought to feign sleep to spare the sad modesty of a world regretfully stirring into life. And in the dim and melancholy dawn Mike felt the sting of sorrow as he had never felt it before. He threw off his bedclothes, seated himself on the edge of his bed and watched while the world, as he reluctantly looked on, shamefacedly revealed its wounds and sores to the light of day. A terribly complex and imperfect world, essentially hostile and yet pitiable—a poor crippled world, festering with wounds, and revengeful for its injuries, a world from which its inhabitants withdrew as far as they might, stretching on their toes towards inaccessible skies, wasting the best strength of their hearts in delirious aspirations towards a being whose essential nature it is to be different from everything within their comprehension. Mike had aspired like others, so long as he had felt the grasp of a helping hand; but now the hand of mercy had relinquished his, and the supreme being had gradually withdrawn. Through

the livid rectangle of light which formed his window, dawn poured infinite discouragement upon him.

All that day he was haunted by a vague fear, a kind of superstitious terror of shapes imbued with divine malevolence. It was an unprecedented and unexplainable event for him to wake at this hour for no apparent reason, and to have to keep company with care in the sad hour of dawn. It was unnatural, almost terrible, and he wondered if it would recur. Then a few days later it did recur; and later on, two or three times in succession. He would wake just before daybreak and see the sun rise and remind him of all he had lost. He did not have the satisfaction which subtle and highly-strung natures find in analysing their sorrow and making it the object of bitter pride; he could only gaze at the grey light filtering slowly through the dirty window and feel penetrated by a profound sense of abandonment, of hopeless abandonment and injustice.

XVI

When the persecution of the invisible powers assumed this form, it achieved his final demoralization. The struggle was too flagrantly unequal; he was only a toy between inexorable hands, a living toy which they handled slowly, cunningly and cruelly, first wounding and then rubbing the open sore. He could do nothing against them; for what good was it to pay a high price for an evening of happiness if the dawn but reminded him maliciously of the paradise he had lost and lost twice over!

Little by little a longing came over him to run away, a desire to go on, to see something new, and a confused hope that to do so would perhaps help him to understand. But where should he go? What would he see? Endless streets between rows and rows of small dirty houses; a few squares whose gardens

closed too early; here and there causeways with greasy pavements which slithered furtively down between sombre walls into muddy waters; innumerable people passing in the streets or seen through lighted windows, and each of them a hopeless riddle: and besides all that a feeling that he was watched, spied upon by hostile spirits, or else a conviction which was even more desolating that no one even took the trouble to spy upon him, and that he was drifting, as chance might take him, all alone upon a deserted ocean.

One evening his wanderings took him to the fringe of Hackney Marsh. He often went again. Partly because it was different from anything else and partly because it was an immense open space, as yet unencumbered with houses, a great stretch of earth and sky which had something elemental and primaeval about it, where the dim mechanism of life seemed to lose something of its complexity. As he sat on a bank, with the last gleam of sunset behind him, night seemed to invade the marsh like an army, while squadrons of mist rose from the distant river and marched on with darkness. The

paved streets of Hackney, lined each side by houses, and sprinkled with lamps, came abruptly to an end in tracks which cut into the spongy soil of the marshes. Fogs issuing from the further side of the flats scouted as far as the frontier of the houses and hung wavering at the limit of the forbidden territory: Mike often watched them come up, but they never brought him anything.

At other times he would stay late at the Whitechapel Road Library, turning over the leaves of books or magazines, but he never found much in them to interest him. The printed pages, the columns of ordered characters discouraged him at once. No doubt they contained things of great value, precious and probably helpful explanations, but he felt that they were beyond his reach, tangled in words, swaddled in innumerable lines which were like so many wrappings that protected them from him.

