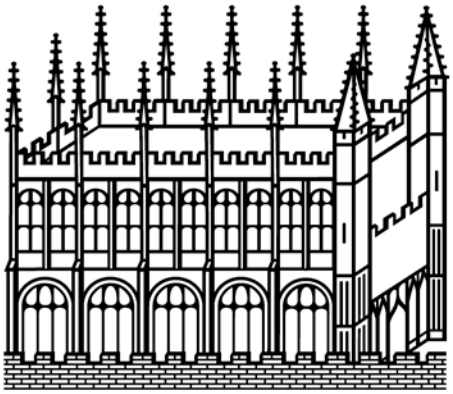

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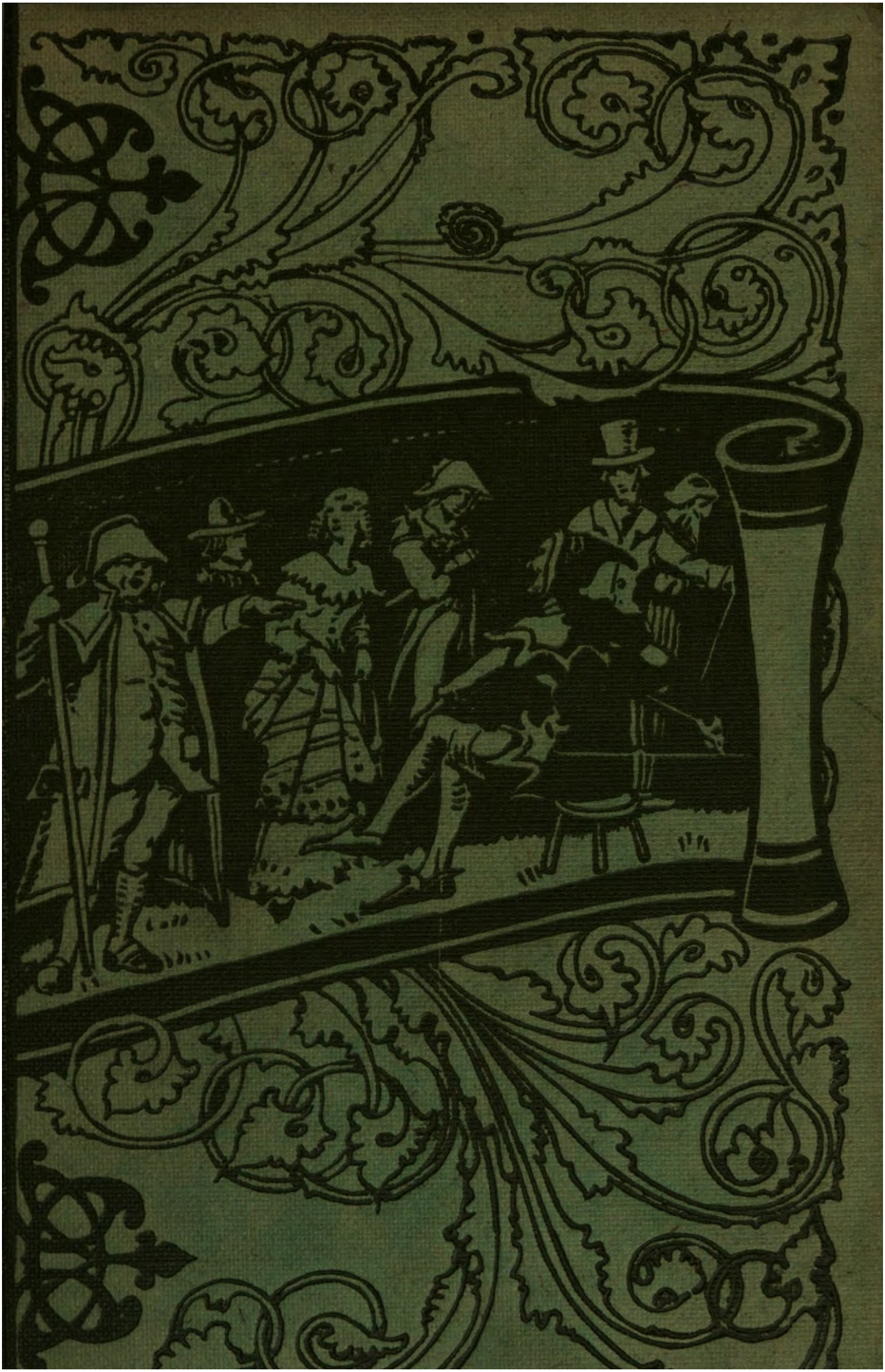

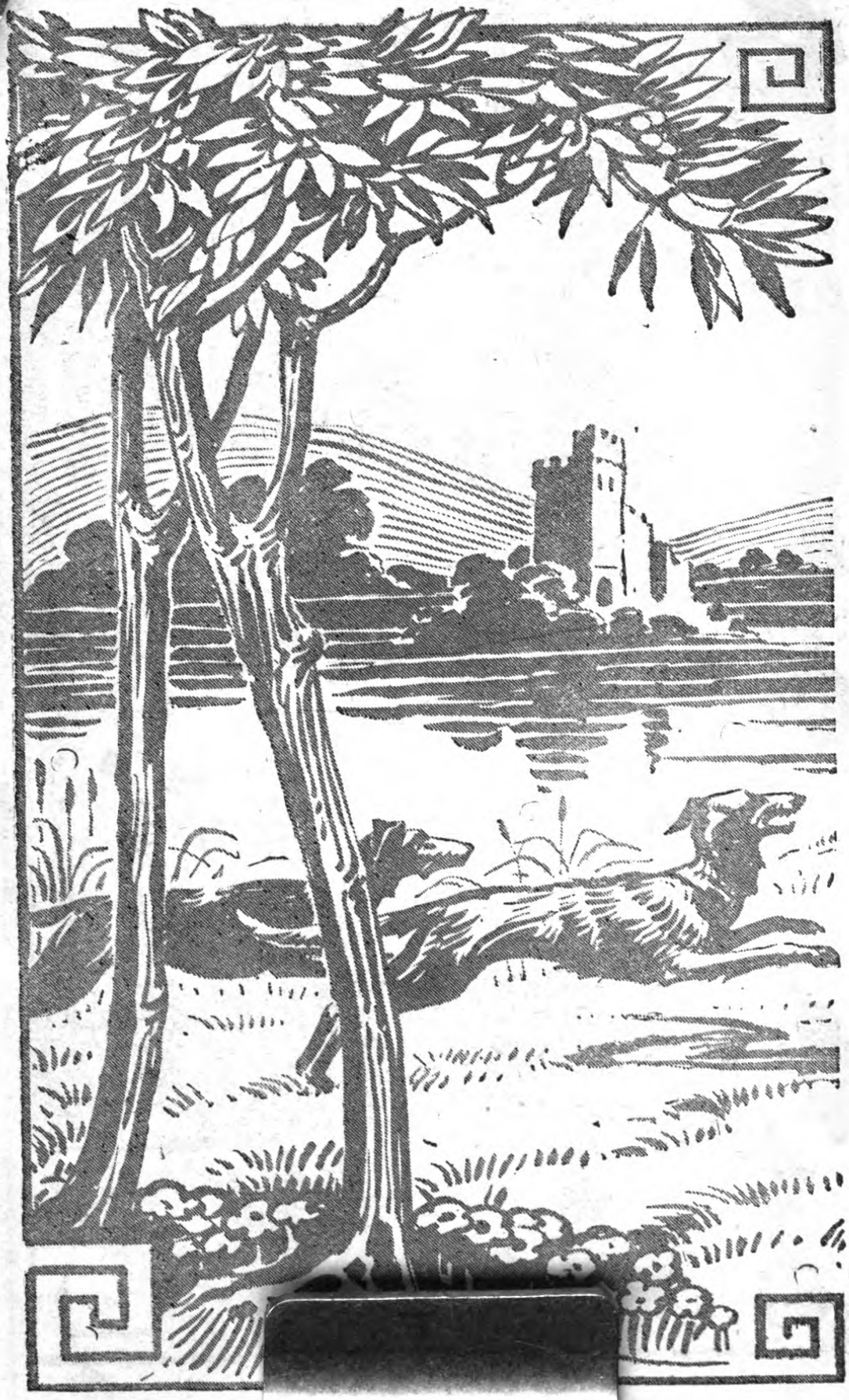

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THE EXILES OF FALOO

CHAPTER I

OVERHEAD a blue sky without a cloud; in the distance the sound of the surf—a muffled bass which broke on the tink of the bell at the French Mission or the scream of the parrot on the broad verandah of the Exiles' Club.

On the lawn in front of the verandah two natives had just finished their reluctant work with the mower. They wore loin-cloths of tappa and nothing else. The head-gardener wore a loin-cloth of tappa and a white evening-dress waistcoat, the latter being the gift of Dr. Soames Pryce. The waistcoat was splendid but unclean. The head-gardener had been inspecting the work of the others from a recumbent position. All three passed away now along the grass path under the laden orange-trees. Two gorgeous butterflies chased one another over the lawn in the sunshine.

The plaited blind in front of the French windows was pushed back and Sir John Sweetling appeared

on the verandah. He was a man of fifty-five, six feet in height and inclined to corpulence. On the whole a handsome man, with a short white beard and moustache neatly trimmed, and fearless blue eyes under shaggy white brows. The nose was perhaps a trifle nosy. He wore a white silk shirt, white ducks, a brown holland jacket and a panama of the finest texture.

Sir John lingered for a moment beside the parrot's perch. He scratched the bird's neck, and said in an affectionate voice, "Poor old Polly."

The parrot bent down and got to work with its beak on the perch, much as if the perch had been a steel and the beak a carving-knife which it was trying to sharpen. Then it sat up, drew its indecent lids over its solemn eyes once or twice, and spoke distinctly.

"You damned thief," said the parrot.

It was an observation which had been addressed to Sir John before, and not only by parrots.

Sir John shook his head. "Naughty bird," he said, "naughty bird!" Then he came down the steps of the verandah on to the lawn. Three lounge chairs were grouped about a small table, and Sir John took the most comfortable of the three. On the table were books of a ledger-like appearance, writing materials, and a bell. Sir John struck the bell with a fat brown forefinger.

The head-gardener came out from the orange-trees. After all, he was not only the head-gardener. He smiled ingratiatingly, as if to say that he took a

personal interest in Sir John, and it would be a positive pleasure to him to do anything for him. From a natural friendliness, which only broke down under severe stress, all the natives wore this air of interest in the white man and of readiness to serve him in any way. As a matter of fact no native, with the solitary exception of King Smith, ever did anything that he could possibly avoid. The climate is relaxing, and the cokernut palm supplies many wants.

Sir John looked at the man doubtfully. "Well, yes, you'll do," he said. "Go and tell Thomas that I want a lime-squash, no sugar, and a double Hollands in it."

The head-gardener repeated the order, with a careworn look beginning to gather on his handsome, dusky face. The club-house was at least twenty yards away, and he would have to walk every step of it. He walked very gracefully and very slowly, a slight wind fluttering the buckle straps of his waistcoat behind. On the verandah he paused to rest and to tease the parrot.

"Get on, you dog," shouted Sir John. And the head-gardener got on.

Presently Thomas appeared with the drink. At one time he had been desk-waiter at the Cabinet Club, London. At the Exiles' Club, in this very tiny and remote island, he was a combination of steward and head-waiter. He wore black trousers and neck-tie and a white jacket. He was grey-haired, round-faced, and loose-mouthed.

Sir John let the ice clink musically against the glass. It was almost the only æsthetic pleasure that he enjoyed. He took a long suck at a couple of straws and then, as he fumbled for his money, said plaintively:

"I say, Thomas, aren't they coming?"

"Coming directly, sir. The green lizard won, and they are not racing again, Mr. Bassett having no more ready money with him."

"Childish—utterly childish," said Sir John, irritably.

"Your change, sir?"

"It was half-a-crown I gave you."

"I took it for a florin," said Thomas, quite unembarrassed. "My mistake. Sorry, sir."

Down the steps of the verandah towards Sir John came Mr. Bassett and Dr. Soames Pryce. Mr. Bassett was a very short man. His face was ape-like and had a fringe beard of sandy grey. He was overshadowed by an immense Terai felt hat, and was a quaint figure until you got used to him. He occupied the honorary position of secretary to the Exiles' Club. Dr. Soames Pryce was a man of medium height and magnificent figure—a chest deep and broad, small waist and hips, powerful muscles, and no spare flesh. He was clean-shaven, and his ugly, strong face suggested a cynical Napoleon. He wore a shirt and trousers of white flannel and a pith helmet.

"My lizard won, Sweetling," he said, as he sank into one of the lounge chairs.

"So Thomas has been telling me," said Sir John, reflectively. "Wish I'd backed it."

"Tell you what, Bassett," said the doctor, sharply. "You were grumbling—said you'd never seen your browny run so badly. I'll back my green one against him once more for another sovereign—run it off to-morrow morning."

"Can't," said Bassett. "Killed mine—always kill losers." His manner was jerky and nervous. He was already turning over the volumes on the table. "We have business of some importance to the club before us this morning—the election of—"

He stopped short as a native waiter approached with a tray. The doctor apparently shared the taste of Sir John in morning beverages; Mr. Bassett drank iced barley-water with a slice of lemon in it.

"Yes, yes," said Sir John as the waiter retired. "Mr. Bassett is right; business of very serious importance. We must be getting on. I will ask Mr. Bassett to read the minutes of the last meeting."

Mr. Bassett jerked rapidly through the data of the meeting and the names of the committee-men who attended. In addition to the names of those now present the name of the Rev. Cyril Mast was read.

Dr. Soames Pryce took his mouth away from a drinking-straw to observe, "Mast not coming to-day?"

"I shall have something to say presently as to that," said Sir John.

"Myself also," said Mr. Bassett, and went on with the minutes in a quick staccato.

There were certain financial matters "examined and found correct." There was a history of two backed bills; in one case the secretary would write and express regrets; in the other the committee had found that the price charged for giant asparagus was not unreasonable.

Sir John took the formal vote that he should sign the minutes as correct, and proceeded to routine business. Financial questions were considered with care, and were a little complicated by the use of more than one currency. The club was in a very satisfactory position. It had only thirty-two members, but the subscription was high and the expenses were small.

At last came the important business. Sir John opened the candidates' book and spoke with a voice of deliberate impartiality.

"Gentlemen, we have a candidate up for election. He is a native of this island, known to us all, I think, as King Smith. I see that he is described here as John Smith, trader and chief of Faloo. He is proposed by Mr. Page and seconded by the Rev. Cyril Mast. He is supported by Mr. Bassett, Mr. Mandelbaum, Mr. Duncombe, Mr. Clarence Mills, and Lord Charles Baringstoke—under ordinary circumstances, I should say a strong list. Before proceeding to discussion I will

ask our secretary to read the letters of the proposer and seconder."

The letters were unusually long and apologetic, but this was the first time that a native had been proposed for membership of the Exiles' Club.

Mr. Page, in his letter, pointed out that this was no ordinary native. He was of the blood royal, and was recognised by all the natives as chief or King of Faloo. It was to be remembered that certainly in the old days and in a neighbouring group of the islands white men had not thought it beneath their dignity to take positions—and even subordinate positions—at the court of native kings and queens.

Dr. Soames Pryce gave a short contemptuous laugh; Mr. Bassett glared at him out of mean eyes and continued the letter.

Mr. Page pointed out further that Smith had shown a readiness to absorb European ideas which was without parallel in the case of a native. His business, in which a syndicate of members of the club were financially interested, was solid and progressive. He had shown enterprise and talent for organisation. He spoke French well and English to perfection. He had been of great assistance to the white men on the island. "And of his wide and generous hospitality most of us have had pleasant experience."

"Good letter," commented the doctor, briefly.

The letter of the Rev. Cyril Mast repeated much that Mr. Page had said, but contained some additional items of information. As regards the

name of John Smith, Smith was merely the Anglicised form of its owner's native name.

The doctor's laugh was perhaps excusable. The native name was of four syllables, began with "m," ended with "oo," and had a "k" in it. The laugh was repeated when the Rev. Cyril Mast asserted that Smith had received the name John upon baptism into the Church of England, performed during boyhood when on a visit to another island.

"Name," said the doctor.

"Order," said Sir John. "We can discuss the letter afterwards."

"I presume," said Mr. Bassett, savagely, "that Dr. Pryce does not venture to question the veracity of a member of the club."

"Rot," said the doctor.

"Order, order," said Sir John. "Read on, please, Mr. Bassett."

He read on. The Rev. Cyril Mast pointed out that King Smith's attitude in religious matters was one of the broadest toleration, as exemplified by the fact that he permitted the French Catholic Mission on his island. He had lessened the superstitious observances of the natives, had deported the priests, and now held solely in his own person the important power of "taboo." In view of labour difficulties and other difficulties with the natives it was imperatively necessary to conciliate the possessor of this power. It was hardly too much to say that their existence depended upon it.

It would be necessary to elect King Smith, "even if he were not the genial, open-handed sportsman whom we all know him to be."

There was a moment's silence. It was for the President to speak first. Sir John spoke with ease and fluency. He had addressed many meetings, and soothed for the time many angry shareholders.

"Well, gentlemen," said Sir John, "Mr. Smith comes before you under very good auspices. He is seconded by one member of the committee and underwritten by another. Among his supporters we have noted the names of Lord Charles Baring-stoke and—er—others. But it must be remarked that his seconder is not here this morning to speak for him. Why is he not here?"

"He was so very drunk last night," said Dr. Soames Pryce. There was not the least shade of moral accusation in his voice; it was a plain statement of a cause having a certain effect.

"Nonsense!" snapped Mr. Bassett.

"I assure you, my diagnosis is correct."

"Gentlemen!" said Sir John, in mild protest. Both men apologised to the President for the interruption. He continued:

"From whatever cause it arises it is at least unfortunate that Mr. Mast is not here; there are questions that I should have felt it my duty, unpleasant though it might be, to put to him. However, we will leave him and consider the candidature of Mr. Smith."

Here Sir John paused to light a cigar and refresh himself from the glass before him.

"Now, gentlemen, I think if I may claim any virtue at all it is the virtue of foresight. When the circumstances arose which made it advisable for me to leave England, I had already foreseen those circumstances and I knew that Faloo was the place. From its want of an accessible harbour, its small size, and its position out of the usual line of trading and other vessels, and also perhaps from a pardonable ignorance, Faloo has been omitted by statesmen and their advisers from treaties innumerable. It has independence on sufferance. Any European power that claimed Faloo would be met by a counter-claim from another power, and at present it is considered too obscure and insignificant for diplomacy, or for sterner methods of arbitration. Briefly, it is not worth fighting about. But I know that you will agree with me that it is just what we require. Life is soft and easy, and the climate is always summer. Nature has showered her gifts upon this island—gorgeous flowers and luscious fruits, the graceful and useful palm, the orange-trees in the shade of which we sit."

"Pardon the correction," said Dr. Soames Pryce. "The orange-trees were brought by Smith's grandfather from Tahiti, and they were not indigenous even there."

"Thank you, Dr. Pryce. At least I may say that this kindly and prolific soil has, in the case

of the orange-trees as in our own case, welcomed the stranger. The natives are friendly—except in some cases which I can explain—and though their natural laziness makes it difficult to find useful and trustworthy servants, we have managed to get along so far by a temperate firmness on our part. For such hostility as exists I regret to say that certain members of this club have only themselves to thank, and I may add in confidence that Mr. Mast is one of the worst offenders. This—er—philandering with the wives and daughters of natives is a thing that must definitely be stopped or there will be awful trouble."

Sir John paused for another sip, and surveyed his companions. Dr. Soames Pryce looked straight down his nose; Mr. Bassett toyed innocently with a pen-holder.

"Well, gentlemen, to make a long story short, insignificant little Faloo precisely suits me. Personally, I ask nothing better than that I may live the rest of my life here, enjoying—if you find some worthier President—"

"No, no," said the other two men.

"Well, enjoying at least my membership of the Exiles' Club. Now I do not want to break a tacit understanding by referring to the past history of any of us. Some may have made mistakes, or yielded to some unfortunate impulse; some—my own is a case in point—may be the victims of conspiracy on the one part and misunderstanding on another. But in any case, if ever we had to

leave Faloo, where could we go? I know of no place from which we should not promptly be sent back to our native land, to be tried by some clumsy tribunal that on half the facts of the case judges a man's isolated acts apart from his motives and his general character and his mode of life."

"Hear, hear," said Mr. Bassett.

"Now comes my point. Our safety lies in the obscurity and insignificance of Faloo. Make it of importance—get it talked about—and we are lost. Now Smith's great idea is to boom Faloo, to extend his own trade indefinitely, and he even has dreams of finally getting its independence formally acknowledged. This last he will probably never do, because the island would be annexed, but if he did, part of the price of independence would be an extradition treaty. He has been described as enterprising, and the description is true. He even now has a plan for blasting the reef and throwing open the harbour for his own trading ships. He speaks often of the loss and the danger occasioned by loading and unloading by canoes a vessel lying outside the reef. Well, there is only room for a canoe or a small boat to get through the reef now, and there will never be any more room, so long as we have the whip-hand of Mr. Smith. His interests and ours are diametrically opposed. How can we admit such a man to terms of perfect equality as would be implied by membership of this club? Why should he ask it except as a means to push his schemes with injudicious

members, lured by the prospect of a money advantage? What would it profit us, gentlemen, if we gained all the money in the world and lost—er—this quiet retreat from the malicious people who are anxious to interfere with us? Believe me, he has no love for the white man. If he permits the French Mission it is because the French Mission is a regular and lucrative customer and the priests help to educate him. He is genial and hospitable; but we also are regular and lucrative customers and much more than that. He has been of service to us; two or three times he has sent off, with almost needless brutality, low-class English and Americans, without a five-pound note to call their own, who have attempted to establish themselves here. He serves us, because we do not want that type. But he serves himself too, for they are no use to him either. I have known Smith longer than any white man on this island, and I know that extension of trade and the making of money is his first aim. He'd like a regular trading fleet instead of the ramshackle tramps he owns at present. When I came here he lived in a leaf-thatched shanty and had hardly anything. See how far he has got on already; he means to go twenty times as far as that. And when he's got the money he's on to something else—he doesn't talk about it, and I don't know much about it, but I do know that it will be something with King Smith in it and ourselves outside. Now at present we've got the whip-hand of that gentleman, and we've got to keep it.