One evening he left the reading-room and wandered about the museum. It consisted of a large hall surrounded with glass cases with other glass cases in the middle, and a

large globe stocked with tadpoles. Mike made the round of the room absently, inspecting the cases. The first one contained flint axes and prehistoric implements, others displayed a meagre collection of savage weapons from various countries; but most were devoted to the animal kingdom, of which an attempt had been made to give a sort of abridgment: tiny fishes and molluscs, then insects, next reptiles, further on birds, then mammals of all kinds, and at the end of the row skeletons of a chimpanzee and a man. Everything was there, not only common animals and those which anyone may see in menageries and in pictures, but also those which are really rare, and some of them were astonishing to behold. The largest were indeed only represented by means of coloured diagrams or by parts of a skeleton; but others were quite complete just as they are doubtless to be found during their lifetime in distant countries, of which it is difficult to form a picture. There were several snakes, a venomous spider, a bull-frog, strange organisms from the sea, and birds of many colours. Mike looked at them and shook his head; what comical things they were; dangerous

too some of them, and they did not seem to be much use for anything.

In the centre of the glass cases a photograph of a bald old man occupied what was evidently a place of honour. Underneath it, written in a fair hand, was an inscription which explained in the language of the learned that he had been illustrious in his day. Mike read the inscription without understanding it and studied the photograph again. 'Darwin,' 'Evolution.' They had put him between the insects and the reptiles! Perhaps he was different from other people. As he turned away another visitor who was looking over his shoulder, nodded towards the photograph and said in a tone of conviction, 'A great man that! A very great man!'

Mike looked at him sceptically and said with the utmost sincerity, 'A great man! Oh, I daresay!' and at that the stranger looked him indignantly up and down. He was a fat red-faced fellow with an extraordinarily short nose and he looked aggressive and spiteful. Every two minutes he stuffed his hands into his trouser pockets, swelled out his chest, bent his head

till his fat chin rested on his waistcoat, frowned and screwed up his face expressively. Sometimes he seemed to be trying to look at his own eyebrows, sometimes he had the look of a man who was carrying on a discussion with a less profound thinker than himself, whom he was getting ready artfully to confound. He looked sternly at Mike and repeated with emphasis upon every word, 'Yes, Sir! A very great man! It was he who, so to speak, explained all this,' and with a sweep of his arm he indicated the whole of the fauna in the cases. 'Yes, explained all this! And once for all upset all the pretty fairy tales of the Bible and Genesis and all the rest of it! They tell you that the universe was made complete to order, in six days, hey! Prompt delivery, low price and bad workmanship, like goods made in Germany!' He tossed his head and indicated by the expression of his face the splendour of the principles which the bald man had revealed to the world.

'Ah, it's a much finer thing, as he explained it,' he went on. 'Finer than fifty of their Genesis! I know all about it! I have read his book! The first part of it!

We are all equals, so to say! All brothers we are! The kangaroos and the sponges, all the same at bottom, except for a little difference of next to nothing between our ancestors, millions of years ago! We all come from the same strain, only we are different now because each of us has come in time to live a little differently, each of us in a nook of his own! One ancestor for all life! It seems a bit funny, eh? Life, yes! Life is a queer thing.' He scratched his head and contemplated the bull-frog dreamily. The expression of suspicious incredulity on Mike's face seemed to offend him.

'I see!' he went on, 'you're one of those fellows who hang like leeches on to what they were taught in the Catechism! You don't want to learn anything! Or understand anything? They get their teeth into an idea at the age of seven because somebody has put it into their mouths and there they are, stuck to it for life! Poor silly creatures.' He squeezed his double chin on his collar and scornfully clicked his tongue. 'Everybody laughs at your story of the creation and all the rest of it! Everybody that has got two pennyworth of sense! Men of science

don't believe it any longer. They know that Darwin was right ! Why, it's all been proved ever so long—it's as sure as sure . . . The same origin for all life. All alike . . . All brothers or cousins ! That beats the Bible, eh ? But it is harder to understand . . . for fools ! ' He burst into a spiteful laugh and went off.

Mike watched him go away with a feeling of perplexity. He had made use of evil-sounding words, and if it had not been for the solemnity of the place . . . But Mike always felt curiously timid with people who appeared to be instructed, well informed, and sure of their facts. He did not dare to show resentment of self-confident personalities, and would keep quiet and respectful and feel a little humiliated while they poured forth their wisdom and knowledge.

A second reading of the beautifully written inscription which had been made slightly more comprehensible by the angry claims of the fat man on behalf of the subject of the photograph, showed him the museum in a new light. It began to dawn upon him that the animals in the cases had not been arranged haphazard, that some method had

been employed in their classification. Some cases seemed to belong indissolubly to one another. Sometimes between species which were extraordinarily different a strange type intervened, which was possibly extinct or else still existed somewhere on the other side of the world. He stepped back to get a general view of the whole collection. And twice he seemed to get a glimpse of something, an idea which ran through the room from end to end, an extraordinary explanation, a chain. . . . But it was no more than a glimmer which was quenched as soon as lit, leaving him once more wondering and perplexed before a scheme of things which was incomprehensible, imposing and confused.

At the door the fat man, who seemed to be lying in wait for him, attacked him again. His spiteful little eyes gleamed with anticipated triumph. He wagged his forefinger and took Mike confidentially by the lapels of his coat. 'Next time you go to church,' he said, 'and they tell you to study the Bible in order to discover the truth, ask your friends a few riddles from me! Ask them where the water of the Flood came

from, eh ! Every school-boy knows that rain is nothing but the moisture of the terrestrial globe which is drawn up by the sun and afterwards falls down again ; now, where did the water of the Flood, the rain which covered the whole world without leaving the smallest bit of it dry—not even a bit as small as a threepenny piece—where did that come from, hey ! and if it came from the earth it must have evaporated first of all, and then, since no more could fall again than had evaporated, where did the rest come from ? ' He bent his head forward, shot out his lips and looked triumphantly at Mike.

' And Noah's ark ! A nice story that too. It must have been even better than a museum, hey ? And rather more difficult to keep in order, since, mark you, there were some thousands of animals there all used to eating one another ! But the Bible says nothing about that ! And it says nothing about the food that would have been wanted to keep them alive all the time that they were in the ark ! What a pity that there are not more details ! Besides, just keeping order must have been a devil of a job.'

Mike turned on his heels and went down the steps. He felt that he had been listening to something altogether reprehensible, almost obscene, to a talk which in other times would have brought down the divine wrath in the shape of a flame of fire. He had made no answer because he felt quite incapable of entering upon a discussion with a man whom he took to be cram full of science and armed with all kinds of ingenious arguments. But he did wish with all his heart that some supernatural intervention might confound him, refute his blasphemies, and destroy once for all the clearly impious and indeed improbable system that his conceit had impelled him to build up. A few minutes later he was reflecting how curious it was that he who felt himself deserted, persecuted, repulsed by the implacable hand of the Lord should have constituted himself the silent champion of divinity.

And suddenly there arose in him a wave of desperate faith, faith in spite of everything, an aching desire for some one in whom he could believe, of some one equipped with superhuman grace enthroned in splendour

and majesty high above the poor grovelling world, surrounded with all those glorious things to which men can only give names. Once he had drawn quite near that vision of bliss, and now ! Now ! . . .

On the curb of the pavement fronting Leman Street he stopped and laboriously counted up the weeks. He did it three times over to be sure that he was not making a mistake, and said to himself, ' Seven weeks and no mistake ! That makes seven weeks since she went away ! ' And in a moment his world fell into place again. The Divinity again smiled propitiously upon him ; his sins were wiped out ; once more the road was mapped out definite and easy, towards the pinnacle of supreme truth and glorious certitudes, and he was following this road cheerfully, guided and protected, understanding better every day, once more raised again above the common herd and again confidently ascending towards the bliss of the elect. The weeks which had just gone by were merely a misunderstanding, troublesome indeed, but which by tacit agreement would be forgotten. The pact would be renewed, the Lord would smile

upon him again, deliver him from doubt and obscurity, admit him anew into the privileged circle of His chosen. In return, Mike would praise His name, would listen fervently to hymns and would live in righteousness.

He repeated, 'Seven weeks! That's right, and to-morrow will be Friday!' And a little later: 'Whatever made me lose my head like that, just because a high-class lady went off for a holiday? That couldn't prevent my being saved, could it?'

On the following evening he went confidently up to the Institute, saying to himself once more what he had been saying to himself all day long, 'After all, even if she has not come back what does it matter!'

Wilkins received him with a few questions regarding his absence, and as he met with no response he did not press him.