We've got the whip-hand, because the money on which his business is run is our money and under our own control. I have put seven hundred golden sovereigns into it, Dr. Pryce has two hundred, Mr. Bassett two hundred, and other members have smaller sums, making fifteen hundred in all. From the very beginning I took the line that (in the absence of ordinary legal safeguards) the borrower must trust the lender and the lender must trust nobody. We see such books as he keeps; we practically control the bank. We know what he's doing. We can say 'go on' and we can say 'stop.' Smith controls the natives? He does. He can enforce the 'taboo'? He can. And what on earth does it matter so long as we control Smith? It's money that talks. And that reminds me that I've been doing a lot of talking myself, though I've still got one more point to raise. You don't mind!"

"I want to hear everything you've got against Smith; it'll help me to show the other side," said Mr. Bassett.

"My own mind is still open," said Dr. Soames Pryce. "Let me hear you both by all means. At present it doesn't seem to me to matter a curse whether we elect him or not. But might I suggest an interlude!"

"Certainly," said Sir John. "The same idea had just occurred to me." He struck the bell repeatedly, until Thomas appeared on the veran-

dah. A sign gave the order, and fresh drinks were brought out.

"Now for my last point," said Sir John. "England has not treated me well, and it would probably treat me worse if it could get me, but I can never forget that I am an Englishman. We white men here"—his voice vibrated—"are the representatives of the conquering races."

Dr. Soames Pryce concealed a smile.

"We have a certain amount of prestige among the natives, and we cannot give away prestige and keep it. Our action in electing Mr. Smith would be read by the natives as a concession made from fear. He would be exalted, and we should be debased. A rule of the club prohibits the introduction of any native as a guest; I have not the least doubt that the election of a native would also have been prohibited, had it ever been supposed that such an event was possible. Let us treat Mr. Smith with kindness and civility. He likes to exercise hospitality, and I sometimes look in at his place and take a drink with him. But we must not elect him as an equal. If you two gentlemen a e divided in your opinions my casting vote goes against Mr. Smith."

Sir John leaned back in his chair, removed his hat and mopped his bald head with his handkerchief. He was convinced that the election of Smith would be disastrous, and he had done his best to prevent it. Bassett, he knew, would support

Smith, but Sir John counted on opposition from the doctor.

"Well, now, Mr. Bassett," said Sir John.

But Mr. Bassett suddenly adopted a conciliatory and even flattering attitude towards Dr. Soames Pryce.

"Excuse me," he said. "Better take things in their order of importance. Dr. Pryce—most popular and representative—better hear him first."

"My mind's still open," said Dr. Pryce. "Sir John's been talking rather as if the Exiles' Club were the Athenæum and King Smith were a doubtful archdeacon. We aren't the Athenæum. We represent the dead-beat section of the conquering races. As we have referred to the past I may mention that we comprise men who have had to skip and can't go back."

"A little too strongly put," said Sir John.

"I'm only saying what you've been thinking," said Dr. Pryce. "Poor old Thomas messed his accounts at the Cabinet Club and he had to skip, and it's supposed to be the same all the way up through the members. All we ask about a white candidate is how much he brought with him or can have sent out to him. If he can afford it he's a member. Our rules are easy, but we don't change members' cheques, and it's a recognised principle with us that we believe in the money we see and in no other money. If the cash isn't on the table there's no bet. That being so, ought we to put on side? Can we carry it?"

"Certainly not. Hear, hear!" said Mr. Bassett with enthusiasm.

"Sir John says we've got the whip-hand of King Smith now. True. So we have. So we shall still have if he's made a member. Sir John thinks that if Smith opens the harbour and widens the trade the island will be grabbed and we shall be grabbed too. I should say rats!"

"Really?" said Sir John, frigidly.

"I mean, with all respect, that there's not enough in Faloo to make any power restless in its sleep—except ourselves, and it is not likely to be known that we are here. As for Smith himself, he's a clever blackguard, but I doubt if he's as deep as our President thinks. There are good streaks about him. The natives get none of the filth that he brews in the still at the back of his office—that's traded away under the rose to other islands. He's got an open hand, and keeps good whisky, and what persuaded our reverend friend Mast to get tight on curaçao last night beats me altogether. What I don't like is that while his business is financed by some of us he's lending money out of his share of the profits to others. Three of the men who underwrote him have got an advance on their remittances from him—Charley Baringstoke's one of them. That might make awkwardness. He's playing it all out for John Smith too, as our President says. Well, I'm playing it for Dr. Pryce. If Bassett isn't playing it for a man whose name begins with B I'm wrong.

Fire in, Bassett. As I say, my mind's still open."

Mr. Bassett spoke briefly and nervously, with a sickly, ingratiating smile, fingering at times that uncomely fringe of beard. He was sure that Sir John had presented the arguments on his side of the question with great skill and power. But he must confess that he thought the greater part of those arguments had already been fully answered in a few sentences by Dr. Pryce. As for the absence of the Rev. Cyril Mast, that was really due to delicacy and good feeling; he had felt that the discussion of a candidate whom he had seconded could be more free and open in the seconder's absence. That being so, Mast might possibly have felt free to indulge last night in the—er—lapse which Dr. Pryce had described. Certainly the money-lending to which Dr. Pryce had objected was a serious point. But he believed that Mr. Smith had only given way from good-nature, only in a few cases, and only for small sums. He would guarantee that an expression of opinion would be enough to stop it. There was one matter with which Dr. Pryce had not dealt, and that was the native question. Here Mr. Bassett became very impressive.

"It's not foreign powers and extradition treaties we've got to fear. If John Smith wants to blast the reef, and can give us twenty per cent. for our money instead of ten, let him do it, and I've got more money waiting for him. But we've got to fear the natives of this island here and now."

"I suppose it's necessary for you to be in a funk of something," said Dr. Soames Pryce.

"Order," said Sir John. "Really, that's rather an insulting remark."

"Sorry. I withdraw it," said Pryce, placidly.

"Sir John himself said that unless this—er—interference with the native women were stopped there would be awful trouble. Mr. Mast's name has been mentioned. Two nights ago, as he was coming home from Smith's, a spear went too near him to be pleasant. Doesn't that mean something to fear? Let me ask Dr. Pryce if he were managing an insurance office if he would accept Mast's life?"

"If I were the physician he'd never get as far as the manager," said the doctor, grimly.

"Mast's is not the only case. Mr. Mandelbaum has had stones thrown at him. Lord Charles Baringstoke has been threatened. Natives have been found skulking round the club-house at night. Sir John says that this—er—philandering must be stopped absolutely. But nature is stronger than Sir John; the women are said to be attractive, and young men won't live ascetic lives. Even if it could be stopped now, much of the harm is done already. The election of Mr. Smith would bring the natives round again, and in the meantime something could be done to regularise the situation—some form of marriage which would satisfy native susceptibilities without imposing too onerous an obligation upon us. The help of Mr. Smith in a

matter of the kind would be invaluable. If we refuse to elect him the natives will get to hear of it —they get to hear of everything—and we stand a good chance of being burned in our beds. I don't say we might elect Mr. Smith—I say that for our own safety we must elect him."

As Mr. Bassett finished there was a sound a little like distant applause; it was merely the club parrot stropping his beak on his perch with furious energy.

"We will proceed to vote, gentlemen," said Sir John. "You know which way my casting vote will go if there is any difference of opinion between you."

"You damned thief!" screamed the parrot.

"I shall certainly vote that Mr. Smith be elected," said Mr. Bassett.

"You damned thief!" screamed the parrot again.

"Well, I'm quite decided now," said Dr. Pryce.

"You damned thief!" shrieked the parrot once more. Sir John banged the bell again and again.

"Thomas!" he shouted, "take that infernal bird inside. We can't hear ourselves speak. Now," he added more suavely, "we are ready for your vote, Dr. Pryce, and the election turns on it."

CHAPTER II

MR. BASSETT had made the commonest mistake of political speakers; he had supposed that the argu-

ment which appealed most strongly to himself would appeal most strongly to his audience. He had appealed to fear. Dr. Soames Pryce was not a timid man, and he resented what he regarded as an attempt to scare him.

"I vote against the election of Mr. Smith to this club," said Dr. Pryce, bluntly.

"After all you have said!" exclaimed Mr. Bassett. "You surprise me very much."

"One moment, Mr. Bassett," said the President. "I must declare then that Mr. John Smith is not elected."

Mr. Bassett paused with the pen in his hand. "Am I to write 'not elected,' gentlemen? We have all admitted that Smith is a good, hospitable fellow, and we have business dealings with him. We might let him down as easily as possible. May I write 'postponed for further consideration'? It commits us to nothing, and it's not quite so harsh."

"I see no objection to that," said Sir John. "What do you think, doctor?"

"No objection," said Dr. Soames Pryce with a yawn.

"Then," said Sir John, as he rose, "I think that concludes our business."

The head-gardener and his two assistants made an incautious appearance, and were at once commanded to carry the club-books within to the secretary's room. Mr. Bassett said he supposed he ought to go and see how poor Cyril Mast was getting on after last night.

Dr. Soames Pryce watched Bassett's little figure under the big hat retreating down the avenue.

"Nice specimen of Pusillanimus Ambulans, or the Walking Toadstool," said Dr. Pryce. "What's next, Sweetling? I don't mind backing my green lizard against the clock."

"Silly game, very silly," said Sir John. "Still, I may as well lose four half-crowns at that as anything else. And"—he glanced at his elaborate presentation watch—"there's still half an hour before lunch."

The course for lizard-racing had been designed and laid out by Dr. Pryce in the courtyard on the further side of the club. The course was circular, and the boards on either side sloped inwards so that the lizards should not climb them. A lizard attempting escape would go straight ahead by the only path open to it, round and round the circle. That was the rule, but there were various exceptions.

Dr. Pryce produced the box of plaited grass in which his lizard was kept, and turned it out on to the course. It made an ineffectual attempt to climb the side, and then went straight away, looking rather like a clever clockwork toy.

"Lay you ten shillings it doesn't go round in thirty-six seconds," said Sir John.

"Thirty-four's record. Not good enough. I'll back him to do two rounds in seventy-five for the same money."

"Done. Start the watch."

Both men put down their money and kept one

eye on the stop-watch and one on the starting-point. The lizard was round in 35.5 and going strongly. A few feet further on it paused as if it were saying to itself, "Let's see—where did I put my umbrella?" Then it turned right round and went back, presumably to fetch it.

"Damn," said Dr. Pryce, and put the lizard tenderly back in its box again.

Sir John laughed and slipped the two half-sovereigns into his waistcoat pocket. "Want another?" he asked.

"No thanks," said the doctor. "My beast's got into one of his absent-minded moods. He's like that sometimes. He might beat the record, or he might go to sleep in the first patch of sunshine."

The club was beginning to fill up now. In the reading-room two or three members turned over the out-of-date papers—but there is really no date in Faloo. Little groups on the lawn in front of the house sipped cocktails. Lord Charles Baringstoke went from group to group with his usual plaintive, "Anybody goin' to stand me anythin'?" Thomas was fixing the *carte du jour* in the frame over the dining-room mantelpiece; the fireplace was filled with pot-roses in bloom, had never known a fire, and did not possess a chimney. Two other English waiters and many native servants bustled to and fro.

Sir John and Dr. Pryce took their Manhattans on the verandah. "Do you know," said Sir John,

"I almost thought you were going to elect King Smith this morning."

"So did I," said the doctor. "Believe we ought to have done it too. He's better than that worm Charley Baringstoke, or a boozer like Cyril Mast, or a mean badger like Bassett. Better than most of us, in fact. It was Bassett put me off it."

"So I noticed," said Sir John.

"Interesting man too," said Dr. Pryce. "Has he really got these ideas—the ambitious poppycock that you talked about?"

"If he had, would you let him make a start with them?" asked Sir John, enigmatically.

"I would not," said the doctor.

"I think you're the man I want. We'll talk about it at luncheon. Our curry should be ready by now."

The meal was called luncheon, but for all classes on the island luncheon was the principal meal of the day; in fact, no regular club-dinner was served in the evening. Most of the members were gathered in the dining-room now, but a small table had been reserved for the President and Dr. Soames Pryce. At the next table Mr. Mandelbaum, a round-faced German of great girth, was entertaining Lord Charles Baringstoke, who under alcoholic influence was being betrayed into confidences. "You see," he whined loudly, "it wasn't so much that I went a mucker, because of course all my people went muckers; it was the particular kind of mucker that I went." The German

passed a fat hand over his salient moustache and addressed him as "my poor frent."

Sir John and the doctor conducted their conversation in more discreet tones.

"Do you think," said Sir John, "that the King really meant to be elected to-day? Did he sound you?"

"He's not on those terms," said Pryce.

"He could have made a certainty of it if he had not let Cyril Mast get drunk last night and had sent him up to the scratch this morning. He could have done that. It would have been Mast and Bassett against you, and my casting vote would not have come in."

"Perhaps he took things too easily. But why should he get himself put up?"

"Well, I'll tell you my views. It was a move to blind you and others—to make you think that he hankered for nothing but the joys of European civilisation and the society of white men. His genial manner and his free hospitality are a blind of the same nature. The man's native through and through, soul and body. He is playing the game for his own natives, with himself at the head of them—as he is indeed to-day—but in a position of much greater power and dignity."

"I don't say it isn't so," said Pryce. "But what do you build on?"

"Several things. I've known Smith a long time, and I've only once known him miss a trade opportunity. He won't sell liquor to his own natives.

He won't let them get it. The stills and liquor-stores are taboo. He's after money, but he won't do that. You've noticed it yourself. About two months ago I was going along by the beach one night, and I turned into Smith's place for a drink. He was alone in his office, sitting at a table, with his back to me, and working on some papers. 'Hullo, Cyril,' he said, without looking round. Evidently he was expecting Mast. There was a tin trunk open on the floor, and it was packed with blue-books and pamphlets—things of that kind. I went up to him and touched him on the shoulder. I don't think he was so pleased to see me as he said he was. King Smith was studying the native depopulation statistics in the different groups, and making notes on them. King Smith had got old dailies and weekly reviews—radical rags—with passages marked in blue chalk, spread before him. I tried to see more, but he was very quick—shovelled them all together, threw them into the tin trunk, and kicked the lid down. He said that he had been reading some dull stuff, and then out came the whisky, of course."

"I wonder now if he'd have any chance. I think he might."

"Given that he had the money, and that he could get into touch with English publicists—journalists or politicians of a certain kind—I think he'd have a very good chance at first. Of course all traces of his liquor business would be traded off or sunk in the Pacific by then. The Little-Englanders and

sentimental radicals would back him to a man. It would be shown that he had governed well, kept the natives sober, and was fighting for admitted independence to keep them from the dangerous influences of white civilisation."

"Well," said Pryce, "they are undoubtedly dangerous—for natives."

"There are depopulation statistics to prove it. The fact that he handed us all over to what they are pleased to call justice would count in his favour. His patriotic attitude would appeal. The fact that the island was too small to matter, and that no expense was involved, would help. If he caught the country in the right temper, with nothing of importance to distract its attention, the *Chronicle* and *News* would scream 'Faloo for its own people!' for a while. In the end it would be protection—British or French—but that doesn't matter a straw to us. We should be done. Look here, doctor, I've made one mistake in my life and I can't afford to make another. Whether Smith's ideas are exactly what I say or not, he is trying to do things which will attract attention. We can't let him start."

"That is so," said Pryce. "But how do we stop him? Money comes first, I suppose?"

"Certainly. I've already been into that point. Smith must never be much richer than he is now; if he goes on with this money-lending, he must be rather poorer. Of course, Bassett can see nothing but twenty per cent. instead of ten, and some of the other members are like him, but I think we can do

without a dividend for a year or two if necessary. There's no need to show our hand. We can't adopt deliberately a thwarting policy. But I have an idea that when Smith begins to be too prosperous he will lose a schooner with a valuable cargo. A store or two may be burned down. Some new line of business, which has been suggested by his English friends, is likely to be a financial loss. The second point is that he must not get into touch with the people who can help him—publicists. It would not be healthy for us to have much written about Faloo in the London papers. Well, he can't get away himself—his trade and the natives tie him by the leg. There's no telephone or telegraph here —thank Heaven !—and our mail arrives and leaves irregularly in one of his own schooners, which has to go hundreds of miles with it. I fancy that if you chose to go a cruise in that schooner something might happen to any letters it carried which were not to the general interest. You could manage that?"

"Pleasure—at any time."

"I may ask you to do it."

"Look here, Sweetling, that's all right, of course. But I fancy you're looking so far ahead that you're missing the next step. The row with the natives about their women is the next step. Although there's no need to get into blue funk about it, like Bassett, it may very easily be the last step too."

"I know," said Sir John. "I'm going to speak

to some of the men about it. I wish you'd tackle Cyril Mast."

"Well," said Dr. Pryce, "it's rather difficult. You see, I'm not exactly qualified for—er—er—stained-glass treatment myself, and Mast knows it. For that matter, I could tell you a true story about the amiable Bassett. However, I'll advise discretion—if they'd only remember that all the native women don't come into the same category it would be all right. By the way, you were rather down on Cyril Mast."

"The man's a human sink."

"There are times when that describes him. There are also times when he'd shock Naples and make Port Said blush. There is no act of madness which he might not possibly commit. But he has his moments. I'll try to find him in a lucid interval. Good Lord! I wonder why King Smith doesn't give the natives their head and wipe the island clean of the whole lot of us."

"Excellent prudential reasons. Smith banks—has been compelled to bank by those who financed him. His cheques require the signatures of two Englishmen as well as his own. It is awkward at times to have a bank so far away, but I thought it advisable that the money should not be kept here."

"That's all right," said the doctor, rising from the table. "I've got a native with pneumonia down on the beach. I'll go and look at him."

"Half a moment," said Sir John. "Last time

a schooner came in, two piano-cases were brought ashore. I've looked round, and the only piano in the island is in Smith's big concrete house, where he never lives, and that piano was there ages before. Pianos? Guns, my boy. Smith's keeping the natives in check for all he's worth. It's his best policy. But if it does come to an outbreak, you'll find the natives armed and Smith leading them. You can tell Mast that. If Smith gets into a position where he finds his hand forced, and it's a question of the white man or the native, he'll throw over his trade and his ambitions, wipe out the white men, and chance it. Now, haven't I seen the next step? Pryce, I watch everything. I can't afford to make another mistake."

"An almighty row—a big fight—and then wiped out, as you say," said Pryce, meditatively. "One might do worse."

"Possibly. All the same, I'm going to spend this afternoon frightening the life out of Parker and Simmons and Mandelbaum and Lord Charles Baringstoke. I leave it to you to make Cyril Mast ashamed of himself."

"He's always that," said Pryce, as he turned away.

Mr. Bassett had said that he was going to see Cyril Mast; therefore it was quite certain that he was going elsewhere. He had taken luncheon with King Smith, had eaten baked fishes with the eternal cokernut cream sauce and a conserve of guavas which was one of the King's trade-items.

He had drunk with great moderation of an excellent hock and iced water.

Three sides of a square on the beach were occupied by the King's stores and office, with some living-rooms attached. The styles of building were various. There was concrete, dazzlingly white in the sun. There was timber. There was corrugated iron. There were shanties built in the native fashion—poles planted close together for the walls, and a leaf thatch for the roof. The King had a fine concrete house with an excellent garden in the interior, but he rarely visited it.

Luncheon had been served by native boys in one of the living-rooms. The King now smoked a Havannah and sipped coffee which he himself had grown. There was surprisingly little that was native in his appearance. He wore a white flannel shirt, white duck trousers, and white canvas shoes, all of spotless cleanliness. His tint was very light. He had none of the native's love for personal decoration with flowers and necklaces. His eyes were not like a native's. They had not that sleeping gentleness, and were the eyes of a master among men. No native would have worn those shoes. The natives went barefoot as a rule, torturing themselves with squeaking boots on state occasions or as a concession to the French missionaries. But the King had all the native's inborn grace of movement, and he wore his hair rather longer than a European's. He looked at Bassett with that slightly cynical air of a man who has

gauged another man completely, will use him to the utmost, and will not trust him quite as far as he could throw him. Bassett had removed his big hat, and his indecent baldness shone with perspiration; it gave something of the appearance of the vulture to a head which otherwise suggested the ape.

"All I can say is that I did my best," said Bassett, plaintively. "It nearly came off. Dr. Soames Pryce had seemed all in your favour, and then just when it came to the voting, he went right round."

"Ah!" said Smith. His voice was pleasing and his pronunciation was perfect. "And was that just after you had spoken?"

"It was," said Bassett, "and that's what makes it so surprising." The King smiled. "We ought to have had Mast there. I said so."

"Well, well, my friend," said King Smith, "you did your best and who can do more? Perhaps, when Sir John and the doctor have got to trust me a little more, I may be elected. If they do not think I am yet fit for the high honour of membership, I must wait. It is bad to force oneself. I can wait very well. There was a time when every inch of this island belonged to my forefathers; but I must remember that I own comparatively little myself. I am a king by direct descent; but I must not forget that I am a poor trader far more than I am a king. I owe much to the white man. It is his money that has helped me to develop the resources of my island. It is to the white man that I

owe my education. Many are kind enough to come in sometimes for a little chat with me. Further intimacy is to be a matter of consideration—after all it is not unnatural."

"You seem to take it smiling," said Bassett.

"My friend, you were, I think, what you call a solicitor. That means a great education. I often look at you with envy when I think of the vast number of things that you must know and I do not, and of the things that would be easy for you to arrange and are so difficult for me. But if I might venture to give one little piece of advice, it is this—always take a defeat smiling and a triumph seriously. Ah, you must take that as a joke. I cannot tell you anything you do not know."

"It's true enough that to be a solicitor one must pass very severe tests," said Bassett. "And every day of practice in a good firm means a lesson in knowledge of the world." He was quite unused to flattery, and was ready to take a good deal of it.

"My friend," said the King, "you do not drink my cognac, and it is too good to miss. Alone I would not have got it. It comes to me by favour of the padre."

Bassett, who knew his physiological limitations, hesitated, filled his glass and sipped. He expressed the opinion that the French missionaries knew how to take care of themselves.

"Yes," Bassett continued. "As a solicitor I met with all kinds of men. I can generally make an estimate. I have my doubts about Dr. Soames

Pryce. I have raced lizards against him; doctors know drugs and can use them."