'My word,' he said, 'one would think you were coming back from the country like a swell! Where did you go? Brighton? Scotland? The Continent?' and he adjusted his glasses with an amiable grin. 'Well! Well! You're back again and that's the main thing! I suppose you are still a

free man ! At least not engaged like Miss Gordon Ingram ! Ah ! Didn't you know that ? Yes ! Miss Gordon Ingram and the Captain spent their holiday together, and they have come back engaged ! A true Christian couple ! Yes ! Yes ! Known one another since they were children ! Old family friends and all that ! And now we're going to lose them both ! Only a few weeks more ! The Captain is ordered to Egypt ! Yes ! We must not be selfish ! A real Christian couple ! ' After which he said nothing for some time, took off his glasses and began to polish them carefully. Without them his red eyes blinked in the light and made him look like a poor creature who was ill-adapted to life and condemned to extinction. The bony structure of his face looked fragile, as though it had never grown properly, and then what a tragedy were his threadbare and despairingly respectable clothes, his celluloid collar and his frayed shirt cuffs ! He went on mechanically polishing his glasses, repeating half audibly ' We must not be selfish ! A real Christian couple ! A real Christian couple ! ' and his eyes blinked and blinked

and blinked. Just then Boulter came in, shook hands with Mike, and the three sat down in a corner together. 'Have you heard the news?' said Boulter. 'Yes! A great loss for the Institute! Yes! a great loss! But the good work will go on! They have sown the good grain and with God's help others will harvest it—yes, others, and their support shall be in the Lord!'

He raised his eyes, stroked his chin and tried in vain to hide the justifiable complacency of one who had been promoted from the pew to the pulpit. But after a short interval of beatitude his eyes returned to Mike, and stirring somewhat uneasily in his chair he went on, 'It's a very long time since we saw you last! We began to wonder whether you had not deserted us! You haven't—ahem—you haven't gone back to the ways of error? No! No! Obviously no! We should not like to think you had, but, my friend, we must be perpetually on our guard. The devil is full of cunning!' He went on looming at Mike and seemed, as before, to be infected with doubt. This fellow always gave him a feeling of uncer-

tainty and discomfort. He seemed to fear that Mike's soul had not been purified through and through, that his repentance and salvation might not have left troubled depths in him which were full of stagnant heresies. Still one must be tactful. 'No!' he went on, 'when you have once tasted the divine blessing you cannot dip into vice again. At least unless you have lost your reason. For what are the passing pleasures of the world compared to the joy which Christ brings to the heart of man? Such joy! Such confidence! Such peace! I am but a miserable sinner. But since Christ has pardoned me and granted me His love I have never had a moment of anxiety! I have heard my Saviour's voice and I never wish to hear any other. By His grace I have found eternal truth, and I seek nothing more. I know that He looks on me with joy and that He sustains my steps; why should my heart be troubled? No doubt you feel the same?'

He seemed to be waiting for an answer. None came. He looked at Mike again and again, furtively, cautiously, watching the effect of his words. Gradually his mind grew easier.

'The truth is,' he concluded, 'that we are the happy ones of this world, we who live in the shadow of the Lord. May we never forget that and render Him thanks every day of our lives!' When he went away Wilkins and Mike remained alone. Wilkins seemed absent-minded. He examined the ends of his fingers through his glasses, as though he had suddenly discovered some pathetic attraction for the points at which the personality of Mr. Wilkins ceased and space began. He said suddenly in a low and rather melancholy voice, 'Yes! it's a great thing to have God in one's heart, particularly for those who have not much else! No doubt a great thing! Only one must be sure and never doubt, never—and be satisfied with that. Otherwise where would one be?' He looked towards the light, and even behind the shelter of his spectacles his weak eyes blinked curiously.

'Have a game of draughts,' he said. Mike shook his head, and they both sat silent. In the next room the voice of Boulter was speaking, with a solemnity that was new to it. 'Children,' he was saying, 'next Sunday we will . . .'