The suggestion was too preposterous, and the King's laughter was both hearty and natural. "But I think not. It is unlikely," he said. "The doctor is not in any want of money, and he does not risk his position here with all of you for a little piece of ten shillings. I do not know much, and so I have to guess a good deal. I should guess that it was no question of money that sent Dr. Soames Pryce to Faloo."

King Smith watched his guest with a critical eye. It was not generally advisable to speak of the past in Faloo. Lord Charles Baringstoke was quite shameless, and the Rev. Cyril Mast was occasionally maudlin, and these two had chattered about themselves, but members of the Exiles' Club were mostly discreet and reserved as to their personal histories.

"Wasn't it money?" said Bassett, peevishly. "No. Perhaps not. Perhaps it was something worse—something which could not be misunderstood."

"Then these money troubles in your country—the sort of troubles that have decided some of you to leave it—may possibly be only due to misunderstanding."

"That and other things. You see, you don't know about these matters."

"No," said the King, regretfully, "I do not know that great world in which you moved."

"Well, see here," said Bassett a little excitedly. "Suppose there is a sum of money—a hundred pounds or a thousand, any sum you like. You know as a business man that if you were asked for that sum one day you might be unable to find it—though you would be able to get it if you were given time."

"Yes, I see that."

"I had money belonging to clients—ladies of course. They were very impatient, and consulted another solicitor, a jealous rival. The money was being employed by me in a way that would ultimately, if I had been left alone, have benefited those clients. It was not immediately available, and delicate financial operations do not admit of clumsy interference. The result was disastrous. I—I gave up and came here."

"It is wonderful that you knew of this little island."

"I had heard of it—two men that I knew had already gone out."

"Your clients—they were not all ladies?" said the King, as he refilled Bassett's glass. "I suppose traders like myself consulted you—clergymen too, perhaps."

"There are no traders like you in England," said Bassett. "But men of the highest business standing consulted me. Lechworthy now—I've lunched with him often. A Cabinet Minister was one of my clients. I tell you, I'd some of the very top. I daresay you never heard of the great libel

action against the *Daily Message*—well, I acted for the *Message*."

King Smith had listened very attentively. "That must make a difference," he said.

"How?"

"Men like that would be superior to a vulgar misunderstanding. They would see, as I do, that it was a mistake—that you had acted for the best—that your probity was not in question. It must be pleasant for you here when the mail comes in—friendly letters from Mr. Lechworthy, who manufactures the leather goods—letters still showing his gratitude from the editor of the *Daily Message*, or perhaps—"

"You don't know anything, my boy," said Bassett. He was slightly flushed, his voice was raised, and his manner was more familiar. "The editor of the *Daily Message* indeed! That case cost his proprietor close on fifty thousand. You make me laugh. No, when a man in England goes under, nobody goes down to look for him. Lechworthy, with all his piety, was as hot as anyone against me. The only letters I get are from my old mother, and they're no use."

It was not then through Mr. Bassett's personal connections that King Smith would be able to get into touch with the right people for the scheme which he had in view. Cyril Mast and Lord Charles had also boasted an influential acquaintance, and in their case, too, the thread had been snapped. The King was not disappointed. He

had found out what he wished to know, and he had no further use at the moment for Mr. Bassett.

The King rose. "I must go back to my work," he said. "Stay here and drink if you like."

But Bassett also rose. "I have drunk enough," he said as he peered at his face in a scrap of mirror on the wall. He wondered vaguely if he had been talking too much. He tried to think of something complimentary to say. "I—I respect the way you work," was his effort; and then certain fears recurred to his mind. "I say, is it all right about the native women?"

"No," said the King, "it is not all right. But there will be no serious trouble yet, unless further cause is given. I have been busy about it this morning."

"Awfully good of you," said Bassett. "You're a sort of protection to the white men here. I say, you ought to have been elected, you know."

"Remember that there may come a time when I cannot protect. The natives here are not much spoiled. This is not Papeete."

"That's what I'm always saying to our chaps."

"Say it also to yourself, my friend. I had a man here this morning who wished to kill you. No, he will not do it. Now I must go."

It was a very sobered Bassett that skulked back along the beach to the club-house. He jumped perceptibly when a land-crab rattled an old meat-tin on the stones. At the club it seemed to him that most of the men were sulky and bad-tempered.

Some slept on the verandah. The German and Lord Charles Baringstoke bent over an interminable game of chess. Lord Charles looked up as Bassett passed.

"I say, Mr. damned Bassett," said Lord Charles, "why didn't you elect Smith?"

"Oh, go to the devil!" said Bassett, irritably, and went on to his own room. He was angry with himself, and a man in that case is always angry with the rest of the world.

King Smith went on with his work, assiduously as a London clerk under the eye of the senior partner. It was near sunset when he came out on to the beach.

Down by the water's edge stood the Rev. Cyril Mast. He was quite a young man, and his face was that of a dissipated boy. At present he was looking out through glasses that he could not hold quite steady.

"You look at nothing," laughed Smith.

"See for yourself," said Mast, in a musical, resonant voice. "Your schooner will be in before you expected her."

King Smith took the glasses and levelled them at the little speck on the horizon.

"It is a schooner, but not mine," he said. "A chance trader perhaps. Mine can't be here for three days. That one can't get here to-night. To-morrow morning we shall see. And how do you feel to-night, Cyril?"

"As I deserve to feel, I suppose. I am bad company to-night. You are the first person to whom I have spoken to-day, and I have neither eaten nor drunk."

"Poor devil, come up and have a drink now."

"No, thanks. I'm going for a swim."

"Don't recommend it," said the King.

"The sharks are welcome," said Mast.

The sun set. Light streamed out from native-built houses. In all directions one heard the sound of singing. It mingled with the lap and fret of wavelets on the shore. Mast swam out and back again in safety. As he walked along the beach a native girl called to him. She stood in the light of one of the houses, a flower of scarlet hibiscus behind her ear; her white teeth shone as she smiled.

One by one the lights of the houses went out. The sky became gemmed with many stars. Faloo was asleep. The King had put aside for a while his problem—how to get in touch with an Englishman who could help him.

In the schooner that he had sighted there was such a man, though the King did not know it—a man of great wealth, a newspaper proprietor, a keen politician—Mr. Lechworthy, who manufactured the leather goods.

The circumstances that brought Mr. Lechworthy to Faloo must now be recorded.

CHAPTER III

THE factories of Lechworthy & Co. covered many acres at Setton Park, and the large village adjoining was inhabited almost solely by those employed in the factories.

In the factories as in the offices of Lechworthy & Co. one found the last word of effectiveness and enterprise. Time after time good machinery had been scrapped to make way for better and to meet American competition, and the enormous outlay involved had subsequently justified itself. Everything connected with their business was manufactured at Setton Park. Boxes and crates were made there. They made every metal article required—from the eyelets of a pair of cheap boots to the gold fittings of the most expensive dressing-case. They made their own glue. They even made their own thread.

Lechworthy & Co. were good employers. They paid fair wages, and in the treatment of their workmen went far beyond what the Factory Acts required of them. Allotments, cricket fields, libraries, recreation halls abounded. Lechworthy & Co. had themselves seen to it that the least paid woman in the packing or lining departments could obtain an abundant supply of pure milk for her babies at a price she could easily afford. The sanitation was excellent, and the delightful air of the country—for the tannery was at a judicious

distance—made town-workers envy their more fortunate comrades at Lechworthy's. Thrift was compulsory and automatic. The man who grew old or past work, or who broke down from illness in the company's service, found ample provision made for him from funds to which his own savings had contributed, augmented by the company's generosity. Such a man need not leave Setton Park; there was a cottage for him, and it was not called an alms-house; medical attendance was provided free for him. The conditions still prevailed which were established when Lechworthy turned his business into a Limited Company. The ordinary investor had never been given a chance to put a penny into the concern. Lechworthy had by far the largest holding, and the other shareholders were men of a like mind, personal and political friends; men of substance, and, it was averred, of nice conscience. The company earned an excellent dividend, in spite of its philanthropical ideas.

It was not of course to be expected that Lechworthy & Co. would entirely escape criticism. The man who has political friends has also political enemies, and the political enemy is not always too scrupulous in the way in which he inquires into his opponents' private business. A part at least of the raw material which the company purchased had been subjected to comment. Their attitude towards any smaller manufacturer was characterised as merciless—he was absorbed into

Lechworthy's, or he was frozen off the face of the earth. The scheme of compulsory thrift was commented upon even by those who did not deny a value to compulsory virtues. It was said quite truly that any man who voluntarily left the company's service, or who was dismissed for misconduct, thereby sacrificed all that he had been compelled to put by. It was answered as truly that every man who entered the service knew upon what conditions he entered it, and that the company had a right to guard itself against disloyalty, defection and disorder, by all the means in its power. In view of the fact that Lechworthy had always proclaimed freedom of religious and political opinions, it was held to be remarkable that ninety per cent of his workpeople shared his political views, and that while every shade of dissent was represented among them, it was hard to find a member of the Church of England and impossible to find either a Catholic or an Agnostic. If this were mentioned to Lechworthy he said merely that he had been fortunate, or that he supposed that like attracted like. He was sincere, and had strong convictions; he was also shrewd and knew that strong convictions depend amazingly little upon argument. Many a workman of Lechworthy's had professed for mercenary and time-serving reasons a religion which had afterwards become real to him—not as the result of a cool reasoning analysis, but by sheer force of habit and by the unconscious effect of example. Now and

again a discharged servant of the company asserted bitterly that he had been discharged for his political or religious views, but the head of his department always had another story to tell, and the evidence of discharged servants is always—and quite properly—discounted. A more serious charge was that he had kept on servants whom he should have discharged. Mr. Bruce Chalmers, the Conservative candidate, had attempted to address a meeting of the men in their dinner-hour. Lechworthy's young men had smashed up the motor-car, and hurled stones and mud at himself, his wife, and his supporters. Mrs. Bruce Chalmers had been seriously injured, the police had come to the rescue, and several of these fervent young men had been imprisoned without the option of a fine. But their situations were still waiting for them when they came out, and in some of the worst cases promotion rapidly followed. Lechworthy maintained that he had told Chalmers that if he addressed the men he would do so at his own risk, and that those who provoked a breach of the peace should not complain if the peace were broken. If, as he supposed, the law had punished his men sufficiently, it would have been unnecessary and unjust for him to punish them further. Those who knew that two words from Lechworthy would have prevented the outbreak, or knew what Lechworthy's attitude would have been to a workman who had been fined for drunkenness, did not think the defence satisfactory.

For the rest, the selection of books in the free library at Setton Park provoked a sneer, the blacking out of all the racing news in the reading-room papers seemed a little childish, and the absence of a rifle-range, when gymnasia, swimming-baths, and cricket fields were liberally provided, was taken as an instance of the short-sighted methods of professed lovers of peace.

At the age of sixty Lechworthy determined to retire from the board of his company. He had relinquished the position of managing director some years before. He was not so young as he had been—it was his favourite observation—and other men could be found to take his place on the board. He was an active Member of Parliament and he was the proprietor of the *Morning Guide*. The paper did not pay, and Lechworthy did not run it to pay; he said more than once in public that he ran it in the service of Christ. Incidentally, it was of some use as an organ of his political party, and a most enthralling hobby for himself. While in England he was quite incapable of leaving the editor alone for two days together. The same doctor who had recommended him to retire from the board of Lechworthy & Co. had suggested a prolonged holiday in some place where it would be impossible for him to see a copy of the *Morning Guide*.

The occasion of his retirement had of course to be marked. Sounded upon the subject, Lechworthy had objected to the service of gold plate or to his

full-length portrait by the most fashionable and most expensive artist. He did not want for money, or for the things that money can buy, and he said that he thought the talented artist might find some more pleasing subject. He knew too, that subscriptions would come from many who could ill afford to give them, and that idea was repellent to him. But he consented to receive an illuminated address, to which his employees might affix their signatures. The address swelled itself to a book, every leaf of the finest vellum, magnificently bound, majestically expressed. The title-page declared as follows:

To WILBERFORCE LECHWORTHY, ESQUIRE,
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
FOR SOUTH LOAMSHIRE,
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS RETIREMENT FROM
THAT BUSINESS
WHICH HIS GENIUS AND HIS UNTIRING INDUSTRY
HAVE WITH THE BLESSING OF THE ALMIGHTY
CREATED

The presentation of this rather portentous volume was to take place on a Saturday evening. On the afternoon of that day every employee of the company was invited to tea by Lechworthy. A number of vast marquees were erected for the purpose on the cricket-field; and the return match between Setton Park and the Hanley Wanderers was in consequence postponed. The *Evening News* headed its paragraph on the subject: LECHWORTHY PACKING—WHO MADE THE PORT-

MANTEAU?" But the paragraph itself dealt seriously with statistics supplied by the firm of caterers, informing the curious how many hams or how many pats of butter had been thought sufficient. The Setton Park Band performed on the occasion. The antique show of Punch and Judy was to be seen freely, and swings were prevalent. Wilberforce Lechworthy went from one marquee to another, joined in the audience that witnessed the flagrant immoralities of Mr. Punch, and chatted with the crowds that waited for their turn at the swings. He displayed a king-like memory for faces and the geniality of a headmaster on Speech-day. The presentation of the address took place some hours later in the hall which, though it was the largest at the company's disposal, could not provide seating accommodation for one-third of its workers. Heads of departments had tickets, and seniority of service counted. For those who were of necessity omitted, Mr. Lechworthy had provided a fine display of fireworks. Inside the hall the Bishop of Merspool was in the chair, Mr. Albert Grice, M.P., was ready to speak, and the address was to be presented by Mr. Hutchinson, supported by speeches from Mr. Wallis, Mr. Salter and Mr. Bailey. In spite of this, either from altruism or from want of thought, several of the privileged workmen offered their tickets freely to comrades who had otherwise to be content with the display of fireworks; nor were these offers invariably accepted. Some observations by the Bishop on

the influences of religion in our commercial life occupied five lines in the papers next morning, concluding, "The presentation then took place." The *Morning Guide* was more explicit and gave nearly a column. It reported the Bishop, Mr. Grice, and Mr. Hutchinson; it summarised Mr. Wallis and Mr. Salter, and asserted that Mr. Bailey (who had spoken for twenty-five minutes) "added a few words of graceful eulogy." All it said of Mr. Lechworthy was the bald statement that he returned thanks. Thus, indeed, had Mr. Lechworthy directed.

None of the papers noted the presence on the platform of Miss Hilda Auriol, the niece of Mr. Lechworthy, nor can it be pretended that she constituted an item of public interest. But, for the idle purposes of this story, something must be said of her, even if, in consequence, it become necessary to suppress any detailed account of Mr. Bailey's words of graceful eulogy, or of the Bishop's rediscovery that it is better to be good.

Wilberforce Lechworthy, childless and a widower, had been glad to adopt Hilda Auriol, one of his married sister's very numerous family. At the age of six he professed to have detected in her a decided character. She was now twenty-three, and her uncle was very fond of her, but she was perhaps the only person of whom he was much afraid. Let it not be supposed that her temper was either sour or dictatorial. She was sunniness itself, and her criticism of life—includ-

ing her uncle—was fresh and breezy. Her perspicacity detected and her soul abhorred anything that was specious and plausible; in practical politics and in the conduct of a great modern business the specious and the plausible have unfortunately their place, and Wilberforce did occasionally say things after which he experienced a momentary reluctance to meet his niece's eye. She had a sense of humour and she was by nature a fighter. Her uncle himself was not a keener politician, and it was perhaps fortunate that in most respects their politics were identical. If she had asserted her independence she had not lost her femininity; she did take much thought as to the wherewithal she should be clothed, and she liked admiration. And she got it. If she had not already refused six offers of marriage, it was merely because she had not allowed six men to go quite as far as they had intended. Heart-whole, she had not yet met a man who much interested her, nor was she trying to arrange the meeting. She paid no great attention to athletics, but she could swim a mile, could sit a horse, and was a really good shot with a revolver. Of the last item her uncle had not entirely approved. "Why not?" said Hilda. "It's a question of instinct. Instinct wouldn't let me play football or smack a policeman's face, but it does let me learn to shoot and want to vote." She explained that she was only ready to use violence if it were not her own violence but the violence of the other sex. "For instance, when

young Bruce Chalmers had the cheek to try to address your men, I would not have thrown stones myself, but—if I had been there—I would have encouraged the men who did throw them."

"For goodness' sake don't say that," said her uncle. "It was a lamentable occurrence, and it was most unfortunate that it was a woman who was hurt. It has done us more harm than good."

Hilda laughed. She had a rather disconcerting laugh.

At the presentation she had looked charming. In the afternoon she had made friends with a dozen babies and played games with them, and she still wore her afternoon dress. But she looked fresh, cool, unruffled, delicately tended. Her mutinous little mouth remained firm and quiet, but a wicked brightness came into her eyes whenever a speaker achieved unconscious humour—and this was a calamity which occurred to most of the speakers. On the other hand, when Mr. Grice recalled "an intensely amusing anecdote related to me by an old Scottish lady," Hilda sighed gently and seemed to be thinking of far-off sad things. To such an extent may feminine perversity be carried.

Mr. Grice, Mr. Hutchinson and Mr. Wallis were all directors of the company, and returned to London in Mr. Lechworthy's special saloon carriage. The express stopped at Setton Park by arrangement to pick it up. The Bishop had already spread his ecclesiastical wings in another direction. Supper was served at a little flower-decked table in

the carriage for the party of eight. The three who have not already been mentioned were Lechworthy's elderly unmarried sister, who was nervous and good-natured; Burton, his secretary, who had obligingly taken a shorthand note; and Mr. Harmer, quite recently of Corpus, Oxford, and at present a leader-writer on the *Morning Guide*. Mr. Harmer wore at first the air of a man who had got the little party together and meant to be kind to them, even if they did not quite reach his level. Later he had a brief conversation with Hilda Auriol, to whom he wished to say complimentary things; Hilda, metaphorically speaking, smote him between the eyes, and thereafter he wore the air of a dead rabbit. Yet she addressed her uncle's secretary as Tommy, and went into fits of laughter over his excellent but irreverent imitation of the Bishop of Merspool, done for her private delectation. She was polite and charming to Mr. Hutchinson and Mr. Wallis, who admired her intensely; and to Mr. Grice, who admired her quite as much as a married and middle-aged Member of Parliament had any business to do. Altogether, it was a cheerful little party. Mr. Lechworthy, his sister and his niece did not touch the dry champagne to which the others did justice; but Mr. Lechworthy's ginger-ale, taken in a champagne-glass, presented a colourable imitation of festivity. At the moment of the cigarette, Miss Lechworthy and her niece retired to rest with instructions that they were not to be called before London.

In the little saloon, when the supper-table had been cleared, the men sat round and chatted, Mr. Harmer alone being taciturn—which was unusual with him. If the conversation was now more serious it was quite optimistic. Mr. Grice removed a faded malmaison from his button-hole, jerked it into the outer darkness, and remarked that it must be difficult for a man of Mr. Lechworthy's splendid energy to get himself to take a holiday at all.

Mr. Lechworthy was smoking the briar pipe which he permitted himself after dark. His figure was lean, and at this late hour of night did not show any sign of fatigue. He sat upright. His hair was grey, but he had no tendency to baldness. He did not wear spectacles or false teeth. He certainly seemed for a man of his age unusually strong and healthy. But he made his customary observation that he was not as young as he had been. He spoke of his holiday plans.

"Let me see," said Mr. Wallis. "I suppose you go to Sydney first?"

"Sydney and then Auckland. Might go on by one of the Union boats from there. But I want to get a little off the usual lines, and I think that I should do better to buy or hire a schooner there. I know very little about such things, but I have friends at Auckland who would help me. I'm fond of sailing."

"You're to be envied," said Grice. "No business, no House of Commons. Nothing to do but enjoy yourself."

Lechworthy fixed his rather fanatical eyes on him. "Nothing to do but enjoy myself? That would be a poor kind of life, Grice. No, no. Let me use my holiday as I have tried to use politics, journalism, and even the business with which I have just disconnected myself—to the highest service of all."

"Quite so," said Hutchinson. "The rest—the gain in health and strength—will be valuable to you, because they will enable you to resume that service."

"Yes, yes. True enough. But I had thought of something beyond that. A voyage without an end in view would not greatly interest me, and even if one does not work one must at least have some sort of occupation. Our friend, Mr. Harmer, will laugh at me, but I am proposing to write a pamphlet—it may even be a little book."

It should surely be abhorrent to a leader-writer to laugh at his proprietor's ambitions. Mr. Harmer did not laugh. He left his taciturnity and his brandy-and-soda to observe that he was convinced that Mr. Lechworthy had already possessed materials for a dozen books—interesting books too. If there was any difficulty about getting the thing into literary shape Mr. Harmer would only be too happy, etc., etc.

"Thank you very much. If I don't ask you, it won't be because I don't know your capabilities in that way. But, you see, Mr. Harmer, I'm not going to try to do anything literary. I couldn't.

And if you did it for me under my name, I should be wearing borrowed plumes. Tell you what I'm going to do—I'm going to make notes of the different missions in the islands I visit. I can only touch the fringe of the subject, of course. Goodness knows how many inhabited islands there are where I'm going—Eastern and Southern Pacific—and I shall only have six or eight months there. Still I want to wake up our people about South Sea Missions. The ordinary man knows nothing about the islands. What could you, Tommy, for instance, tell us about them?"

"I dunno," said Tommy, reflectively. "I read some yarns about them when I was a kid. All coral and cokernuts, ain't they?"

"Ah! There are human souls there too. Yes, and I'm told that in one group at any rate Roman Catholicism is rampant. There's work to be done."

"Well," said Grice, "if we hadn't been fools enough to let the French slip in and grab what they wanted—"

"Grice, my friend, let us be proud that in one instance, at any rate, this country has not done all the grabbing. I'm not going to suggest that we should add one square foot to our possessions. We have too much—territorially, we're gorged. No, let us see rather what we can do to spread the true religion in place of the false. That's what I feel. If I can do one little thing for the cause of true religion, then my holiday won't be entirely wasted."

"No, indeed," said Mr. Wallis, who suddenly

felt that his cigar and the glass in front of him had been inappropriate.