XVII

MIKE had stopped at the corner of Commercial Road and Bromley Street to let a lorry pass, and had forgotten to go on again. Once more he had reached the threshold of the Promised Land, but the mere sight of Boulter, solemn, earnest and in full command, had been enough to drive him back again. Boulter! What could he learn from Boulter? What could he ever learn from anybody? Where would he find anyone who would bestow the power upon him of seeing sacred things. Just when he had recovered faith and repentance he had been thrust back, and now he felt himself falling, falling, for ever. The powers were making mock of him again, and at one stroke had snatched from him everything worth desiring, for no better reason than that Audrey Gordon Ingram was going away for good.

Or was it that they had been making sport of him from the very first ! Just because she was going away ! Just because she was going to live her life in her own way, luxuriously, in the way that suited her, somewhere in the east, with palanquins and slaves ! It was her right ! It was natural, and the Captain was undoubtedly a superior man ! But somehow, somehow . . . it did not seem fair ! It was one of the mistakes of an ill-regulated world !

Mike lifted his eyes mechanically, saw that the road was clear, and crossed the street. A little way off a figure that seemed to be familiar was hurrying along. Suddenly it stopped, hesitated a moment, and disappeared into a public house with a nervous gesture of his hand towards his head. Wilkins ! Mike stopped, watched the door swing to and fro till it shut, and then went on his way shaking his head. If Wilkins was departing from the path of virtue what chance of salvation could there be for men like him ? Everything was upside down ! The bulwarks of the world were crumbling into the abyss, carrying feebly gesticulating puppets with them. Men tottered to perdition

because their Creator had Himself placed in their hearts the desire for unattainable things! The just were confounded, while those who blasphemed the name of God and derided His work prospered and built museums to propagate their impious doctrines.

At the next cross-roads he came to a group, who were gathered in a circle round a platform, singing a hymn. The noise of lorries and motor-buses, the clanging of electric trams, drowned the voices of the speakers. Passers-by as they hurried on glanced at them. Only a few guttersnipes had been drawn in, and were now chasing one another round the circle with shrill cries. Regardless of the noise the faithful sang, serene, content and placid, turning their backs on insoluble realities. They evidently were people who had found what they were looking for. Mike turned to look at them as he passed, and when they were out of sight his heart suddenly overflowed with desperate bitterness. He hated them as he had formerly hated the rich and all those well-fed beings who stand round and sing, giving thanks to the great Giver because he had given them everything they wanted! He went on his

way mechanically, and mechanically he pushed open a door and went in. Then he realised that he was in one of the bars of the 'Three Dolphins.' Ever since the landlord had turned him out he had kept away. But this time the landlord was nowhere to be seen and Mike decided to stay.

Winnie apparently was not there either. He gave his order to a small boy in a white apron, who was busily important behind the counter, and pensively filled his pipe. He had an impression, absolutely clear and absolutely inexplicable, that to this day there would be no to-morrow that would matter. He felt that he had come to a blank wall and that life never returns upon its steps. To what end then should he husband his resources and be wise or good?

An hour or so later the mechanical piano in the saloon bar struck up a cheerful tune, and it occurred to Mike that a client like himself had a right to a little enjoyment, and that music would add pleasure to his drink. So he sat himself down on one of the red plush benches, ordered a 'special Scotch' like a gentleman, and put his penny into the slot of the piano. But chance

willed that among the seven pieces of the repertoire it was the turn of ' Santa Lucia,' a deplorable ' Santa Lucia,' that was melancholy, slow, and interspersed with worn out notes which sounded dim and feeble like so many sobs. When it was over he gave a sigh of relief and resolved to make a better use of what money he had left. This he did. And for the last time the invisible powers descended into the life of Mike O'Brady and a new miracle was accomplished. There are people who disbelieve in miracles, but all men of experience know that from time to time the divine spirit is still capable of accomplishing them. But in its wisdom it chooses as witnesses only those whose spirits it has previously disturbed by philters of potent power. Those who drink in cheerful company, laughing, shouting, singing, and intoxicating themselves principally with noise, will never behold the dread hand descend from the clouds and change the face of the world. But to a man whose heart is undecided and full of doubts, who goes apart and seeks forgetfulness and peace persistently through drink, a moment will come when he does indeed quit the ordinary world which the

vulgar know. When he has drunk for some time intoxication comes, common and beastly intoxication, but if his trouble still tortures him and he continues, silent and motionless, implacably to drink, intoxication goes and he finds himself at last on the verge of the world in the hands of the gods whose voice he hears.