Mr. Lechworthy's fist descended solemnly on the table before him. "True religion—that's the only thing. I've kept it before me in my business. I've tried to show that it is possible to treat the workman as a brother, to consider his soul's eternal salvation, and yet to make a fair profit. I've dared to bring practical religion into journalism. The *Morning Guide* loses me so much every day, so much every year. The money's set aside for it—to produce a paper which will never print a divorce case or an item of racing news—a paper in which every feuilleton clearly and distinctly enforces a good moral—a paper which will be the sworn foe of this blatant self-styled imperialism. In the House I venture to say that I belong to the religious party. You'll find little religion among the Conservatives—and what there is, is largely tainted with ritualism. Unprofitable servant that I am, little though I have done, I have at least kept my faith and carried it into my life."

There were a few seconds of silence. Then somewhere at the back of the saloon a fool of a servant opened a bottle of soda-water. It went off with a loud and ironical pop. The gurgle of the fluid seemed to utter a repeated tut-tut. But Mr. Lechworthy was unperturbed. Gliding easily into another subject, he began to talk about cameras. His book or pamphlet, whichever it might be, was to be profusely illustrated. Mr. Wallis, an

amateur photographer of some experience, was lavish with his advice. Later, a possible title for the book was discovered. Mr. Grice, who had been a little sleepy, grew suddenly alert again and almost disproportionately enthusiastic. "A magnificent and noble enterprise that could only have occurred to yourself, Lechworthy," was a phrase that possibly overstated the facts. Tommy Burton slept peacefully—poor Tommy Burton—much in love with Hilda Auriol and condemned to perpetual cheerfulness and brotherhood.

. . . . . .

Thus it happened that the schooner which Cyril Mast had sighted bore with it to the island of Faloo Mr. Lechworthy and his niece. He had never intended to take Hilda with him at all, but then Hilda had always intended to go. Faloo had never been part of his programme, and all that the skipper could tell him about it was that it was wrongly charted; but Hilda had caught a glimpse of it in the evening light and decided that she must spend an hour or two there. It was immediately discovered that the ship needed oranges and taro, and that Faloo might as well provide them. Lechworthy still had a will of his own, but then the captain knew so much more and Hilda cared so much more, and the sweet content of the South Seas had settled down upon him. He had eaten peach-flavoured bananas and was learning the mango. The expressed juice of the fresh lime,

mingled with ice and soda-water, seemed to him the best drink that had ever been found. As to the missions—well, he was getting a general impression (which bothered him a little, because it was not quite the impression that he had meant to get), and he would fill in the bare facts later. He had taken many photographs and would develop the rolls of film as soon as he could find the time—unless he came upon somebody who would do them for him.

At dawn the *Snowflake* lay in a dead calm just outside the reef. Cyril Mast took a good look at her. The snowy decks, the brilliant white paint and the polished metal showing a hundred bright points of light in the sunshine, told that this was no ordinary trader. Had the retreat of the exiles been discovered at last? No, for the ship to come in that case would be something sterner than this pretty toy. In a few minutes he had changed his clothes; and now his collar, his necktie and his waistcoat proclaimed his calling. He could manage a canoe excellently himself—it was his favourite pastime when sober—but now his dignity demanded that a couple of natives should propel him out through the opening in the reef to the schooner's side. The natives—as curious as Mast—were eager for the work. At the moment the mad idea which Mast subsequently carried out had not yet entered his head. All that he wanted was to find out what the schooner was, and if possible to get some break in the accursed

monotony of his island life. He wanted, pathetically, to exchange a few civilities with some white man who did not know too much about him—to catch a glimpse of the outside world that had been closed to him. That was why he wore the starched dog-collar that was so uncomfortable, and the frayed black alpaca jacket, and the waistcoat of clerical cut. He had not worn them for ages, but he meant now, for an hour perhaps, to get back to the old time, before certain events had made Faloo the only place in the world for him.

Already there were many natives on the beach, adorned with wreaths and necklaces of flowers, wearing holiday clothes. It might be of course that the schooner was merely waiting for a wind, but perhaps a boat would come ashore and there would be much festivity. Possibly some order had come to them from King Smith, for a few of the natives who would have launched their canoes were restrained by the others; and the two men who had taken Cyril Mast out did not attempt to go on board. Of King Smith himself nothing was to be seen. The white men still slept peacefully in their bedrooms at the club, or in their own houses. The schooner was Cyril Mast's own discovery; none of the others knew of its arrival.

On the deck of the *Snowflake* Mr. Lechworthy came forward with hand outstretched.

"I don't know your name, sir," he said, "but I am glad and proud to meet you. Missionary enterprise is a subject in which I take the deepest

interest. My name's Lechworthy—you may have come across it in connection with my business."

Cyril Mast stammered his own name. He was astounded. He, the pariah, the outcast, had been mistaken for a missionary. This man of wealth and position was admiring his heroic self-sacrifice. And that beautiful girl with the laughing eyes—

"Permit me, sir, to present you to my niece, Miss Auriol."

Miss Auriol took one glance at his pimply, blotchy complexion, and in great charity remembered that there was a complaint called prickly heat and that a prolonged sojourn in the tropics must be unhealthy for a European. She chatted freely. They expected to sail again later in the morning, but were sending a boat ashore to see if they could get some fresh fruit. Her uncle and she had thought of going in the boat and getting an hour, perhaps, in Faloo.

As she spoke, Cyril Mast made up his mind. He would act the part that had been given him. The deception could not be kept up for any length of time, but it might be managed for one hour. It was simple enough to call the club the mission-house. Few if any of the members would be about at this hour, and he could manage to get breakfast served at a table on the lawn outside the house. An hour in which to see this beautiful English girl—

He found himself speaking rapidly. They must certainly come ashore and have breakfast at the mission-house. His canoe would pilot their boat.

It would be the greatest pleasure for him to show them something of the island. See, that was the mission-house there among the orange-trees.

Hilda Auriol and her uncle agreed that it looked charming; the invitation was at once accepted. Preparations for their departure and the arrangements for their return were made at once. Cyril Mast's canoe flew over the water, the schooner's boat following. Speaking partly in the native tongue and partly in English he explained to the crowd on the beach that the ship was "Mikonaree." He would take the "Minkonaree" and his daughter up to the club, where they wished to go. The others—they must entertain them as best they could—would be going up to the stores to buy things and the King would direct what was to be done.

On their way up from the beach to the club-house Mr. Lechworthy asked if Mr. Mast had been long on the island.

"Four years."

"And never a holiday?"

"No," said Mast, who every moment felt more like a real missionary, "no, I have needed no holiday."

"Rather lonely, I should think," said Hilda.

"Well, one has one's work. There are other white men on the island too—traders and planters. You may possibly see some of them up at the mission-house."

Lechworthy began on the subject of his book—

his projected work on the missions of the South Seas. A native girl ran up with a necklace of flowers for Hilda. Mast began to talk more easily and fluently, falling into the part that had been assigned to him. He described King Smith, that prodigy among natives, with accuracy and with some humour. He was sketching the French Mission for his guests as they entered, with exclamations of delight, the beautiful garden of the Exiles' Club. Somewhere at the back of his head Mast was wondering why King Smith had not appeared. The arrival of a schooner constituted a great event. What could he be doing?

Just at present the King sat in his office, deep in thought. Another event had happened which made the schooner's arrival of comparatively little importance in his eyes. It was the first sign that his power might not hold back the native outbreak, and it had come before he expected it. In the early morning, while it was still dark, the King as he lay awake had heard a scream—brief, agonised. It seemed to be fairly near—a hundred yards or so away. He had lighted a lantern and searched the scrub at the back of the stores. There he had found the dead body of a white man with a native knife sticking in his throat. The white man was Duncombe, and no complaint against him had ever reached the King's ears. It was a private revenge, and might not end there.

The King decided and acted quickly. Already the body was buried out of sight, covered with

quicklime in a shallow grave. Hundreds of the natives were in a state of angry ferment, held back by the King with difficulty; if they saw that the first step had already been taken, it would be impossible to hold them back at all. The King himself had been the grave-digger, and had kept his own counsel. Duncombe would be missed at the Exiles' Club that day. On the morrow his friends would be anxiously searching for him. Meanwhile, the King would have found out the assassin and would have used the strange gift with which the natives credited him. He would talk to the man seriously in the melodious native tongue, and say that he wished for his death. No other step would be necessary. The man would go back to his hut, refuse food, remain obstinately silent, and presently draw a cloth over his face and die. In what way the death was caused the King could not have told you, though once before he had used this gift. Modern science may choose between an explanation by hypnotic suggestion, or a blunt denial of a fact which has been credibly witnessed and reported.

In a few days the strange disappearance of Duncombe would be forgotten. The King felt sure that for a while at any rate no further provocation would come from the white men. The natives would quiet down again, and their King would be free to follow the line of his own ambitions.

For the moment nothing else could be done. The King roused himself and went out to look at

the schooner. Word had already been brought to him that this was not a trader. His interest was no more than idle curiosity. He did not know that already there reclined in a lounge-chair on the lawn of the Exiles' Club the man for whom he had been seeking. Lechworthy proposed to enjoy his hour or two in Faloo; he also did not know. He did not know that he was destined to remain in Faloo for days, and to meet with incidents that were but little enjoyable.

CHAPTER IV

THE Rev. Cyril Mast left his guests for a few minutes on the lawn, while he went into the club to order breakfast. The hour was early, but not unusually early, and the Exiles' Club never closed. For a few hours after midnight the staff was much diminished, and only one of the white servants was on duty, but even then a member could always get anything he wanted. At least two-thirds of the members had bedrooms at the club.

But to-day the club did not wear its air of morning freshness. The soiled glasses and laden ash-trays of the night before were left still on the little tables on the verandah and in the hall. Not enough windows had been opened, and the sour smell of stale cigar-smoke poisoned the place. Even the Rev. Cyril Mast, who was by no means particular, noticed it. A reluctant native servant was sent to

find Thomas, and failed; a minute later Thomas arrived of his own volition from the bedrooms, looking hurried and worried. His quick eye noticed Mast's clerical clothes.

"I say, Thomas," said Mast, "this place is in a hell of a mess."

"Yes, sir," said Thomas, and gave a rapid order to two native servants. "Very sorry, sir, but it's all the schooner."

"How do you mean?"

"It's made so many of the gentlemen unusually early. Quite a little excitement when we first heard about it, sir. Seems it's just a chance visit from some missionary, but it's meant more for us to do here—gentlemen requiring baths and breakfasts. Three orders to give at this moment."

"Do that first, and then I can talk."

"Thank you, sir," said Thomas, and called down the speaking-tube. "Drinking cokernut, large gin, ice and dry biscuit to Lord Charles. Got that? Right. Tea and boiled eggs, Mr. Bassett. Got that? Right. Those two lots in the bedrooms at once. Coffee, two pork chops and stewed pineapple to Mr. Mandelbaum downstairs in twenty minutes. Yes, that's all. Now, sir, I'm ready."

"I have two guests from the schooner—one of them is a lady—and I want breakfast for them in the garden. And, look here, Thomas, they're here for only an hour or so, and we've got business, and if possible I don't want to be interrupted by

any of the gentlemen. Put the table in some secluded corner. See?"

"Certainly, sir. Sir John and Dr. Soames Pryce are out already, sir, but they will probably have gone to the beach, and I think there's no other gentleman down yet."

As they settled the details of the breakfast more windows were opened and a strong, fresh breeze blew in from the sea. Under the eye of Thomas the native servants moved more quickly and order began to be restored.

"You manage those beggars pretty well," said Mast.

But Thomas was pessimistic. Four gallons of methylated spirits had been stolen from the club stores, and for the life of him he couldn't find out which of his boys had got it. It was his belief that the only man who could really manage them was King Smith.

The Rev. Cyril Mast had been careful to place chairs for his guests where the orange-trees screened them from any view of the house. Mr. Lechworthy was perfectly contented to stay where he had been put. He was quite happy, and he promised himself that presently he would acquire valuable material for a sketch of a Protestant mission on one of the smallest, the loneliest, and the most beautiful of the South Sea islands. Meanwhile he had risen very early, and he had some ability for the five-minute snooze. His head went back and the brim of his black felt hat shaded his

eyes. But Hilda Auriol had sighted a big parrot, swaying on its perch in a patch of sunshine, and it was her wont to make friends with all tame birds and beasts.

She went up and spoke to the parrot. The bird gave a husky cough, imitated the act of expectoration, and began to say the three worst things it knew. Then it sat blinking and thinking in silence. As Hilda passed the verandah, the French windows of the card-room were flung wide open, and she caught one glimpse of it—precisely as it had been left the night before. She returned and roused Mr. Lechworthy.

"There are at least sixteen missionaries here, uncle, which seems a good many for such a small island. The sixteen play cards, drink, and teach a parrot bad language. I don't think I like them."

Mr. Lechworthy was much startled. "What do you mean, my dear?"

Hilda told him precisely what she had seen—the card-room with the four tables, at all of which play had taken place, and the other tables piled with glasses, gazogenes, and tiny decanters. She pointed out the parrot, and once more the bird became clearly articulate and quite reprehensible.

"I cannot understand it," said Mr. Lechworthy. "The thing's incomprehensible. I must see into this—there may be something which I shall have to put a stop to. I ought not to have brought you here, Hilda. You must leave me and get back to the boat at once."

Hilda laughed. "Oh, no. We'll see it through together. Here comes our host."

"Well, he shall have his chance to explain. He spoke of other white men—traders and planters. They may be responsible. It is impossible to believe that a minister of the true religion would—No, he will explain."

Hilda and her uncle went forward to meet Mast. They stood now in full view of the house and close to the entrance to the garden. Mast was voluble in his apologies. He was sorry to have kept them so long, but he was afraid his native servants were not very intelligent. He feared that breakfast would be rather primitive when it did arrive. But they would have it in a spot from which one of the loveliest views in the island could be obtained.

Mr. Lechworthy smiled pleasantly. He and his niece preferred to live quite simply, and it was most kind of Mr. Mast to entertain them in any case. "While we are waiting for breakfast, perhaps you will show us the mission-house. We should particularly like to see that—the church, too, that you built for the natives."

Cyril Mast made three different excuses in three different sentences. Lechworthy watched him narrowly, and drew one or two correct conclusions. His pleasant smile vanished, and beneath their heavy brows his eyes looked serious.

And then Bassett's curious little figure appeared on the verandah. He had hurried through his

breakfast and was hastening down to the beach to find out what he could of the schooner. But he was scarcely outside the doors before the wind, blowing now with increasing force, caught up his big felt hat and whirled it into the bushes. Bassett chased his hat, and for the moment did not notice the little group by the orange-trees. But Lechworthy's quick eye had already recognised him.

"That man over there—is he also engaged in missionary work?"

"Yes. In a sense, yes," stammered Mast. "He—"

"It will be interesting to talk to him about it. I happen to know him, and I will call him. Bassett!"

Bassett was startled and turned sharply. He came very slowly across the lawn, much as a dog comes to his master for punishment. What on earth was Lechworthy doing in Faloo? Was he, too, flying from justice? That would explain the arrival of the schooner and the fact that he was evidently on friendly terms with Cyril Mast. But Bassett had to put that notion aside. Knowing Lechworthy, he knew that it was not possible. And Bassett was very much afraid. What did Lechworthy mean to do? Well, he must put the best face on it he could. A defence that would be torn to rags in court might seem plausible enough in Faloo.

"Good-morning, Mr. Lechworthy," said Bassett. "This is a great surprise. Morning, Mast."

"Bassett," said Lechworthy, "Mr. Mast, whom I had not met before, brought us here from my schooner. He has told me that you are associated with him in his missionary work here. Now you, Bassett, I have met many times before, and I know your history."

But it was not Bassett who answered; it was Cyril Mast, whose face was white and twitched curiously.

"This is my fault, Mr. Lechworthy," said Mast. "I had not meant to represent myself to you as a missionary. But you made the mistake, and I was tempted to go on with it."

"Yes," said Lechworthy, quietly. "I don't think I see why. You hardly seem to be enjoying a practical joke."

"Don't you? For four years I have not spoken with a decent white man or woman. We are all the same here—and we're here because there's no other place left. If you had known about me—the truth about me—you would not have spoken to me at all. That's all. Don't ask me any questions, please. I'm going to leave you now. Get back to the schooner at once; any of the natives on the beach will find a canoe for you."

Without a word to Bassett, Mast raised his hat and turned away. He went up the steps of the verandah and into the club-house.

"I think," said Hilda, "that his advice is good. It's blowing hard now, and the *Snowflake* can't lie where she is—with a reef on her lee."

"Yes, my dear, we will go. But I must have a few words with Mr. Bassett in private. Go on ahead of us a little."

And now Bassett found his tongue. "You must not pay any attention to what Mast said, Mr. Lechworthy. Mast is a good fellow, but he suffers from fits of morbid depression in which he believes himself to have done horrible things—the life here is very lonely, you know—no amusements of any kind—nobody to speak to."

Lechworthy thought of the card-tables. "Bassett," he said, "it's not about Mast but about yourself that I wish to speak. Many have looked for you and have not found you. I have found you unwittingly—I think because I was sent to find you. You are a thief, Bassett. You are a murderer, for one of those poor women whose property you stole took her own life."

"I am absolutely innocent, Mr. Lechworthy. I have a complete explanation. You—should be careful, sir. I have seen men shot dead on this island for saying less than you have said to me."

"Do not try to frighten me, Bassett. I am ready for death when God wills, and death will come no sooner than that. You are coming back home with me, Bassett. You've fled to the far corner of the earth, and it's no use; your sin has found you out. You are coming back to take your trial, and, if need be, your punishment. Do that, and I will help you by all the means in my power. I will help you to make your peace with man and

to something better—your peace with God. It's the one way to happiness. You'll find no way here. Turn back for nothing. Come now, this moment."

Even as he spoke Bassett had made his plan. Hilda, a few yards in front of them, turned round. "Which way?" she called.

"The little track to the right, if you please," called Bassett, "it's the shortest." Then he turned to Lechworthy. "I will come," he said. "I put myself in your hands unreservedly."

The little track to the right was very narrow and led through thick scrub, damp and odorous with the scent of the frangipani bushes. Hilda, well on ahead, fought her way through a tangle of lianas. Behind her came Lechworthy, crouching and going gingerly, serenely happy. Behind him at a little distance came Bassett, his hat under his arm, sweating profusely, the revolver which he had taken out from his pocket held clumsily in his shaking right hand.

And some way behind Bassett, going far faster than any of them, and unseen by any of them, came the lithe figure of King Smith.

Just as Bassett fired the King's club came down heavily on his head. Hilda turned with a cry, as she heard the report, and struggled back again to her uncle. Mr. Lechworthy had at last found a place where he could stand upright and ease his aching back. He held his black felt hat in his hand, and examined the bullet-hole in the rim with a mild, inquiring, benevolent eye.

"You are not hurt, uncle?"

"Not in the least, my dear, thanks to this gentleman."

"Get up," said King Smith to Bassett.

Dazed, rubbing his sore head with one hand, Bassett staggered to his feet. He looked from one to the other bewildered. In this wind, that gave a voice to every bush, he had not heard the approach of King Smith. And now his revolver lay on the ground, and the King's foot was on it, and it was the King who spoke in a way that Bassett had not heard before.

"I have finished with you. Go where you like and do what you like. And a little before midnight you will die."

It was a definite sentence of death, and Bassett knew it. Half-stunned as he was, he could still lie and make a defence.

He began an explanation. He had taken out the revolver to draw the cartridges and stumbled. The thing was a pure accident. But of course King Smith was not in earnest. He could not sentence a white man to death like that. He would be elected to the white men's club in a few days. The white men were his partners in business, and—

The King cut him short. "It is to the King and not to the trader that you speak now," he said, as he picked up Bassett's revolver. "Do not compel me to shoot you where you stand. It is better that you should have a few hours to arrange your affairs. Shortly before midnight, remember."

Bassett turned away in silence. Certainly the white men would act together and stop an outrage of this kind. He must see Sir John and Dr. Pryce at once.

The King was transformed immediately from a stern judge into a courteous man. He made many apologies to Lechworthy. He brought news from the *Snowflake,* from which he had just returned. The wind had got up so suddenly that there had been no time to send for Lechworthy; the schooner had run for the lee of the island.

"I think, Mr. Lechworthy, that the English have a proverb that it is an ill wind which blows nobody any good. I confess that I am very glad to get this opportunity of speaking with you. You can help us very much in this island if you will. Of course my palace in the interior will be entirely at the disposal of yourself and your niece. A guard will be placed there, and I can guarantee your personal safety. I will do my best for your comfort. And in a day or two, when the hurricane has blown itself out, you shall go on your way again if you will."

"We owe you our lives, sir," said Mr. Lechworthy with some dignity. "And now we must thank you for your hospitality as well. It is as though God had sent you to save us. We shall come to you willingly and with the utmost gratitude."

"Yes, indeed," said Hilda.

"Perhaps," said the King, "you will do me a

greater service than anything I am able to do for you. Now, if you follow me back to the next clearing, some of my people will be waiting for us."

"There's just one thing," said Hilda, hesitatingly. She had never spoken to a King before, and she was rather shy about it.

"Yes?" said the King, smiling. "The schooner? It will be quite safe."

"I'm afraid," said Hilda, "that I meant—er—clothes."

"I foresaw that," said the King. "Everything in that way that could be got together in the few minutes that we had to spare has already been brought ashore in my canoes. If there is anything further that you would like, another canoe will go out to the schooner as soon as it is practicable."

"Thanks so much," said Hilda, fervently.

They retraced their steps to the clearing, for the path by which Bassett had taken them led only into the scrub. Many natives were in waiting, full of smiles and excitement. To one group after another the King gave rapid yet careful directions. Some sped inland and others down to the beach. Presently some twenty of the native boys were racing on bicycles up the road to the King's house. Soon only two of the natives remained, two girls of surpassing beauty, chosen by the King from many aspirants. The King turned to Hilda.

"Miss Auriol, these two girls wish to be your friends, and to do everything that you want while

you are on the island. They will be in attendance upon you while you are at my house, if you will let them come. They are of my kin, and they speak a little English. If you will have them, you will make them very happy."

Hilda had already been watching the girls with frank admiration. "Oh, yes, please," she said eagerly. "There is nothing I should have liked better."