Now what happened to Mike in the saloon bar of 'The Three Dolphins' was this. An all-powerful hand swept from his mind the life he had led and the thoughts he had thought for months past, and suddenly he beheld them set before him as though he read them in a book. The book spoke of ardent longings which had not found their goal; of faith which had flared up and sunk down again like a flame, had been re-lit and had again been put out. It was curious to think of these things as of things dead and strange to him. It was difficult to believe that they could ever have been anything else; and the book told many things, of all those longings, of that faith and of those futile efforts and endless misunderstandings, which Mike could not decipher.

His glass was empty, and as he got up to

get it replenished Winnie raised the curtain which hid the door to the stair and returned to her place behind the counter, closely followed by the landlord. Her face had evidently just received a new coat of powder which, nevertheless, had not succeeded in disguising the rings about her tired eyes or the twist of disgust on her mouth. The landlord puffed rather more than usual. He stood with his feet apart, looking round him with an air of satisfaction, and, holding the bottom of his waistcoat in both hands, he pulled it carefully into place. When he had gone to the other end of the counter Winnie nodded to Mike, and after serving several customers came and leant over close to him. She made some remark or other, possibly about the weather. Mike did not answer, and she showed no surprise. Then she opened an evening paper and ran through it, yawning. After a few moments silence she pointed to one of the columns and asked, 'Have you seen that?' Mike shook his head and she passed him the paper. It was the report of an address given by the Bishop of Eastcote at a meeting of some charitable institution. The Bishop had spoken with

all his customary eloquence and charm upon modern pessimism and upon the deplorable pleasure which some people appear to take in disparaging their fellow-creatures, or rather their contemporaries, who are probably better men than they are. Certainly the world was not perfect, evidently not, but still it was not so bad as that. He himself had constant opportunities of seeing acts of real kindness and delicate charity, not only towards suffering human beings but often even towards the dumb creation. Quite recently a touching occurrence had come to his knowledge; a small thing no doubt, but it would serve as an example. In a village in his diocese a woman who had been guilty of some small crime had been arrested and taken to prison in the neighbouring town. On the way she had spoken to the policeman who accompanied her of a faithful cat that she had left at home, and which had just given birth to a family of kittens. She was anxious about them and as to how they would find food. This had been brought to the knowledge of the public through the Parish Magazine, and the article had been reproduced in various local papers. The

consequence had been that the clergyman of the village had received not less than fifty-three letters from people of all classes, charitably offering to adopt one or more of the kittens. . . . This was evidently only a small thing, but it was significant—one of those many incidents which served to demonstrate conclusively to any impartial observer the culpable falsity of the pessimism which appeared nowadays to be so fashionable.

Winnie, with her chin in her hands and her eyes looking vacantly before her, made a derisive face. 'I like that Bishop,' she said. 'He must be a peach! I wonder if he is the one who has just been given a new motor by the ladies of his diocese because his old one was no more than six donkey power, and had the cheek to stop on a hill, so that his eminence had to shake up his gaiters and get out and walk. Why didn't he tell them about that example too? A society for the protection of bishops' calves! Nearly as good as adopting a kitten!' She laughed shrilly and passed her hand over her face. 'Here we are, millions and millions of us, fighting, we don't know why, kicking out anywhere and anyhow because life

hurts us, and here's this Bishop coming along after dinner, with his motor and his black gaiters to tell us stories about kittens ! Not that I grudge it them ! Poor mites ! But how about us . . . us . . . ! The truth is that if he took any notice of us he would neither know what to do nor what to say ! I suppose he would tell us that everything that happens to us is our fault because we have broken the laws of God. Poor old laws. It's about time they were repaired and given a coat of fresh paint.'

Mike listened silently, but his head seemed to nod of its own accord in approval at every sentence. ' Right ! Quite right ! That's right ! Ah ! You've got it ! ' He felt a sort of brotherly tenderness for Winnie ; a pity for her which came all the more naturally to him because she showed that she thought much as he did. He began to tell her as well as he could about what had happened to him since he had come to London : about the people whom he had known and all the things he had thought about day after day ; what he had sought for and what had happened to him. It was incredibly difficult to tell, as futile, in

fact, as to try and describe a picture in words. Now and then he stopped with the words which he had just spoken still sounding in his ears, perceiving vaguely that they in no wise expressed his thought, and feeling surprise at having uttered them. Shadows, confused images to which he painfully gave birth and which no one could identify—mere mirages.

Winnie listened languidly, going away from time to time to serve customers. He often went on speaking without seeing that she was no longer there, and when she came back he saw that she had completely misunderstood what he had said, and he grew more and more disheartened. He spoke of the little shop in Cable Street, Socialism, Hanna Hydleman and her father who had abruptly gone out of his life without his being able now to remember why, and all those inexplicable and nameless things which lived in his heart and drove him hither and thither as they would. He spoke of the Limehouse Christian Institute, the absurd people preaching wild doctrines, and a young lady who was there, and more and more things that had arisen in his heart, that he had ardently desired

and which had escaped him—perhaps indeed they had never been there—and the girl who had gone away too. There was clearly no connection between her departure and the bankruptcy of his aspirations, and yet—somehow, as he tried to explain it—her departure and the futility of divine consolations and his abandonment of all hope seemed mysteriously intermingled.

When he said this Winnie put on a mischievous expression and looked at him ironically.

'I see,' she said. 'So you and this young lady . . .'

Mike looked at her with amazement. He reflected a moment, stirring the whisky in his glass, and said very quietly, 'No! Thank God! I never thought of her at all like that!'

A little later he heard his own voice pronouncing words of profound wisdom and he listened to it curiously. The voice said: 'Yes! It's true that everything's in a muddle, and no one can make head or tail of it! There are people who say that they understand, but it isn't true! They are paid to say that and make people forget what

is real ! Or perhaps it is that they have all that they want and they amuse themselves with making fun of me ! But I will tell you something ! As long as a man has enough to pay for a drink he can snap his fingers at the lot ! Can't he ? Well ! I'm not going to seek any more ! '

After that he lost all sense of time and his mind became filled with visions of obscure forms and with incoherent thoughts. Mike realised that he had no more money, and made his last glass last as long as possible. The world which was waiting for him outside was full of insoluble problems and unsurmountable difficulties. It was a world where it seemed that there was nothing left for him, neither money nor certainty, a hostile world which he had not even the power to hurt. He looked at the door with fear in his heart and as he turned away his eyes fell upon the landlord, who was staring at him from the other side of the counter. Even before he had opened his mouth Mike guessed what he was going to say. Something insulting and an order to be off, to leave his last refuge for the melancholy hopelessness of the street. He returned his

stare, gripping the counter with both hands, and recalled the old grudge that still had to be settled between them. The man had grossly insulted him again and again. He still insulted him by his ugliness, his money, his indecent complacency, by the power he had to be master, to oppress, to soil and to wound, and to lift up a brazen forehead in the midst of a universe that seemed to be made for him. His purple, puffy face! His gold watch chain! His distended stomach! And now he was going to insult him again!

The heavy matchbox which hit the landlord between the eye and the temple sent him staggering towards the door of the staircase with a stifled cry and his hand raised to his face. In the short moment of stupefaction which followed, Mike pulled himself together, leant one hand on the counter and cleared it with a bound. Exclamations and appeals came from every compartment in the bar. Winnie fled to the further end of the counter, covering her eyes with her hands, and the landlord, who was still stunned with the blow, let Mike come up to him without moving. A moment later other customers had leapt over the counter and the waiter hurried down

the stairs, but Mike cared nothing for them. He had time to get in two heavy blows on the jaw, with an angry snarl; and as his man fell, he fell upon him, knelt on his chest and took him by the throat with both hands.