Tiva and Ioia flew to her side at once. Hilda made in them pleasant discoveries of shyness, *naïveté,* curiosity, the utmost friendliness, and a delicious sense of humour. Their questions were many and amazing, their broken English made her laugh, and their laughter echoed her own. Even in the short descent to the beach, these fascinating people made her forget how near she had been to tragedy. The beautiful island of Faloo that had begun to be dark and hateful to her took up its charm again.

Behind the group of girls walked Mr. Lechworthy in placid converse with the King.

"Events happen quickly here," said Lechworthy. "A bogus missionary—a meeting with an absconding solicitor, whom I knew in his better days—an attempt to murder me—my escape, for which I thank you, sir, and, unhappily, the sentence of death." He hesitated, and then ventured to point out that in England an attempt to murder was punished less severely.

To the ignorant native the English practice

seemed to be illogical and to put a premium on bad shooting. But he did not raise this point. He said that he had never pronounced sentence on a white man before, though the white men in his island had done much wrong. This was not the only offence that Bassett had committed, and it was necessary that he should die. "Here, you see, I am the King and the law—and my island is not England. It is all different. You will see later."

There was a pause, and then the King said, "I already know something of you, Mr. Lechworthy. I read your speeches at the time of the South African war, and an article about you which appeared a year or more ago in a paper called the *Spectator*. I have your pamphlet about Setton Park, and I have many copies of the *Morning Guide* containing articles signed by you. I cannot tell you with what joy I found it was you that the *Snowflake* had brought. You, perhaps more than any other Englishman, can help us here."

"Every minute, sir, I become more surprised. Here, many hundreds of miles from civilisation, I find a native king who speaks English like an Englishman, procures and reads the English papers, even knows something of such a seventh-rate politician and busy-body as myself. But, sir, with the best will in the world to help you in any way that my conscience permits, I don't see what I am to do."

"If you are kind enough to permit me to dine with you to-night, I will explain everything."

They had reached the beach, and once more the King changed the subject.

"You breakfasted at the Exiles' Club? No? I thought perhaps that might be so. Well, it is all ready here." The King led the way to a broad balcony of his unofficial residence, well sheltered from the wind. "You will be more comfortable at my house inland—here there is not much."

Certainly, the plates and cups were of various patterns and had seen service; the forks and spoons were not coated with a precious metal, and the use of the Union Jack as a cloth to the low breakfast-table could only be excused by those who saw that a compliment was intended. But Mr. Lechworthy drank the best coffee he had met in the islands, and devoured in blind faith delicious fruits of which he did not even know the names. "Also very good," he murmured at every fresh experiment. King Smith had business needing his attention elsewhere, and it was Tiva and Ioia who waited upon his guests. Nominally these two girls did not breakfast, but Tiva ate sugar when she happened to come across it, and Ioia drank coffee out of Hilda's cup when Hilda had finished with it. In the intervals they learned the word "Hilda," and exchanged the story of the robber-crab for hints on hair-dressing. Of their own toilette they spoke with an innocent freedom, utterly open-air and natural, which to some European girls might have been disconcerting. But Hilda had picked up the right point of view, an invaluable possession

to the traveller anywhere. She had talked and played with native girls in Tahiti and other islands, but she had found nothing so charming as Tiva and Ioia.

"When shall we go on to the palace?" Hilda asked.

"Sometime—plenty quick," said Tiva. The answer was not precise; but then to Tiva the question was idle, for what on earth does time matter?

"I wonder," said Mr. Lechworthy, "if you could tell us anything about this palace? It must be an interesting place."

Mr. Lechworthy inspired the girls with some awe. It was quite clear to them that he was a very great chief indeed, and possibly King Edward VII. Never before had King Smith received any white man in this way. Wherefore Tiva hid her face in Hilda's shoulder. Ioia said thoughtfully that the palace was a "plenty-plenty big house." She had thoughts of adding a few picturesque inventions—it was so hard for her not to give everybody everything they wanted—but she refrained. It subsequently transpired, in talk with Hilda, that neither Tiva nor Ioia had ever seen the King's official residence. It stood in a big garden, hidden by trees, and the whole place had been taboo to all native women. A few of the native men had charge of it, and no one else had been allowed to enter. This would be changed now. Tiva and Ioia were to reside there as long as Hilda remained, and it was clear that they

looked forward with delight to this privilege and, possibly, to the satisfaction of their curiosity.

King Smith himself announced that all was now ready for the drive to his house in the interior. There were two light, well-built buggies, with island ponies harnessed to them. Hilda and her two attendants went in the first vehicle, followed by the King and Mr. Lechworthy. The luggage had already gone on, borne on the heads of natives. The drive was along a wide, white-powdered road, bordered on either side by groves of palms. Glorious bougainvilleas made streams and splashes of colour. The tall utu scattered its graceful plumes of rose and white. Sheltered though the road was, the travellers could hear the roar of the wind, and now and then a soft thud, as a nut heavily-husked thumped to the ground.

As they went, the King told Lechworthy all that he wished to know about the Exiles' Club.

"But how can you permit it, sir—this lazar-house, this refuge for the worst scum of Europe polluting your beautiful kingdom?"

"I have not only permitted it, I have even—in vain—tried to become a member of the club. I have done even worse. My friend, if a man wishes to escape from a prison, he will use good tools, if he has them, to break through the walls. And if he has not good tools, he will use anything that comes to his hand—rusty iron, old nails, anything. And he will use them even if they hurt his hand and put a festering wound in it."

"Yes, sir, I see what you mean. I will not judge hastily. To-night, I think you said—"

"To-night I tell you everything. You will find much to condemn, much that is hateful to you. But you love liberty and you will help my people in spite of all. Then I shall no longer need the bad tools, and I shall put them down. And as for the festering wound in my hand, I shall burn it with a little gunpowder and in time it will be made whole again."

Lechworthy, watching him as he spoke, was conscious that he had found here a master among men, clear in purpose, indomitable in pursuit of it. But where was the man's Christianity? What were his political purposes? Was there no danger in being drawn into them? Well, that night he would see. He had already found that the King could be inexorable, and that it seemed impossible to procure postponement of the execution of Bassett even by one single hour.

Bassett himself was horribly frightened, but he did not believe that the sentence of death would be carried out. For the moment King Smith was angry; later in the day Bassett would see him again, or would get Sir John to do it for him. He would persist, of course, that the shot was accidental. Besides, King Smith might be pleased to say that he did not speak as a trader, but he still was a trader, and on the trader the members of the Exiles' Club could bring very stringent and serious pressure to bear. If the King still persisted—well, it

was easy enough for him to pronounce sentence, but he would find it impossible to carry it out.

In the hall of the club Mr. Bassett found the Rev. Cyril Mast and Lord Charles Baringstoke. The latter was shivering in pale blue pyjamas and an ulster; he had not yet bathed, neither had he brushed his yellow hair. The two men were getting on well with a bottle of doubtful champagne.

"Hullo, Mr. damned Bassett," said his lordship. "You've got a lot of blood on your collar. Somebody been crackin' your egg for you?"

Bassett took no notice of him. He turned upon Mast and swore hard at him. So choked was he with rage that he could hardly articulate. He repeated himself over and over again. Had Mast gone clean out of his mind? What had he done it for? What had he brought Lechworthy there for? Lechworthy of all people! He stormed and spluttered his abuse.

"Lechworthy was my guest and you can mind your own business," said Mast, sullenly, and refilled his glass. "If you swear at me again, I'll hit you."

"My business?" screamed Bassett—but he did not swear this time. "Why, wait till you've heard. We're done—every man of us—and all the result of your folly. You haven't seen King Smith, but I have—and he means to take my life to-night. Oh, what's the good of talking to you boozers? Where's Pryce? Where's Sir John?"

"Ask the waiter," said Mast.

"Look here, old friend, I'll tell you. Pryce and Sir John went out to find Duncombe," said Lord Charles. "Duncombe's been stopping out all night. Naughty, naughty! And won't he catch it from Sir Jonathan Gasbags? Jaw, jaw, jaw! Lordy, I had some of it yesterday! I say, Bassett, has anything really been happening? Because, if so, I should like to be in it. Why, there they are!"

Sir John and Dr. Soames Pryce entered from the verandah. Mast and Bassett both began to speak at once, angrily and in a high voice. Lord Charles Baringstoke gave a quite good imitation of a north-country pitman encouraging a dog-fight. The noise was terrific. Members came out from the reading-room to see what was happening. Servants paused on the stairs to watch.

Sir John's walking-cane came down with a crack on the table before him. "Silence!" he roared. And he got it.

"Now, then," he said severely, "is this a club or a bear-garden? You—members of the committee—behaving like this? Now, Mr. Bassett. Now, sir, I'll hear you first. And don't shout, please."

"A most serious thing has happened, Sir John. I fear that we're done for. I must see you and Dr. Pryce in private about it. And the whole thing's due to the damned folly of this man Mast."

The champagne bottle whizzed past his head, missing him by a hair's-breadth and smashing on the opposite wall. Mast would have followed up

the attack, but he met a quick fist with the weight of Dr. Pryce behind it; the lounge-chair on which he fell collapsed under him, and he lay sprawling on the floor,

"You all seem very excited," said Dr. Pryce, cheerfully. "I would suggest, Sweetling, that you and Mr. Bassett go off to his room, and I'll join you there in a minute."

"Very well," said Sir John. "Come on, Mr. Bassett. This must be discussed quietly."

"Get up, old cockie," said Dr. Pryce, extending a hand to Mast. "Made up your mind to bring disgrace on the cloth this morning, haven't you? You've been drinking too much. Go and lie down for a bit—you can't stand it, you know."

"You're a good chap, Pryce," said Mast. "Perhaps I can stand it and perhaps I can't. But I'm going on with it for this day anyhow. Thomas, I say, where's Thomas?"

"Go to the devil your own way then," said Pryce, and followed Sir John and Mr. Bassett.

Lord Charles Baringstoke turned to the onlookers. "Seem very cross, don't they?" he said. "Now is anybody going to stand me one little brandy before I go up to bathe my sinful body?"

In the secretary's room Bassett's story was told at length. Sir John listened to it with gravity and Dr. Soames Pryce with a sardonic smile. In the main Bassett stuck to the facts, but he lied when he said that Mast was drunk when he brought Lechworthy to the club. "I left Lechworthy with

King Smith, and he can't have got back to the *Snowflake*. So I suppose that he's with the King now."

"Most likely," said Sir John, drumming on the table with his nails. "See, Pryce? Remember what I said? Well, the King's got into touch at last. Lord knows what Lechworthy was doing here, though."

"Yes," said Pryce. "That is so. The illustrious visitor will stop at His Majesty's official residence. That is why we met that gang of boys cycling up there."

"It was the worst of luck," whined Bassett. "If King Smith hadn't come up just at that moment I should have saved the situation. You see that, of course."

"No, I don't," said Sir John.

"Bassett, my poor friend," said Dr. Pryce, "you've made every possible blunder. I can't think of one that you've left out. I'm not going to argue about it, but it is so. So don't brag about saving situations."

"You express my own opinion," said Sir John. "And the consequences of your blunders, Bassett, are likely to be serious."

"Anyhow, the consequences are serious. The most serious of all is that my life is threatened."

Dr. Pryce laughed.

"You'll pardon us if we don't think so," said Sir John. "But you can cheer up, Bassett. Threatened men sometimes live long. Remain in

the club. It will be well guarded to-night. Every precaution will be taken. Smith simply can't get at you—short of a general attack on the white men by the natives, and he won't risk that. It wouldn't suit his book at all just now. Meanwhile, you appeal to Lechworthy."

"Surely he's the last man in the world to—"

"He's the only man who's likely to have much influence with King Smith just now, and he won't approve of irregular executions. If he asks to be allowed to take you back to England, he'll probably get you. And it's better to go than to die—also, you can probably give him the slip somewhere on the way."

"Yes," said Bassett, rubbing his chin. "There's that. There's always that."

"Look here, Bassett," said Dr. Pryce, suddenly, "we shall want four or five good men to patrol outside from sunset to midnight—sober men who can shoot and know when to shoot—Hanson and Burbage are the right type. Go now and find them."

"I'll do it at once. Shall I bring them here?"

"No. Just get their names. I'll talk to them later."

"And, I say, wouldn't it be a good thing if we elected King Smith a member now?"

"Might as well offer a mad buck-elephant a lump of sugar. You go and find those men."

"Now," said Dr. Pryce, as soon as Bassett had gone.

"Smith will tell Lechworthy everything. Lechworthy goes home with our names in his pocket. Therefore he must not go home."

"Certainly. Nor must other people go home with similar information."

"They must not," said Sir John. "Therefore we must get a man on board the *Snowflake*. That ship must be lost with crew and passengers. Our man may be able to save himself or he may not. It's a devilish risky business. Still, money will tempt people."

"I wouldn't trust a paid man on that job," said Pryce. He reflected a minute. "My lot's thrown in with the sinners. Tell you what, Sweetling—I'll do it myself."

CHAPTER V

THE societies that are to be permanent grow without plan, much as a coral island grows. The schemed Utopia never lives; it leaves no room for compromise and becomes pot-bound; it guards with wise foresight against numberless events which never happen, and the unforeseen event blows in upon it and kills it.

The Exiles' Club had never been planned at all. The first of its members to arrive at Faloo—Sir John Sweetling—had not the slightest intention of starting such a club. He was a man of considerable ability and he had been clever enough to see

that the smash of his tangled operations was inevitable, and that any defence would be wasted speciousness. Recalling to himself a voyage which he had once made as a young man, he left before the smash came and while he still had considerable means at his disposal, even if he had no legal claim upon them. A chance of that early voyage had shown him Faloo, and it was his intention to lie concealed in Faloo for two or three years and then under a different name to resume his business career in San Francisco.

He found himself hospitably received by the priests of a small French mission and by the King of the island. With the former he never became on intimate terms, and he took occasion to tell them more than once that he was by education and conviction a member of the Church of England. But he found the King interesting—in his ambitions and energetic character, as well as in his education and appearance, totally unlike any island native of whom Sir John had ever heard.

Sir John noted, too, that the island had considerable natural resources, and that these were capable of development; labour was in any case cheap and plentiful, and if he worked in with the King, forced labour would also be available. The King was a poor man, owning nothing but the land which he had inherited, within sight of wealth, but unable to reach it for want of the knowledge and capital without which it was impossible to trade. Sir John had always assimilated quickly and eagerly any

kind of business knowledge, and he had picked up a good deal of useful information about the island trade; his capital was safe and at his command. Before long he had entered into a partnership with the King, and had purchased from him land and plantations in one of the most delightful spots in the island.

Of natural and inherent vice Sir John had very little. Crimes of violence and passion were distasteful to him. A love of money and position had drawn him gradually into a career of gross and abominable fraud, but it is doubtful if he ever saw it as fraud himself—technical error, committed with the best intentions, is how he would have characterised it. In the days of his prosperity at home he had been rather a generous man. A church in a London suburb boasted a pulpit of coloured marble, which had been the gift of Sir John Sweetling, and the munificence of the donor had been the subject of a complimentary reference in a sermon; nor would it be safe to say that at t e time he made this presentation, though it was practically paid for with stolen money, he was altogether a hypocrite. He loved decency and order. He was always anxious that the proper form should be observed. He loathed that slackness of fibre which leads men to unshaven chins or made-up neckties. His orderly characteristics remained fairly constant, even in a soft and enervating climate, although in other respects, as we have already seen, circumstances and the Exiles'

Club considerably modified him. At the time of his arrival at Faloo he did not realise that he was cornered. He prepared a return to the outside world.

He was soon convinced that not in two or in twenty years would it be safe for him to show himself. He had trusted friends in England who knew at least where letters could be addressed to him, and they kept him informed. At his own request he was sent copies of what the Press had to say about his disappearance. He read it all with amazement and with extreme but temporary depression. These writers, it seemed to him, were actuated by spite and expressed themselves with virulence. They ignored facts which should have told, more or less in his favour. They credited him with no honest desire to restore money, had his speculations been more successful. They put the worst constructions on these "technical" lapses. In the case of a prospectus they seemed to be unable to distinguish between deliberate lies and an overstatement incidental to a sanguine temperament. He had never said to himself, "Let us steal this money"; he had merely said, "Let us make this investment look as attractive as we can." And does not every tradesman try to make his goods look attractive? Is there any close and ungarnished accuracy about the ordinary advertisement? Sir John felt angry and sore at the view which had been taken; but he put his San Francisco scheme aside.

And then gradually were interwoven the cords which bound him to Faloo for ever. Two men,

who had been personal friends of Sir John's and associated with him in business, skipped their bail and joined him at Faloo. It was natural and convenient that the three men should live together, and their house was the nucleus of the building which afterwards became the Exiles' Club. Through them came a further widening of the circle. The secret was kept for the discreet, and among them was a city solicitor. He knew when to talk about it. He had among his clients families of the highest respectability, and all such families have their black sheep. The Colonies might prove inhospitable and America too inquisitive, but there was always Faloo—for people who could afford to get there and to live there. To Sir John belonged the prestige of the explorer and pioneer; it was to him that the new-comer came for advice, and occasionally for investment. Sir John sold part of his interest in the island trade to a syndicate, and part of his land to the white community, taking in each case such profit as his conscience allowed. His abilities, too, were admitted. He was a born organiser. It pleased and amused him to undertake the work of providing European luxuries in an almost unknown island hundreds of miles from anywhere. His judgment was unerring in welcoming any desirable addition to the fraternity and in arranging for the speedy deportation of the undesirable. Men with no money or education were as a rule excluded. "We want gentlemen here," said Sir John, and struck the right note at once. But he saw the use-

fulness of that ex-waiter from the Cabinet Club, and Thomas had no trouble in making good his position on the island.

The position of director and adviser rather pleased Sir John; the position of President of the Exiles' Club pleased him far more and sealed him to Faloo. It was a chance suggestion which led to the formation of the club. Six men sat over their Sauterne and oysters one evening and listened to the music of the surf. Presently one of them (nobody afterwards remembered which one) said, "Sort of little club of exiles, ain't we?"

There was a moment's pause, and then Sir John, already with a foretaste of the presidential manner, said, "Well, gentlemen, it rests with you. I'm ready to put my money down if you others are. The thing can be done, and done well. Club-house and grounds, decent service, everything comfortable and in order. Why not?"

They discussed it during the greater part of that night, and they all worked very hard at it during the month that followed, planning and superintending the construction of the only two-storied building on the island. Sir John had always been a great gardener, and Blake, one of the earliest arrivals, had made a hobby of his workshop. The special knowledge proved very useful. Sir John was told that English turf was impossible. "We shall have our lawn just the same," said Sir John. And ultimately, at great trouble and expense, they did have it.

The club never had any other President than Sir John. If Smith, as the white men called him, was the hereditary king of the natives, Sir John was by common consent the symbol of authority for the white men. Lord Charles Baringstoke had not a respectful manner, and frequently alluded to Sir John Sweetling as Jonathan Gasbags, but he would never have dreamed of opposing his annual re-election to the presidency.

Customs grew as convenience demanded, and rules were made as they were wanted. The rules were kept almost invariably by every member of the club; a reprimand from Sir John was sufficient to prevent the repetition of any lapse, and the feeling of the majority of members was always against the transgressor. At first sight this may seen extraordinary. There was but one man in the club who was not wanted by the police. It included men like Lord Charles Baringstoke, who did not possess, and never had possessed, any moral sense. There were others, like Cyril Mast, who had killed what was good in them and become slaves to the most ignoble indulgences. There were members who seemed for ever on the verge of an outbreak of maniacal violence, and there were some who were at times sunk in a suicidal melancholy. It r ight have been foretold that such a club would be doomed to destruction by the riot and rebellion of its own members. But that forecast would have proved incorrect.

It is, after all, a iommonplace that when anarchy

has removed all existing laws and government, the construction of a fresh government and new laws will next have to occupy its attention. Those who had rebelled against an elaborate legal system, bore with patience the easier yoke which was devised for their own special needs, and often at their own suggestion and instigation, in the island of Faloo. Too high an ideal was not set for them. Every form of gambling was permitted, except gambling on credit. Among the exiles there was neither bet nor business unless the money was in sight. Intoxication was frequent with some of the members, and was not condemned, but it was recognised that its propriety was a matter of time and place. As ritual survives religion, etiquette survives morality, and no member of the Exiles' Club would have committed the offence of tipping a club servant; nor would he have stormed at a waiter however bad the service might have been, but would simply have backed his bill. There was no definite rule against profanity, and its use was common enough, but there were two or three men in the club—one of them murdered his own mother—in whose presence the rest kept a certain check on their tongues. The principle was generally accepted that the life of a member, so far as it concerned other members, began with his arrival at Faloo. Confidences were not sought; if, as rarely happened, they were volunteered they were not welcomed, lest they should demand confidences in return. Briefly, the men, troubled no longer

with a complex civilisation, had made for themselves their simple conditions of life, and such law as was involved by those conditions they respected.

Two other considerations made for the permanence and well-being of the club. Few of its members were habitual criminals; they were mostly men who had ruined their lives with one thing, and in other matters had been normally respectable, and even over the worst men in the club the climate seemed to exercise a curiously quieting and mollifying influence. Secondly, it was very generally realised that Faloo was the last station, the jumping-off place. There was nothing beyond it, and there was no other chance.

Sir John had already stated at the election meeting some of the reasons which bound him to Faloo. It may be added that he thoroughly enjoyed his position. The society in which he lived was small, but it held itself to be the superior society of the island, and it bestowed on him the first place. He had been the great man of his suburb, and he found it to be almost equally satisfactory to be the great man of Faloo. The exploitation of a native king was work which was quite to his taste, and at the same time it was easy work. Shrewd and educated though the King was, he showed himself quite native, and pathetically ignorant at first in matters of business. Sir John had but to say that this or that was common form, or the usual European practice, and the King accepted it at once. But the King learned quickly, and at a later period

he had about taken Sir John's measure, as Sir John himself was aware.

Nor had Sir John any delusions about his fellow-members. His manner was genial; he would gamble and drink (in moderation) with the sinners. But in his heart he despised most of them. They had never had the great idea and the Napoleonic collapse. Their weakness and not their strength had been their ruin. It was not their mind but their body that had run away with them. Sir John had not lived the life of an ascetic, far from it, but his tastes were in favour of a decent reserve and a sufficient moderation. From no man will the slave of the flesh receive more hearty contempt than from the man of the world; and in the difficult task of his reclamation it may be that the sneer of the worldling has sometimes effected more than the tears of the spiritual.