Mike heard nothing of the tumult which filled the house and spread out into the street, the cries of the panic-stricken women, the voices of men shouting advice or abuse, the noise of stools being knocked over, of jugs and glasses being crushed by the bodies which crowded into the narrow passage. The only things of which he was conscious were the furious blows which were rained on his head and shoulders, the hands which twisted his wrists, and the flabby neck with folds of fat flesh whose groans and gurgles he was stifling between his fingers.

Slowly, slowly he became aware that he would be forced to leave go, that those who struck and pulled him from behind were too many for him, and that the man whom they were tearing away from him was going to come out in the end alive and triumphant, at the cost of a few bruises, the work of a poor imbecile sot, who would expiate his foolishness in prison.

Luckily there was little room between wall and counter for his assailants, so that at most only three or four of them could lay hands on him at once. Yet he felt his grip giving way little by little; someone had slipped a hand under one of his and was doubling back his fingers; the man who lay under him struggled weakly and half rolled over on his chest.

His prey was on the point of escaping him, when a hand, wet with sweat, which was gripping his, slipped, and for a second he found himself almost free, still kneeling on his enemy who was now lying on his chest and trying to crawl away. Jerking himself forward Mike worked his right knee a little higher up, close to the nape of the neck, passed his free hand under the forehead, and pulled like a madman.

There was a deep groan, a crack of the vertebrae of the neck as they gave way under the strain, and then the tense body beneath him fell suddenly limp as a rag. With a sigh of content Mike let himself be dragged away and held.

While they lifted the body stupid hands tried anxiously to pour brandy between the

inanimate lips; one of the lookers-on ran to find a policeman. Mike remained indifferent to the hustling and blows which he received, let himself be pushed against the wall by some of the strongest of the company, pending the arrival of a rope with which he could be tied up. He was perfectly calm and satisfied, and thought of nothing but of recovering his breath as far as he was allowed to do so. Between two of his improvised guards, he could get a glimpse of the landlord's purple face; he saw by its colour and the look of the eyes that he had done his work; nothing else mattered. A thin thread of blood crawled like a worm along the chin and was lost in the folds of the neck. Catching sight of Winnie, who was looking on in horror, with one hand at her mouth, the other clutching the curtain of the stairs, he called to her triumphantly, 'I told you I'd deliver you from him some day.'

Her answer came in a strangled hysterical voice, broken by a sob, 'O, God,' she said, 'whatever will become of me?'

At that moment a man came down the stairs four steps at a time carrying a hank

of rope. Another, returning from the street, entered the room at a run. Sudden rage seized hold of Mike; he shook himself, and his action was so unexpected that some of those who were holding him let go.

All those faces distorted by hate, the pain caused by the hands which again gripped him and held him tight, the humiliating bonds which were being made ready for him, roused him once more to fury, and in a flash he thought that now that he had begun he might as well fight to the end. He was still between the counter and the wall. Throwing himself back he crushed two of his guards against the end of the shelves and compelled them to leave go. Then throwing his whole weight forward, with his head downwards, he brought down those who still kept hold of him. As they lay on the ground he delivered a savage kick, and two more hands relaxed their grasp. Only one of his opponents was left now, lying against him, and Mike felt for his eyes with his fingers. After that he was free. By chance he caught sight of an iron bar lying in a corner that was used for putting

the shutters into place. As soon as it was in his hands those who were about to throw themselves upon him again stopped dead, and a minute later all had fled except two, whose bodies lay stretched at the foot of the curtain. Then Mike jumped back over the counter and stood in the saloon with his iron bar in his hands. He was now quite sober. He realised what he had done and what awaited him, and he was glad. The memories which just now he had been painfully revolving had vanished like things of no importance. Nothing now counted in this world but that hard, heavy thing he felt between his hands, that piece of metal, tangible, real, indisputable, easy to understand, which had power to mould into strange shapes the fragile skulls of men. The many souls which month after month had slain themselves within him had fled like shadows. In his heart flamed up clear, simple and stark, the natural indifference to law and order of every O'Brady of County Roscommon, whose indigent lives had been brightened by countless fights. Out in the street the enemy forces were making their plans. A policeman's whistle, a sound of

footsteps and of subdued voices, and then a sudden push and the door burst open, hurling three blue-clad giants into the room.

'Now, we're going to laugh,' said Mike O'Brady.

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