Yet even in his contempt for many of his fellow-members he found some source of gratification. He liked to wonder where on earth they would have been without him, and to feel his sense of responsibility increased. From their depth he could contemplate with the more satisfaction his own eminence.

But there were a few members whom Sir John could regard with more respect. Bassett, for instance, had worked admirably for the club, and had shown something of Si John's own talent for organisation. He had now lost his head in a crisis and acted, Sir John considered, like a fool.

However, he would get a good scare—Sir John doubted if the King had really intended more than that—and would not be likely to act on impulse again. Then there was Hansin, a quiet man and an ardent chess-player. He had character and ability, and Sir John hoped that he would one day replace the Rev. Cyril Mast on the committee. Mast had a gift for public speaking, and owed his election to it, but Sir John found him quite useless. Probably the man whom Sir John liked most, respected most, trusted most, and understood least was Dr. Pryce.

The men were as different as possible. Dr. Pryce had never shown the slightest interest in the working of the syndicate which financed Smith, although he was a member of it. He had been approached by Sir John on the subject, had put down his money without inquiry, and apparently had never thought about the subject again. In an ordinary way Sir John would have taken this as evidence that the man was a fool, but Pryce's rather various abilities could not be doubted. The doctor's contempt for vain assumption sometimes wounded Sir John, who habitually called his own vain assumptions by prettier names. Pryce never pretended to be any better than his fellow-members, nor had he that not uncommon form of perverted vanity which made a man like Mast pretend sometimes to be the greatest of sinners. Sir John had a sufficiency of physical courage for ordinary uses, but Pryce had shown himself on many occa-

sions to be absolutely reckless of his own life. This had occurred not only in such forms of sport as the island afforded; but more frequently in the practice of his science; the island offered drugs that were not in the pharmacopœia, and Pryce, in his enthusiastic study of them, did not stop short at experiments upon himself. It was a great thing, Sir John felt, to have an able and qualified doctor in the club, and with his customary generosity he suggested that a consignment of drugs and apparatus from London for the doctor should be charged to the club account. Pryce replied that his little box of rubbish was paid for already, and changed the subject.

The present crisis in the club's affairs brought out strongly the changes in Sir John's character. The cornered rat was showing fight. Sir John contemplated the destruction of the *Snowflake* and all aboard her without the faintest feeling of remorse. But Pryce's careless offer to undertake the work did not satisfy him.

The man who scuttled the *Snowflake* in mid-ocean would probably be committing suicide; Sir John had no doubt about that. And Pryce was too valuable to lose. Why, Sir John himself might be taken ill at any time. There was a queer form of island fever, as to which he was nervous. The King himself had suffered from it.

And on further consideration Sir John doubted the feasibility of the scheme. By this time Lechworthy probably knew all about the Exiles' Club,

and would see for himself the danger that he represented to them; Bassett's attempt to murder him would have illuminated the question. Under the circumstances it was unlikely that he would allow any member of the club on board the *Snowflake,* unless possibly his religious feelings were involved and that member played the part of a repentant and converted sinner. And Sir John knew that Pryce would not do that.

"We'll think about it, Pryce," he said finally. "There may be some other way. Something may turn up."

CHAPTER VI

THE King's house was built bungalow fashion. The rooms were large and lofty, and opened on to a broad verandah; the furniture was scanty but sufficient, and much of it was of native workmanship; only in the bedrooms did the Auckland-imported suites reign supreme. The walls were hung with printed cloths or matting woven in intricate and elaborate designs. In every room banks of flowers gave audacious but splendid colour, and young palms yielded a cool green relief. The garden was not less lovely because many of its natural features had been left unaltered. The little stream that leaped from the crag into the pool twelve feet below had fallen, just there and just so, long before the exiles had come to Faloo, long before the King's grandfather had died—of

alcohol and excessive passions. The white paths curved and twisted through innumerable shrubberies, and lost themselves in deep cool shade. Here and there were broad stretches of tufty unmown grass, and long hedges of hibiscus aflame with scarlet.

Hilda was principally fascinated by all that was native. The extremely fine work of the matting on the walls interested her, the great garden enthralled her. To Tiva and Ioia it was more remarkable that for the first time in their lives they had seen themselves reflected in a full-length mirror; this wonder of civilisation adorned the wardrobe in Hilda's room. Mr. Lechworthy, attended by King Smith, noted with great satisfaction that his room possessed a spring mattress and a tin bath, and that his Bible, his camera and his clothes had arrived safely. Even as he examined them a letter was handed to him which a messenger from the Exiles' Club had just brought. It was an agonised letter from Bassett, repeating that he had fired by accident, proclaiming the deepest repentance for his past life, expressing his desire to return with Lechworthy to England and there to stand his trial. Lechworthy handed it to King Smith.

"Yes," said the King, when he had read it. "There is no truth in it at all."

"None, I am afraid. I note his account of the accident varies in one particular from what he said before."

"There was no accident. I saw the man's hands."

"And yet, sir, I ask you once more to give me that man's life. I cannot stand the idea of a British subject being executed like this—at a few hours' notice, without trial, guilty in many ways, but not of the capital offence. He may not be fit to live, but he is not fit to die."

"Great Britain has nothing to do here; if she had Bassett would not be here."

"True enough, sir. I know it. I'm not saying that he is not amenable to the law of this island, made and administered by yourself. I am merely, as your guest, asking for a favour. How can I dine with you to-night, smoke my pipe and have my talk with you in peace, if I know this poor wretch is perhaps at that very hour being executed?"

King Smith smiled. "Very well," he said. "To-night I am going to ask you to save the lives of many of my race—I might even say the race itself. This worthless thing—this Bassett—I will give you. You will take him home and see that he stands his trial?"

"Certainly. On that I insist. He must take his punishment."

"Write to him that you have saved his life, but that this is conditional on his surrendering to the man who will await him at the gates of the club enclosure some time before midnight. He can bring his personal belongings with him; you see

I give him time to get his things together, and to clear up his business as secretary of the club. You may say further that he will not be ill-treated, but that he will be kept in custody until you choose to sail."

"Thank you, sir, from the bottom of my heart. You have taken a great weight off my mind. I will write to him precisely in those terms. May I have a messenger?"

"There are many men here," said the King, "and they are here only as your servants, to go where you like and to do what you wish. They understand that."

The King was deep in thought as he drove back to his business residence on the beach. There he became busy. He remembered to send up to his big house the preserved asparagus which would be wanted for dinner. He examined with care a still that was then working. He saw the overseer from his plantations inland. He calculated the number of bags of copra that would be ready for his next schooner. He settled a dispute between two natives as to the ownership of a goat. But he gave no orders for a man to be at the gates of the club enclosure shortly before midnight, nor did he give, nor had he given, any orders whatever about Bassett.

In the afternoon, up at the palace, Tiva, Ioia and Hilda explored the garden, and the native girls discovered with joy the wide pool into which the waterfall plashed. They begged Hilda to come for

a swim with them. The idea was certainly alluring, but for two reasons Hilda demurred. One was the presence of a patrol of athletic-looking natives with rifles on their shoulders, but this reason was disposed of at once.

"We speak him," cooed Tiva. "He go pretty dam quick." And it was so.

The other reason vanished before the resources of the rather fantastic wardrobe which Ioia had brought with her. Two hours later Hilda sat on the verandah with her wet hair loose. She had considered herself fairly expert in the water, but Tiva and Ioia quite eclipsed her; there had seemed to be absolutely nothing which they could not do, and they did everything with the most beautiful ease and grace. Hilda rather wished she had been a sculptor. The two water-nymphs now sat at her feet—Tiva in a loose salmon-coloured robe, with a gold bangle on one arm, and Ioia in a similar robe of olive-green surmounted by a barbarous kimono. The bangle and the kimono were Hilda's gifts. The hurricane had passed as quickly as it had come, and far away before her Hilda could see a sea of marvellous sapphire, foam-streaked, trying to be good again.

Lechworthy spent much of his time that afternoon in his room alone. Then he roamed the garden, camera in hand. He took three snapshots of the armed patrol, and he took them all on the same section of film. But, not yet aware of this little mistake, he was in a placid and even

sunny temper when he came on to the verandah for tea. Tiva and Ioia, commanded by Hilda, took tea with them; Ioia tried most things, including tea-leaves, which she ate with moderation but with apparent enjoyment. Then the two sang—a beautiful voice and a correct ear are part of the island girl's natural inheritance—and Hilda and her uncle listened. The song was in the native tongue and for the most part improvised, and perhaps it was just as well that the listeners did not understand it. It was wholly in praise of Hilda, but it praised her with a wealth of detail unusual in European eulogies.

Bassett at the Exiles' Club received Lechworthy's reply to his letter shortly after the luncheon hour. Bassett himself was unable to eat luncheon; he was sick with fear. He grew worse every hour. His nerves had broken down. Sir John and Dr. Soames Pryce had taken all possible means to safeguard Bassett's life, for that night at any rate. Every member in whom reliance could be placed was ready to help. From ten to twelve Bassett was to remain in the secretary's room. There would be a guard outside both window and door. All over the club garden a watch would be kept. To protect him from poison his food and drink were to be tasted by native servants. Preparations were made to deal with any sudden outbreak of fire.

"Can't you pull yourself together a little?" said Dr. Pryce, utterly weary of him.

"Everything you've done's no good," said

Bassett. "I know King Smith, and he does what he says. You can't stop him."

"Don't be a fool, Bassett," said Sir John. "King Smith is a man and he cannot do miracles. You probably will never be safer in your life than you will be to-night. For that matter, your letter to Lechworthy may get you off altogether."

Bassett began to weep. He was a humiliating, distressing, repellent spectacle. Dr. Soames Pryce ordered brandy to be brought, and forced him to take a stiff dose.

He then became sullen and morose. He said that he wished he had not taken the brandy. Drink was the curse of more than half the men in the club, and he thanked God he had never given way to it. Then he became suspicious of the revolver which had been given him. How was he to know it was all right? Finally he exchanged weapons with Sir John.

The arrival of the letter from Lechworthy did nothing to inspirit him. He read it aloud.

"There you are, you see," said Sir John. "Sentence commuted. Aren't you ashamed of yourself for behaving in this way? I told you Lechworthy would get you off."

"Get me off?" said Bassett. "Do you mean to say you can't see that this thing's a trap? A little before midnight I'm to hand myself over to some man at the gates. He takes me away. Oh, yes! Good-bye all! How long afterwards do you suppose I shall be alive?"

"Do you think Lechworthy would trap you in that way?"

"How should I know? He's got no particular reason to love me, has he? But what's most likely is that Lechworthy himself has been deceived by King Smith."

"That won't do, Bassett. The deceit would be found out next day. King Smith, on the contrary, is most anxious to do all that he can to please Lechworthy and to win him over. What do you think, Pryce?"

"That is so. The letter is quite genuine. Bassett will hand himself over to the man, and—"

"I will not," screamed Bassett.

"You will," said Pryce. "You will be made to do it. You see the situation that way, Sweetling, don't you?"

"Of course I do. Listen to me, Bassett. You have asked the King to spare your life, and offered in return to hand yourself over to Lechworthy. He spares your life, and imposes a condition which amounts to what you offered—he is merely making certain that you do hand yourself over to Lechworthy. What do you think will happen when the King finds that he has been fooled and that you have broken your word? My friend, in that case he would get you, even if it were necessary to set all the natives on us to-night, as he could do. He would get you, and I fancy he would adopt barbarous ways of killing you. Therefore, you

will be at the gates shortly before midnight—even if you have to be carried there."

"It comes to this," said Bassett, "that I'm betrayed by you two." His shoulders shook, the nails of his yellow hands beat the table convulsively, his thin lips twitched sideways and upwards.

"Bassett," said Dr. Soames Pryce, "try to behave a little more like a man, won't you? This sort of show isn't—it's not very pretty, you know. I give you my word of honour that I believe your life's safe if you'll only do what the King tells you. You'll have to go on board the *Snowflake*, of course, but you'll get a chance to give Lechworthy the slip long before he gets to England. Then you'll come back here—you've got the money to do it with. If it's any consolation to you, I may tell you that I shall probably be on the schooner myself—private business of my own—and I'll see that you get your opportunity."

"You on board too? How? What business do you mean?"

"I think I said private business of my own."

"I see. Something I'm not to know about. Another conspiracy against me, eh? Here, give me that brandy." He nearly filled his tumbler with it, and drank it in quick, excited, ugly gulps. He rose to his feet and shook a skinny fist. "You two fools! Do you think I can't see? Smith has bought you. All the jabber about protecting me was a farce, and Lechworthy's letter was a put-up thing between you. If I go, I die. If I stay I die. Pretty

thing, ain't it? You swindled me over the lizards, Pryce, and thought I didn't know. But, my God, I haven't got a friend, and I know that! You needn't look so angry, Sir John. You've been bowled out before. You're used to it. Well, all right. I go to-night. Good-bye all! I'm off to my own room—special leave from King Smith to pack the shirts I'll never wear. Good-bye! We'll meet in hell."

He flung himself out of the room, across the hall, and up the stairs. Lord Charles Baringstoke was seated in the hall, drinking through a straw a mixture of *crême-de-menthe* and crushed ice. He observed Mr. Bassett, and he turned to Mr. Sainton—the member who was paying for the drinks.

"See our Mr. damned Bassett? Well, you know, I ain't the champion gold cup at the beauty show myself, but I never did know anyone look quite so blessed ugly as that chap does. Might use him to tes iron girders, eh? Mean he might grin at them, and if they'd stand that, they'd stand anything."

In the room which Bassett had just left Sir John Sweetling controlled his rage with difficulty.

"Look here, Pryce," said Sir John. "We've done the best we can for the man, but this lets me out. If I see him again before he goes I—I can't answer for what will happen."

Dr. Soames Pryce rolled a cigarette. "The beauty of being a doctor," he said, "is that you

can't lose your wool with your case—whatever he, or she, does or says. Bassett, under pressure, has become a case. And, as I don't think it safe to leave him alone, I'll hop upstairs after him. See you presently."

On the stairs Dr. Pryce heard the report of a revolver. He arrived ten seconds too late.

. . . . . .

The King and Mr. Lechworthy dined alone that night. Hilda discovered, rather suddenly, that she was absolutely worn out with the long day. Tiva and Ioia, watching her, spoke one or two sentences together in the native tongue. Then Tiva explained to Hilda in English that she and Ioia had spread their sleeping-mats on the verandah just against Hilda's window. If Hilda wanted them at any time in the night she had only to go to the window and speak, and they would be with her at once. Hilda thanked them, but she was sure she would not need them. She left with her uncle her apologies to the King.

Mr. Lechworthy's dress was just precisely what he would have worn in the evening in London. The King wore a tropical evening suit of white drill; he had ridden up from the office and changed his clothes at the palace. The two men dined early—a brief and tasteful dinner composed principally of native dishes. And then Lechworthy filled his pipe, and they took their coffee on the verandah, and talked long and seriously.

It was of the death of the native races that the

King spoke—and of his own ambition, that Faloo should become a refuge for them from the deadly effects of civilisation, that in the future no white man should ever be allowed to set foot there. Let Great Britain undertake just that work of protection and close the island definitely to all but the natives. Let her say that neither British nor French nor German, nor any other white man might land there. King Smith said that he knew little of the conditions that might be demanded, but if Great Britain wished him to renounce his title of King he would resign it willingly; if tribute were wanted, he would see that it was paid punctually. All he asked was Great Britain's guarantee that in Faloo the island people should be left absolutely to themselves, to live their own life in the old way, and so to escape the racial destruction that was coming swiftly upon them.

He laid before Lechworthy the pictorial evidence of travellers and the unimpassioned figures of the statistics. Everywhere in the islands, as civilisation advanced, the native race died out. The King made no attack upon civilisation, wasted no time in idle epigrams. Civilisation might have all the merits and all the advantages, but it had been proved in cold history that the island races could not accept it. In childish and rather pathetic goodwill they had tried to accept it, and in consequence many had died out and the rest were dying.

It was not merely a question of drink. It was true, of course, that alcohol, which harmed the

habituated European, quickly demoralised and killed the unhabituated islander. But there was hardly a part of civilisation that did not help to kill him. Civilisation called him from the open air into houses where he was poisoned and stifled. It clothed his partial nakedness with European stuffs and pneumonia followed. It gave him things to learn for which his mind was unfit, and he became obtuse and devitalised. Nature had spared him and put him in places where food and such shelter as he needed might be had free or for a minimum of labour; civilisation put a stress upon him and paid him in luxuries that were bad for him. Tinned meat and multiplication tables, gin and geography, feather beds and tight boots, worry and hypocrisy, everything worked together for bad for the islander. Civilisation increased his needs and sapped his powers. He went down, down inevitably, in his struggle with it.

"Excuse me, sir," said Lechworthy. "What you say is true; I have heard something of this before, though far less than you have told me. But your own case hardly supports your argument."

"I know it. I admit that I am quite exceptional. Heredity may have something to do with it. There is a legend of white blood in my family, a long way back. It may be so or it may not—such intermarriages do not generally have a good result. But my grandfather died of drink, and my father was a very great friend of the missionaries. So perhaps I was born—what is the word?—yes, per-

haps I was born immune. There are no missionaries here now, except the two French priests, and they do nothing; you see, they have grown old and very, very fat."

"Your father then—he was a convert?"

"The missionaries thought so, and he did what they liked; you see, he was a good friend to them, and they taught him. My father could read English, and he spoke it too, but not very correctly. He was a kind man, but he was not very much converted, I think. He began to teach me when I was quite young, and always I wanted to learn more. It was he who showed me what the white man is doing in these islands. So it is very many years since I first thought that Faloo is not a great island, and had been left over, and perhaps I might in time secure it so that it should be the last home of my people, lest they all died. And I have gone on thinking it always; it is for that that I have done good and also bad things."

"But you speak English remarkably, sir. You did not learn it from your father alone."

"Oh, no. For nearly ten years the Exiles' Club has been here, and I have been the friend of the white men just as my father in his time was the friend of the missionaries. The men of the Exiles' Club came to me, and there was always whisky and cigars and whatever they wanted. So they would sit and talk with me. That Mr. Cyril Mast came very often. Most days he is very bad and also drunken. But he is beautifully educated, and he

told me much about England. Sometimes Sir John Sweetling, who started the club, would talk about your financial world, though it was mostly on our joint business he came to see me. This Bassett also talked. Even Lord Charles Baringstoke—"

"What? Is that young scamp here?"

"Yes, and even from him I have learned something. But the best man of all of them is Dr. Soames Pryce. He is very able and he is different from the others. When I was ill with an island fever he came to see me and he gave me medicines, and very soon I was well again. But when I would have paid him he told me to go to the devil. I think it was because he has sometimes drunk whisky with me, but not so often as I should like, for I think he knows very much, and he is the only one whose word I altogether believe."

So far Mr. Lechworthy had expressed no opinion; he was rather miserly with expression until he had well weighed his subject. But he had already formed his opinions. Firstly, the King was simple and sincere. He spoke plainly and without hypocrisy. He had not shirked the fact that his father was not really converted to Christianity, or that he himself had been a bosom companion of these blackguards at the Exiles' Club. He had never emphasised the point that he wanted nothing for himself and everything for his people; he had treated this attitude as a matter of course, and had not dwelt upon it. Secondly, the project of Faloo for the people of Faloo, with their inde-

pendence supported by Great Britain appealed to him greatly. We had done enough grabbing for unworthy ends. We had become a byword in that respect. It was a great thing to save a race; it was an idea which might arouse an enthusiasm, and that in its turn might become useful in practical politics. The missionary question presented to his mind the only difficulty at present. However, he would hear the whole story.

The next chapter of that story dealt with Smith's start as a trader. It went back to the time of Sir John Sweetling's arrival at Faloo; two other white men had followed him there within the year. He narrated his dealings with Sir John and with the syndicate which was subsequently formed. The financial control of the business was practically shifted to a distant island, where there was a bank with a cast-iron method and a Commissioner who could enforce agreements. The King, young and inexperienced, had signed the instructions to the bank and had signed the iniquitous agreements. He had put the noose on his own neck.

But one hold on his partners he retained, or the noose would have been drawn tight long before. They lived at Faloo, and there was probably no other part of the globe where they could have lived with the same safety and comfort. They were in consequence largely dependent on the King of Faloo; he alone could control the natives. Consequently, concessions were made to him on points where he had insisted. The dangerous but re-

munerative contraband trade had been a case in point; he had refused to allow any native of Faloo to buy liquor; he had even safeguarded the native servants employed at the Exiles' Club. After one week—in which the King had left the club without any native servants at all—its members learned wisdom.

In the actual conduct of the business he had not had to complain of much interference. He was free to settle all the details of it and to do all the work of it. It was called his business—not their business. But his partners' veto came in from time to time, and gradually he had realised that he was held back. Trade was not to be extended. The reef was not to be opened up. He was never to be rich enough to buy out his own partners and to be independent of them. Here and there he could tempt one of the investors by an appeal to his cupidity—Bassett had been such a man. But the more important interest, represented by Sir John, had stuck always to the same policy—to keep a control over King Smith, and to prevent Faloo from developing a trade of sufficient importance to attract outside attention. For instance, the amount of copra that might be exported was not regulated by what could be produced and sold, but by a decision of the King's partners; and they had no wish to bring the great soap-making firms down on Faloo.

And then the idea had come to him that he might be able to split up the white men, create differences

among them, and perhaps form a party of his own. It was with this view that he had persuaded some of them to support his candidature for membership of the Exiles' Club, and had lent money to some of the remittance men and had refused it to others. "And perhaps I might have done something with that, but in the meanwhile, without intending it, the white men have split up my own people. There is now a certain number of natives who are acting without any order from me, and even against my order. They have no hostility towards me, and they act secretly because they are all afraid of me. Their aim is to kill all the white men on the island. They killed one last night—I buried him early this morning. I will tell you how that has come about." And the King narrated, with more detail that need be given here, the trouble about the native women.

"I have only kept my people in hand up to this point by promising them that a day should come when not one white man would be left on the island if only they would be patient. If they used violence, then my plans would be spoiled—they would be punished—the men-of-war would come—the whole island would fall into the white man's hands. And, Mr. Lechworthy, even if you had not come I should have kept my word, for when a man wants only one thing, and wants it very badly, he must get it in the end. But I no longer have the whole of my people in hand. There must be some—I think they are few—who have not enough patience.

I cannot blame them in my heart, although as soon as I find them I shall kill them. I cannot, I say, blame them in my heart, for there are wrongs which drive a man mad, and these are just the wrongs of which the white men have been guilty. That then is the position here—a section of my people is in secret rebellion against me, and it is to the Exiles' Club that I owe this. And look—I have but to give one brief order, and in an hour the club would be burned to the ground and every white man in it would be murdered. There are times when I have been tempted. But I always knew that it was not so that I should make the Faloo of my dreams —not in that way that I should gain the friendship and the help—the indispensable help—of Great Britain."

He paused a moment, drank from the long glass before him, and lighted another cigarette.

"There is the story, Mr. Lechworthy. I have worked for a good thing, but it is as I said: I have used a bad implement and it has hurt my hand, and perhaps I must burn the wound with a little gunpowder before it will be whole again. You can save us all, if you will. You are a politician and a friend of politicians of high Cabinet rank. You own a newspaper. You can arouse public feeling, and you can direct it. You know how these things are managed. Perhaps to-morrow you will decide. To-night I cannot remain much longer for I have to fetch this man Bassett—if he is still there."

"If he is still there?"

"Yes. He is a suspicious man and his nerves are very feeble. He may have distrusted your letter. He may have run away. He may have—anything may have happened."

"I see. Well, I have done what I could. There is one little point which I would mention to-night. These agreements with your partners are so unjust, and contain such evidence of bad faith, that I think I could get them set aside. But all that would take time, and there is a quicker way. The terms on which you can buy them out are unfair and extravagant, but even so the amount of capital involved is—well—it is not to me a very large sum. I offer to buy them out and to become your one partner in their place. I wish to do this."

"I accept it with gratitude," said the King, "provided that you understand this: if ever Faloo is closed, except to its own people, the trade will stop absolutely. It would then be unnecessary and a source of danger. The island itself provides all that a native wants."

"Very well," said Lechworthy, "I have no objection. My capital would then be returned to me. I am anxious to make it possible for you to drop—the implement that has hurt your hand. And as for the rest, I can tell you my position in a few words. I am ready to help you by all the means in my power; this idea of the refuge for the race, the island where it may recuperate itself, appeals to me immensely, and I think I can make

some political use of it too. But, sir, I have my conscience. I may shut the door against the white man and his dangerous civilisation, but I dare not shut it against the gospel of Christ. There, we will speak of this to-morrow."

"I shall be here early in the morning. Good-night, Mr. Lechworthy."

At five minutes to twelve the King reined in his horse at the gates of the club compound. Dr. Soames Pryce stood there alone. It was too dark to see the expression of his face, but his voice sounded sardonic.

"You have come for your prisoner, King Smith?"

"I have."

"He has escaped you. He shot himself this afternoon. You found the man's breaking-point all right. Do you want evidence of his death?"

"I take your word for it. You know, I suppose, that he had his chance of life. My guest, Mr. Lechworthy, wrote a letter—"

"Yes, I know. And the only man who disbelieved in the letter was Bassett. He disbelieved in everybody and everything. Extreme fear had made him insane. By the way, it was I who stopped your election to this club, and now I want you to do me a kindness. Damned awkward, isn't it?"

The King smiled. "That is not the only association you have had with me. What is it you want?"

"I remember no other association. Oh, yes, I gave you a few pills once, didn't I? Well, I can tell you what I want anyhow. The fact is that this place is becoming a bit too hot for my simple tastes, and I want to clear out. Duncombe's missing; we've had men out all day looking for him and he can't be found."

"I had nothing to do with that."

"Very likely. I don't accuse you. Still, it happened. Bassett was sentenced and reprieved, and ended by shooting himself. Cyril Mast is boozing himself mad; we are trying to sober him down enough to read the service over Bassett. Every night we find natives, who've got no business here, skulking about this place. It's possible that some of them will hurt themselves. The pot'll boil over presently, and there will be general hell. I'm a quiet man, and I'd sooner be away. I wish you'd put in a word for me to this Mr. Lechworthy. If he had room for Bassett he's got room for me. I'll pay my passage, or work it as a doctor or anything else, whichever he likes. You might put in a word for me."

"But why bother Lechworthy? One of our boats will be going out again in a few days' time."

"Thank you. If I wanted to be poisoned with the stink of copra, and eaten alive with cockroaches, I'd go by it. The *Snowflake's* a sound clean boat, and I prefer it. The inside will drop out of your schooner one of these days. She's all right for trade, but she's slow, rotten and nasty."

"Very well," said the King. "I'll speak to him about it. But of course the decision will rest with him."

"Of course. Thanks very much."

They said good-night and parted, the King riding on to the office on the beach, and Dr. Pryce returning to Sir John in the club.

"How goes it?" asked Pryce.

"Mast is sober now, but he's pretty shaky. It seems that his bit of a row with Bassett is disturbing him, and he's been weeping. I say, Pryce, our men are simply going to pap."

"Everyhing else ready for the burial?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll give Mast one stiff peg to steady him, and we'll start away. By the way, it was as I thought; it was the King himself who came to the gate."

"Then you spoke about the *Snowflake?*"

"Of course. He'll see Lechworthy about it."

"Do you think he smells a rat?"

"There are some men who smell rats and then shout about it, and they don't generally make fortunes as rat-catchers. Smith's not that sort."

"You mean?"

"I mean that I don't know whether he suspects or not. I should imagine that he's watching out, and so am I, which makes it quite interesting. Now I'll go and see if I can straighten Mast's backbone a bit."

The King certainly had not accepted Pryce's

statement that he was a quiet man and wished to run away from fear of a native uprising; but Pryce might have had other reasons of which he did not wish to speak, and the real reason did not occur to the King at all. But he was suspicious and on his guard. He had very much to think of and many questions to ask himself. What line would Sir John take when he found that he and the other partners were to be bought out? Would Lechworthy be obstinate on the question of white missionaries for Faloo? If this were arranged, would Lechworthy be able to bring the scheme to a successful issue? Who was it that had murdered Duncombe?"

To this last question the King had a simple means of finding the answer. Knowing the native mind as he did, he knew that the murderer would be driven to make some demonstration of triumph and satisfied revenge. He would do it secretly, probably very late at night, but he would find himself driven to do it. Stealthily and on foot the King went from one native house to another, wherever he suspected the criminal might possibly be.

It was some hours later that he stood outside a little shanty and listened to the man who was singing within. The singer was drunk—drunk on methylated spirits stolen from the stores of the Exiles' Club. The King entered.

It was just at this time that away at the palace Hilda Auriol managed to raise herself a little in

bed. "Tiva! Ioia!" she called and fell back again. In an instant the two girls entered through the windows from the verandah.

"I—I think I am very ill," moaned Hilda.

CHAPTER VII

BASSETT was buried by lantern-light a little after one in the morning in a far corner of the club grounds. His was the fourth grave there, and not one of the four men had died in his bed. The Rev. Cyril Mast read the service sonorously, with dignity and self-control, for Soames Pryce had seen to him, and Soames Pryce was a clever doctor. The roughly-made coffin—a wooden framework with thick mats stretched over it—was borne by members of the club, and it was they who had dug the grave and afterwards filled it in. No native had ever been allowed to have anything to do with the interment of a white man.

Most of the members were present at the funeral, but not all. Lord Charles Baringstoke was not there, but he expressed his regrets afterwards, leaning against the wall in the card-room with a cigarette in one side of his loose mouth.

"I'd always meant to see the beggar planted, but, you see, I didn't know when the thing was going to start. So we'd one rubber to fill in time. Then, just when the lights went past the window we were game and twenty-eight, and it looked like

our only being five minutes late anyhow; but I got my spades doubled and the little slam up against me, and then they made an odd trick on hearts, and we were finally bust on a dam-silly no-trumper of my partner's. Still, I'm sorry, you know, though it couldn't be helped. Everybody going to bed? One more little drink—what?"

Already on the screen in the hall there was a notice calling an emergency meeting of the members in the afternoon for the election of an honorary secretary who would also be a member of the committee. Neither Pryce nor Mast had cared to undertake the secretarial work.

Standing by the screen, Sir John Sweetling, in conversation with some of the more responsible members of the club, pronounced the panegyric upon Bassett. "He never, or very rarely, drank; he liked business, and he kept the books well." Sir John paused a moment in thought, and added, "And he wrote an excellent hand."

"And paid noddings for it," said round-eyed Mr. Mandelbaum. "But zen it put him in ze know."

It was long before Sir John could get any sleep that night. His mind was still active and anxious. The old questions still bothered him. What compact, if any, had been made between King Smith and Lechworthy? Was it just possible that the King had not given the Exiles' Club away? If he had, which seemed almost certain, would Pryce be able to carry out what he had undertaken?

Would Pryce be able to save himself when the *Snowflake* was scuttled or burned? And then there were many worries in connection with the club. Who could be found to take Bassett's place? What could be done about Cyril Mast, whose folly was the cause of all that had happened? Some advantage might be taken of his repentance.

It seemed to Sir John that he had only been asleep for a few minutes when he was awakened by a loud knock at his door. It was just daylight. Sir John was rather startled. He glanced at his revolver on the table by his bedside and shouted "Come in."

"Sorry to disturb you," said Dr. Pryce, as he entered. He was dressed, and he sat down and laced his boots as he talked. "But I've got to be off. A letter was brought to me ten minutes ago from Lechwórthy. His niece is ill—seriously ill, I should say, and he wants me at once. He seems to have sent the letter through the King—at any rate Smith's waiting for me in a buggy outside."

Sir John was wide awake and out of bed by now. He thrust his feet into a pair of soft red leather slippers. He was quite a good figure of a man, but his tendency to corpulence was more noticeable in his yellow silk pyjamas, and one gets untidy at night. "But this is a new move, Pryce," he said. "This secures your passage on the *Snowflake*." He peered into the looking-glass and used two hair-brushes quickly. Then he suddenly wheeled round, with the brushes still in his hands. "By

God! it settles everything. You needn't go near the *Snowflake*. Don't you see?"

"Thought you'd come to it. You mean that I poison the girl and her uncle. Smith has to come back to us because he has no one else. The skipper and crew will know nothing, and will be told a tale. That's it, eh?"

"Of course, though it needn't be put quite like that. The best of doctors cannot save every patient. Lechworthy would be distracted, and a sleeping-draught might be necessary—and a mistake might occur. That's the way I'm going to put it—to Smith, to the men here, to everybody. You can trust me."

"Absolutely. But you're in too much of a hurry. I'm not going to do it."

"Why not? Because you're called in as a doctor? Man, our lives are at stake. Let's be frank. I won't face a trial and penal servitude to follow. Would you? You were ready to do much worse than this. It isn't a time for—"

"I know," said the doctor. He had finished with his boots now, and stood upright. "It's not exactly a point of professional etiquette. The thing simply isn't sport. It's too easy and too dirty."

"But this isn't reasonable. You're willing to sink the *Snowflake* and—and all that's implied in that."

"Willing to try. The scuttling of a schooner is not too easy. Teetotal millionaires can afford

luxuries, and you may bet there's a good sober skipper and a picked crew on board the *Snowflake*. They will be awake. If I were caught cutting a pipe or fooling with the sea-cocks, or doing something surgical to the boats, I think—well, objections would be raised. Also, the problem of the one survivor takes some thinking out. It's likely there would be too many survivors or none at all. It's blackguardly enough, but still there is an element of risk about it. As for the other thing, well, to cut it short, I won't do it."

"Then I must leave it," said Sir John. "I think you're missing a chance, but that can't be helped. When do you return?"

"Can't say. To-night perhaps, if the patient doesn't need me. Well, good-bye, Sweetling. Get 'em to elect Hanson secretary if you can. If I can't come I'll write."

Sir John crept back again into bed. He did not mean to break with Pryce, and he had shown less anger than he felt. He was not really surprised at Pryce's prompt and definite refusal. He had dealt with many bad men—some worse than the doctor—and he was a bad man himself; and he had come constantly on the bad thing that the bad man would not do. He had found the distorted sense of honour in men who had done some dishonourable things. He had found generosity in thieves and tenderheartedness in a murderer. Even as the good sometimes fall, so do the bad sometimes rise.

And, after all, the summons of Dr. Pryce to the

palace to attend Lechworthy's niece was all to the good. He would be in the position of a spy in the enemy's camp. Probably, by the evening he would return with news of the relations of Lechworthy and the King. Uncertainties would be cleared up, and it would be easier to see what to do. And yet another point occurred to Sir John. Suppose that Pryce saved the life of Lechworthy's niece, Lechworthy's gratitude would be unbounded, and he would be ready to do anything to show it. Pryce would refuse money, but he might ask Lechworthy to leave the Exiles' Club alone, to refrain from policeman's work, to do nothing which would give the secret away. Thus thinking, Sir John fell asleep again.

He rose late, breakfasted in his room, and then sought out the Rev. Cyril Mast.

"I want you," said Sir John. "Pryce has been called away, and we are the only two on the committee for the moment. Come to the secretary's room."

"Very well," said Mast, dejectedly, and followed him.

The two sat at the table facing one another. Mast's red-rimmed eyes fell on the little glass of small shot with which Bassett had been wont to clean his pens. He could recall the nervous jabbing movement of Bassett's hand as he did it. Bassett's three cork penholders lay in a tray before him.

"You can say what you like," said Mast.

"Whatever you say I deserve it. I ought never to have brought the Lechworthys here. I couldn't foresee that Bassett would come out and Lechworthy would recognise him. It was all wrong, though."

"Why did you do it?"

"Do you never feel sometimes that you'd like to talk to a few decent people who didn't know your history? I've been nearly mad. And—well, it was you who began it."

"Indeed? And what had I got to do with it?"

"You didn't mean it, and you'll probably laugh at it. It was about a fortnight ago, and we'd just finished a committee meeting after dinner. There were Pryce, Bassett, you and I sitting out on the verandah. Bassett kept jigging about in a wicker chair that squeaked horribly, and you said you'd give us some better music than that, you remember?"

"Yes, I remember. What about it?"

"You pulled out that swagger presentation watch of yours—the one that plays the tunes—and set it going. The night was quite still, and I sat listening to the tinky-tink of 'Home, Sweet Home.' That brought back Histon Boys to my mind—village where I was, you know. Old chaps hobbling out of church, bad with rheumatism; they used to touch their hats to me then. They didn't know. I was welcome anywhere in the village. I dined with the farmers and played tennis with their pretty daughters. People walked in from the next

village, three miles away, to hear me preach on Sunday evenings. Yes, it won't seem much to you, but I've lost it all, and I can never have it again, or anything like it. Why, if I showed myself in Histon Boys now, they'd set their dogs on me. That infernal tune made me think, and thinking drove me mad."

"I'm not concerned with your sins, Mr. Mast. Being a parson you repent 'em, and being what you are, you repeat 'em. You spend your time in alternate sobbing and soaking. But I'm concerned with your follies, because they're dangerous. You showed yourself a dangerous fool in the matter of the native women. You've showed yourself still more dangerous in bringing Lechworthy here. Lechworthy's hand-in-glove with the King. Lechworthy may sail for home with a list of our names in his pocket-book."

"I realise all that," said Mast. "If there's any thing I can do about Lechworthy I'll do it. I don't care what it is."

"Remember you've said that. I may take you at your word later. At present that matter is in the hands of a stronger man than you are. Lechworthy's niece is ill, and Dr. Pryce is attending her. Something may be worked that way."

"I don't see how."

"Don't you? Well, there are more ways than one of paying the doctor who saves the life of somebody to whom you're devoted. But don't bother about that yet. At present that's in Dr.

Pryce's hands and mine. You've made an unlimited offer, and I think you were right to make it —you've risked the skins of every man in the club, and you ought to be ready to risk your own skin to save them. Probably it won't come to that, but if it does I'll tell you. Meanwhile there's another thing to settle. Who's to be secretary?"

"Mandelbaum says he would take it if a small salary were attached. He has asked me to propose that."

"We can't pay a salary and I wouldn't take Mandelbaum if he paid to come in. He must find somebody else to propose that nonsense. You can tell him I said so if you like. Mandelbaum doesn't happen to be one of the things I'm afraid of just now. The fact is, Mast—and you're a good deal responsible for it—we are getting too disorganised and demoralised here. I don't want to turn the place into a Sunday-school, but I will have some decency and order. And I want a strong committee, because in consequence of this Lechworthy incident it may be necessary for the whole club to take action as the committee directs. Pryce is all right, but you admit your own weakness. You were elected, because you had the gift of the gab, and you can make it useful to us. I want you to propose Hanson. Bassett was never a strong man, and that fat German who flatters himself that he's worth a salary is no better. Hanson is the man. He's steady and he knows things."

"I'll do my best for him," said Mast. "I must not canvass, of course."

"It's no good; it would work the other way. But if you get a chance between now and luncheon of getting your knife into Mandelbaum's election, don't miss it."

"I see," said Mast. He was glad that he was to make a speech; it was a thing that he did well.

"And don't forget—you owe a debt to the club, and you've told me that you're ready to pay when I call on you."

Sir John was satisfied with this interview. The Rev. Cyril Mast would be a second string to Sir John's bow. The second string was not of the strongest, and probably would not be wanted. But if, for example, some further divergence occurred between the views of Sir John and those of Dr. Pryce, Sir John thought he might find that second string useful.

The meeting that afternoon was brief and without excitement. Mast proposed Hanson in a short but admirable speech. Mast, with the appearance of a dissipated boy, had on public occasions the elegant and sonorous delivery of a comfortable archdeacon. His prepared speeches had point and a dry wit that was quite absent from his ordinary conversation. Mandelbaum withdrew, in a few pathetic words that caused much amusement, and Hanson was elected unanimously.

The new secretary was a quiet and reserved man of middle age. Eight years before he had been a

prosperous Lancashire manufacturer. Then for a week he had gone mad; and as his madness did not happen to be of a certifiable kind, he was now paying for it with the rest of his life in exile. He was the best chess-player in the club and perhaps the best all-round shot; with the revolver Dr. Soames Pryce was in a class by himself. Hanson spent four hours every day over chess. He used work where the Rev. Cyril Mast used whisky, and he had not let himself slip down, even in a climate where all occupations are a burden. If you talked to him, he was pleasant enough, and you found him rather exceptionally well-informed; but you had to begin the talking. He was melancholy by nature, but he had realised it and did his best to keep his melancholy to himself. The work of the secretaryship was a godsend to him.

Sir John had never before sought the society of the Rev. Cyril Mast, but now he meant to keep in touch with him. It was not only because, if it should happen that there was a violent and desperate thing to be done, he felt that he could make Mast do it. Sir John appreciated keenly the trappings of civilisation; he wished things to be done decently and in order. He could not make the Exiles' Club in Faloo quite like the London clubs of which he had ceased *ipso facto* to be a member, but he worked in that direction. He respected—almost in excess of its merits—the Baringstoke family, but when Lord Charles Baringstoke entered the public rooms of the club in pyjamas

and a dressing-gown, Sir John resented it. Public opinion in Faloo was not strong enough to stop drunkenness, but there were limits, and the limits had of late too frequently been exceeded. There had been noise and brawling, and worse. Mast had been a bad offender; his conversation with some of the members was one stream of witless and senseless filth, and in his hours of intoxication he had been beyond measure bestial and disgusting. Yet it had been said that Mast had his moments, and he had shown some ability, though with little judgment to direct it. Sir John began to think that association might effect something, for Mast like most weak men took his colour largely from his company. He did not dream of reforming Mast, for the man was congenitally vicious; but he thought he might effect a temporary break in the dreary see-saw of swinishness and sentimentalism that made up the man's life, and this would help to stop the growing disorder in the club.

So he complimented Mast on his speech, and Mast, like any spaniel, was delighted with a little attention from the man who had chastised him.

"I've something else I want you to do. I'm sending a couple of servants to pack up all Bassett's effects. You might superintend that—see that there's no pilfering and that everything is properly sealed up. And, by the way, I've ordered a grilled chicken at nine to-night, and reserved our last bottle of Chambertin. I should be glad if

you'd join me. I daresay Pryce will come in later."

Mast accepted these proposals with alacrity. He was conscious of some faint glow of self-respect—or of vanity, which so often serves the same purpose.

Late in the afternoon Sir John received a note from Dr. Pryce, brought by a messenger. It contained little more than a request that his clothes might be sent him, and the statement that he would write on the morrow if he could find time.

Over the grilled chicken that night Sir John was rather absent-minded. He did not seem in the least inclined to say anything further about Mast's excellent speech, although he had the opportunity.

"And when do you expect Dr. Pryce?" Mast asked.

"Not to-night after all. I've heard from him, of course. The poor girl's really ill. But still we must hope for the best. Pryce has wonderful skill and experience. Shall we—er—join them in the card-room?"

In one corner of the card-room Hanson, the new secretary, was giving Lord Charles Baringstoke a game of chess. There was nobody in the club whose play gave Hanson more trouble. Hanson played like a scholar; his opponent played like a demoniac with occasional flashes of inspiration and was generally, but not invariably, beaten.

To-night, for instance, he looked up triumphantly from the board.

"Well, old cockie?"

"Yes," said Hanson, "that is so. I'd given you credit for something better, and when you unmasked, my position was hopeless. Serves me right. Quite interesting though."

"Tell you what. My game's improving?"

"No, Charles," said Hanson, "it's clever but unprincipled, and always will be. Still, it's always suggestive. Now let me see if I can't wake up a little."

"I say," said Sir John bitterly from the card-table where he was playing a difficult hand, "is chess a game that requires so much conversation?"

"Sorry," said Hanson.

"We've made papa quite cross," said Lord Charles Baringstoke as he arranged the pieces. He was not allowed to win again that night.

Mast played very sober bridge with very bad luck. He could not hold a card.

"I'm a perfect Jonah to-night," he said after his third rubber, as he paid his loss.

"Yes," said Sir John, genially, as he gathered the money; "we shall have to throw you overboard. Come along now. We were very late last night. Bed's not a bad idea."

The Rev. Cyril Mast followed him meekly.

. . . . . .

The King drove furiously, but Dr. Pryce was

not a nervous man. When they arrived at the King's house, Lechworthy was pacing the verandah anxiously, awaiting them. Dr. Pryce was presented to him, but very little was said, for the doctor wished to see his patient at once, and went off to her room.

Nearly an hour had passed before he reappeared on the verandah.

"Well, doctor," said Mr. Lechworthy, eagerly. "I have been much alarmed—needlessly, I hope. What is the matter with my niece?"

"I don't know the name of it," said Dr. Pryce. "I've seen it several times here—never in Europe."

"She is seriously ill?"

"Undoubtedly. But Miss Auriol has a fine constitution, and if we can fight through the next thirty-six hours, recovery is likely to be very rapid. Unfortunately, those two native girls, with the best intentions, have been playing about with native remedies."

"And they are useless?"

"They are very much worse than that. However, it won't happen again, and now that I've talked to them, Tiva and Ioia may be quite handy." At the moment Tiva and Ioia were frightened out of their lives, weeping tears of bitterest penitence, and wishing they were dead.

"Yes," said Lechworthy, "you will be able to use them as nurses."

"A nurse who can't take a temperature isn't

much use to me at present. I shall be nurse and doctor too. But they can do little things under my direction—fetch and carry and so on—and they're willing enough."

"I feel a terrible responsibility in having brought Miss Auriol here. I had hoped, doctor, that you would be able to give me better news."

"Perhaps that will come to-morrow. Meanwhile, there are things I must see to. Is Smith still here?"

For the moment Lechworthy did not understand that it was of the King that Pryce spoke in this unceremonious way. "The King?" he said. "Yes, he wished to see you."

"Thanks. I'll go and find him." He paused a moment. There was something in the plucky, self-controlled wretchedness of the old man that appealed to him. "There is no immediate danger," he said. "If there were, I would tell you. I am going to remain here, and in one point I want to prepare you. Miss Auriol is ill now, but she will be worse this evening. I expect a further rise in temperature, and there may be delirium, and in consequence some noise. But you must not let that upset you too much—it's foreseen and I shall be ready to deal with it. If she gets a good sleep afterwards, I shall be quite satisfied."

"Thank you very much for telling me. Indeed —I wish I could thank you better for all you're

doing for us. It is good of you to have come and to devote so much time to us. I feel it—far more than I can express at present."

"My time here is of little value. You understand then—I cannot say that Miss Auriol is out of danger, but there's room for hope. I'll do my best, Mr. Lechworthy. Go and see her for a few minutes now, if you like. After that, I would rather she were left alone, unless she asks specially for you and begins worrying."

Mr. Lechworthy was almost aggressively cheerful during the few minutes that he spent with his niece. Her room was pleasantly cool, and so darkened that he could only just make out the pale face and the mass of hair on the pillow. Mr. Lechworthy expressed the opinion that Pryce seemed to be an able doctor and would put her right in no time.

"And how do you get on with him, my dear?"

"I think," said Hilda, faintly, "that he is the very gentlest man I ever met."

"Good," said Mr. Lechworthy. "You like him then. That's right."

Hilda's estimate of Dr. Pryce would probably have excited some mirth among his friends at the Exiles' Club. Lechworthy, as he resumed his notes on South Sea Missions, found himself puzzled by Dr. Pryce. Somehow or other Lechworthy had expected to see a furtive, very polite, shaky little man, one who would try to ingratiate himself—something like Mast or Bassett. He

found that he could not fit Dr. Pryce into any reasonable idea of the fugitive from justice.

Meanwhile Pryce had found the King asleep in a long chair in the garden. The King had spent less than one hour in bed, and at such times he slept when he got the chance. But he was awake and alert almost as soon as he heard Pryce's voice.

"And what is this illness?" he asked immediately.

"The same that you had—and your boss man on the plantations."

"Good," said the King. "Then you must cure her."

"You, like your plantation boss, are a man and a native; Miss Auriol is a woman and a European. I got on to your case at once; here, before I arrived, Miss Auriol had been made to swallow a mess of boiled leaves—of a kind that might have poisoned a woman in good health. She has the disease in a worse form than you had it. I could give you horse-medicine; I should kill Miss Auriol if I gave the same doses to her. Well, I don't expect you to understand. But you can understand this—on the whole, the probability is that Miss Auriol will die."

"You stop here?"

"Of course."

"My servants, my house, myself—all are at your disposal. I am no more King here: here the doctor is King. All that you say will be done. But Miss Auriol must not die. I have given my

word that you can save her and that you will save her."

"Then you're a fool," said Dr. Pryce, bluntly.

"Why? I was ill—it was the same thing. You saved me—so you save her too. She must not die. It means too many things. If she dies, other people will die. You will die, Dr. Pryce."

"Shall I?" said Pryce, smiling. He took his revolver from the case at his belt, held it by the barrel, and handed it to Smith. "Catch hold of that, will you? Thanks. Now then, you can either put a bullet through my head or you can take your words back. You shall do one or the other. Refuse—and I leave you to do the doctoring."

The King examined the revolver, and handed it back again.

"I apologise," said the King. "But I have not slept much, and so I judge badly. You must excuse me. Perhaps I wished, too, to make a test. You will take no notice. It is—"

"I'm in a hurry," said Pryce. "I want fresh milk for my patient. I'd like cow's milk, but that can't be got. Goat's?"

"Yes," said the King. "I had yesterday to decide the possession of a goat. It was a goat in milk, valuable because the milk could be sold to the Exiles' Club. Shall I have some milk sent up?"

"How far away is the goat?"

"About a mile."

"Then have the goat driven here, and driven very gently. I'd like to vet. the beast first. If

she's healthy, then with a little modification the milk will do. Have you an ice-machine here?"

"Yes."

"I shall want a good deal of ice to-night probably."

"I will see to that. Is there anything else?"

"I may want some brandy later, and if so I want the best I can get. You used to have some—"

"Of the genuine old cognac that the French padre gave me. There is still one bottle left. It is at my office. I will send a messenger for it."

"Right. See about the goat first, please." Dr. Pryce turned back to the house.

There he found the tear-stained Tiva waiting for him. In her hand she held a plant with small yellowish-white flowers. Dr. Pryce had sent her to get it.

"See," she said eagerly. "All right?"

"Yes, that's all right," said Dr. Pryce, taking the plant. "You're a good girl, though a fool in some respects. You can go back to Ioia now. And, remember, you do not enter Miss Auriol's room, unless she rings that little bell by her bedside."

In addition to doing much of the work that usually falls to the nurse, Dr. Pryce had also to be his own manufacturing chemist. Two cases of drugs and apparatus, that he had brought with him, had been placed in a room near Hilda's. Dr. Pryce unpacked what he wanted. There was oxygen to be made and stored, and the dangerous

virtue of those yellowish-white flowers to be extracted.

The King was kept very busy on the beach that afternoon and evening. His schooner had come in, and brought stores of all kinds, some for the Exiles' Club and some for the King himself. There was a bag of letters, and there was money for Lord Charles Baringstoke. Two messengers had come down from the palace by his direction, but they had brought little news; the case was going on much as had been expected—that was all Dr. Pryce would say. At ten o'clock, as no messenger had come for the last four hours, the King mounted his horse and rode up to the palace.

"I'm glad you've come, sir," said Mr. Lechworthy. "Indeed, I was on the point of sending for you."

"Miss Auriol is better?"

"I—I don't know. At sunset it was terrible—one heard her moaning and screaming. Dr. Pryce had told me it would be so, but still it was terrible. For the last two hours he has been in her room and everything has been quite quiet."

"He dined with you, I suppose."

"No. He came in for a minute, and took a cup of coffee. That was all. I can't tell you the things that that man has done to-day. He has done everything—even to the preparing of such food as she has been allowed to take. If she recovers, it is to Dr. Pryce, under Providence, that she owes her life."

"But why does he remain so long? Why does he not come and tell us?"

"I don't know. I hope, of course, that she is asleep."

"If she is asleep, then all is well, and he need not remain."

"Yes," admitted Mr. Lechworthy. "But I have very great confidence in that doctor. We had better not interfere."

"Here he comes," said the King.

"I heard nothing."

"A door opened and shut softly."

Dr. Soames Pryce came out on to the verandah where Lechworthy and the King were seated. His coat and waistcoat were off. With his left hand he rubbed his right forearm. His smile was slightly triumphant.

"Well, we've got through all right, Mr. Lechworthy. Had a bit of a fight for it too. Miss Auriol has been asleep for nearly two hours and is still asleep."

"Then why have you left us without news?" asked the King.

"This another of your little tests?" sneered Pryce.

"Do you want me to apologise again for that? I will if you like. I was a fool, and I know it now. I asked that only because I did not understand. I did not think it would annoy you."

Mr. Lechworthy looked from one man to the

other. He did not understand to what they referred.

"All right, old chap," said Pryce. "I couldn't come before because Miss Auriol had hold of my right hand when she went to sleep, and I didn't want to wake her again. Simple enough, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid she's given you a cramp in your right arm," said Lechworthy.

"It wouldn't prevent me from holding a knife and fork," said the doctor.

"That's good," said the King. "We will have supper together." In another second he would have clapped his hands.

"No noise," said Pryce, quickly.

"Right. I will go and fetch servants myself."

Lechworthy also rose and went through the French windows. Dr. Pryce stretched himself at full length in a chair and closed his eyes. He was rather more worn out than he would have admitted.

He opened his eyes again as Lechworthy came back on to the verandah with a glass in his hand. "I've ventured," said Mr. Lechworthy. "Supper won't be ready for a few minutes. Whisky-and-soda, eh?"

"Good idea," said Pryce, taking the glass. "All the same, I don't want you to run about waiting on me."

"But, my dear doctor, I can't even begin to—"

"Miss Auriol's a prize patient," interrupted Dr. Pryce. "Good constitution, good pluck, good intelligence. By the way—"

King Smith came out to tell them that supper was ready.

CHAPTER VIII

LORD CHARLES BARINGSTOKE stretched himself in a lounge-chair on the verandah. It was eleven in the morning, and he had the tired meditative feeling of one who has risen too early. The parrot, who had been sitting for some minutes motionless on its perch, swayed backwards and forwards, considering its repertoire. It produced a plausible imitation of the drawing of a cork.

"Yes," said Lord Charles Baringstoke, wearily, "that's rather what I think myself."

Mr. Mandelbaum waddled out to survey the morning. Between his fingers he held a cigar, slightly bloated and rather doubtful, and in these respects curiously like its proprietor.

"Well, my young frient," said Mandelbaum, "I make myself a good breakfast zis morning."

"Gross feeder—what? I say, ain't Soames Pryce ever comin' back?"

"Ask ze Herr Zecretary. I am noddings here. Do you want pills?"

"No. You see, it's rather a rum funny thing. You know that lizard of mine—you backed him once."

"And lost my money. I hop' he is dead, zat lizart."

"Yes, he's dead all right, but that ain't it. I

was exercisin' him yesterday, when the boy brought me a glass of sherry and angostura with a fly in it."

"Fly? Vot fly?"

"Just a plain fly, and I hadn't ordered it. But I fished it out and chucked it to my lizard, who took it in one snap."

"Vell, vell, vot about it? If you veesh to gomplain zat your drink hat som' flies—"

"I did the complainin' at the time, thanks. I don't let a thing like that go past me. But what I mean is that the lizard started off round the course like a flash of light. Cut the record all to rags. Did two rounds and a bit, and then he died, you know. But I've got another lizard, and I can get another fly and some more sherry. And I've got some money just now, and Soames Pryce has got a lizard that he thinks can't be beaten. So that's how it is, you see."

"I see, my young frient. Dope."

"Well, puttin' it coarsely, dope. And good."

"Ve borrow a lizart and try him again," said Mr. Mandelbaum, thoughtfully. "Perhaps zat vos only a chance. Ach, here is Sir John!"

The neatness and freshness of Sir John's attire made the other men look untidy. Sir John had been distressed to hear of the carelessness of one of the native waiters the day before, but at the same time he thought it would have been better if Lord Charles had not thrown the glass in the boy's face. Glassware was so difficult to replace. It

would have been enough to have said a word to Thomas about it. "And though the boy's eye will probably get all right again, we think it's politic not to handle the natives too roughly."

"Awfully sorry," said Lord Charles. "This club etiquette does hedge you around, don't it? And I give you my word of honour there was nobody to chuck the blessed glass at. And—oh! I say, when's Pryce comin' back? He's been away a week."

"Not quite a week. As it happens, I'm expecting him every moment. But he goes away again to-night."

"But ze girl was all right again now, zey tell me," said Mandelbaum.

"Well, yes," said Sir John, genially. "A good recovery, I'm glad to say. But possibly Mr. Lechworthy is still a little nervous. Smith, too, can't be there much, he has his business, and I daresay he's getting the doctor to help him with his guests. Our friend Pryce knows the island, you see."

"Shall we gather at the river?" suggested the parrot very loudly, and with distinct lapses from accuracy in its reproduction of the melody. Nobody took any notice of it.

"Well, if Pryce is comin', I'll wait," said Lord Charles. "I want to do a little lizard-racin' with him."

"Doubt if he'll have time for it. You see, Charles, I'm sorry to disturb your plans, but we

want a little business with the doctor. Committee."

"Then I'll find a canoe to take me over to the *Snowflake*. Unsociable lot on that boat—never come ashore for a drink or anythin'. I should do 'em good."

"Sorry to disappoint you again, but the *Snowflake* left Faloo this morning."

"Where to? When's she coming back?"

Sir John stroked his beard and looked very discreet. "I'm afraid," he said, "I'm not in a position to say."

"Well, I am gettin' it in the neck this mornin', I don't think. Mayn't do what I've done—can't do what I wanted—and not to be told anythin' about anythin'. Krikey! And nothin' for breakfast but two oranges and a bad headache. What a life!"

"Ah, ha!" laughed Sir John. "You keep it up too late, you and Mast!"

"*Shall* we," screamed the parrot with much emphasis on the first word, and then paused. With its head on one side, it blinked at Sir John and observed parenthetically, "You damned thief!" For a moment it had forgotten what it had first intended to say. "Gather at the river?" it suddenly added with perfunctory rapidity.

As a matter of fact Sir John knew no more than the others about the destination of the *Snowflake*. Nor did he know when she would return to take up her owner. His information was derived from a

very laconic note from Dr. Pryce, received on the previous evening. "Syndicate chucked," wrote Dr. Soames Pryce. "Lechworthy partners Smith. *Snowflake* leaves to-morrow morning, but returns for Lechworthy. Shall be at the club for a few hours then. So please call committee to meet me and explain." That morning Sir John had received the King's formal notice of his intention to buy out his partners. The letter was brief, severely correct, business-like in every phrase, and clearly had nothing of King Smith about it except the signature.

The situation was very serious. No longer had the Exiles' Club the slightest hold over King Smith. Nor did it seem likely that the King's association with Lechworthy would be confined to the business venture. The King, Sir John had guessed, had other schemes. A desperate crisis must sometimes be dealt with in a desperate way, and of the desperate ways it is better to say as little as possible. If one uses the knife to cut the knot and all comes free, it may be more comfortable afterwards to ignore what has happened and to hide the knife. Sir John spoke of the departure of the *Snowflake,* for this was, or would be in an hour, pretty generally known, but he was not going to babble of the situation to irresponsible people. He was careful to emphasise the note of indulgent good-humour, and gave no indication of the anxiety that tortured him.

Dr. Soames Pryce came across the lawn with

irritating slowness, rolling a cigarette as he walked. He greeeted Sir John and the other two men, and made one or two poignant observations on the personal appearance of Lord Charles. Then he turned to the parrot.

"Nice morning, Polly, ain't it?"

"Hell to you, sir!" said that profane fowl promptly.

Sir John showed pardonable signs of impatience. "Hanson and Mast have been waiting in the secretary's room for some time," he said.

"Sorry. I'll come."

But in the hall a further interruption took place. Thomas came forward.

"Beg pardon, sir, but one of the native boys has got his eye a good deal cut about. Gentleman threw a glass at him yesterday."

"Never mind that now. Another time," said Sir John.

"No," said Pryce, "I must go and have a look at him. I shan't be long, probably. Meanwhile, you and the others can get through all the formal business—you don't want me for that. You've explained the situation?"

"I've spoken of it to Hanson and Mast, so far as I know it. You ought to have written in more detail. Do be as quick as you can."

"There's no hurry," said Pryce, cheerfully, as he followed Thomas.

The formal business went through, including the provisional election of a new member, and some

desultory discussion followed. The Rev. Cyril Mast looked ill, shaky and depressed. He asked many questions, most of which could not be answered, and repeated at intervals that in his belief Dr. Pryce would pull them through. Sir John was barely civil to him, and glanced repeatedly at his watch. Hanson was taciturn.

Half an hour had elapsed before Dr. Pryce entered the room. He was quite conscious that he was being talked about as he entered. He nodded to Hanson and Mast, dropped into a chair, and lit a cigarette.

"At last!" said Sir John, severely.

"That chap won't lose the sight of the eye, but he's had a damned near shave."

Sir John controlled himself with difficulty. "Very interesting, doctor. We are not here, however, to consider the fact that one of the native servants has not lost his eyesight, but a subject of almost equal importance—the liberty and probably the lives of every white man on the island. Dr. Pryce, gentlemen, comes fresh from the enemy's camp. He was called in, as you know, to attend Lechworthy's niece, and he has had unusual opportunities for observation. He has already sent us, very briefly, some alarming and serious news. We shall be glad if he can supplement it in any way, and if he will tell us to what conclusions he has come."

"Hear, hear," said Mast.

"The conclusion to which I have come," said

Pryce, "is that Faloo is finished, so far as we are concerned. The Exiles' Club is done. D-o-n-e, done. *Sauve qui peut*—that's the order."

His three hearers looked at him, and at one another. There was a moment's silence.

"Rather a sweeping conclusion," said Sir John, suavely. "I should have to feel very sure that our case was desperate before I accepted it. What has been happening up at the King's palace?"

"The first few days I was a good deal occupied with my patient, who is now practically well again. Lechworthy and the King had two or three consultations together, at which I was not present. It was not till yesterday morning that they came to their final agreement. Then, as soon as Smith had gone, Lechworthy asked if he could have some talk with me. Well, he told me all that had been arranged, quite fully and frankly."

"And you believed him?" asked Mast, with a silly assumption of acuteness.

Dr. Soames Pryce took no notice of the question and continued. "Lechworthy's business partnership with the King was first touched upon. I did not know before what terms the syndicate had made with the King, and when I heard them I was not pleased. It's not surprising that, as soon as he got the chance, Smith supplanted us."

"You were one of the syndicate yourself," said Sir John.

"I was asked to put a couple of hundred into the business when I came here. I paid my footing.

I knew, of course, that the syndicate had Smith by the neck, and that this was necessary. But I did not know that we were picking his pocket at the same time, which was unnecessary. We needn't discuss it. Lechworthy will take our place. But that is merely a temporary arrangement, for if the King and Lechworthy succeed in doing what they intend to do, there will be no more trading. Under the trader lies the patriot. The King's scheme is that Faloo shall be the asylum of a dying race. You were not far wrong, Sweetling. It is to be Faloo for its own people. No white man is to set foot on the island. Civilisation is not to contaminate it, for civilisation kills the native. Under British protection, which is sought, this would be possible."

"Great Britain is to be asked to protect an island, of which it is to be allowed to make no use whatever," said Sir John. "Come, doctor, we are practical people."

"Well, Smith is ready to pay for anything that he has. He is willing, too, to have the thing tried experimentally for a few years, and to risk everything on the experiment being successful in arresting the deterioration and decay of the native race. Lechworthy, too, is just the man to pull such a thing through. He owns an influential paper, and he contributes largely to the party funds. He is not often heard in the House, but he is working behind the scenes most of the time. The idea is

sentimental, inexpensive and not dangerous, for France isn't going to worry about Faloo."

"The missionary question," suggested Hanson.

"That created a difficulty for some time. Smith's way out of it is disingenuous, but it has worked. The white missionary is barred, but native Protestant converts will be admitted freely, and a church will be built. Religion is accepted, but not secular education. There will be a church, but there will be no school. As for the Catholics, Smith appears to do what he likes. The priests will ask to be transferred to another island—a sphere of greater usefulness. They came here enthusiastic, but they've grown slack and they've done themselves too well. Smith knows something perhaps, and could write a letter if necessary, and they know that he could. At any rate there are to be no more Catholics in Faloo. That was a point which told tremendously with Lechworthy. Of course, we know that in a very short time there will be no more Protestants either. We know what happens to the Protestant convert when the white man is away and there is neither moral support nor public opinion to back him."

"If you had worked on that," said Mast, "you might have separated Smith and Lechworthy."

"It might have been tried," said Sir John.

"It was, and it failed. You see, Sweetling, Smith had been ready for it. The line taken was that the true religion must prevail, whether by the

native convert or by the white missionary. The idea of the first Protestant church in Faloo had a glamour about it for Lechworthy. A site is chosen already for that church, and a rough plan sketched out. And I have not the least doubt that it will actually be built. Smith knows what he's about. I found I had come up against real faith, and with that one cannot argue. And even if I had succeeded, what was the use? So soon as the business partnership comes into being, we lose our hold on Smith, and the position becomes intolerable. He can charge us anything he likes for the goods he supplies. He can refuse to supply us altogether. He can refuse to carry our mail. And certainly he would no longer risk his popularity by standing between us and those of the natives, who, with good reason, hate us. The game's up. *Rien ne va plus.*"

"The position is certainly very grave," said Sir John. "What about the *Snowflake?*"

"Was to have left yesterday afternoon. Lechworthy asked me if I had any letters to send, but I had none. The delay was caused because Smith had not had time to finish some papers that Lechworthy wanted to send on. Lechworthy himself sent, amongst others, letters to his editor and to his political chief. They will catch a steamer at the nearest port on the route. Then the *Snowflake* returns to Faloo, to take up Lechworthy and his niece. Those letters are on their way now, and you can imagine the kind of letters that the

astonished visitor to Faloo is likely to write. This island has become too public for us."

"If those letters arrive, that must be so," said Sir John. "Well, I deprecate any interference with private letters, of course, but there are exceptional cases. Here are we, a body of men, who, from mistakes and misunderstandings, are anxious to retire from the world. Without our invitation and against our wishes this vulgar wealthy manufacturer intrudes himself here, and proposes to make the place intolerable for us. We had a right to see that those letters were not sent. It seems to me, Dr. Pryce, that you might have gone on board the *Snowflake* and, one way or another, managed that."

"Then you're wrong, Sweetling. If I could have done it, it would have meant only a temporary postponement of our troubles, but it was not possible. I went to the King's house as a suspected man. Smith, in a flurried moment, let me see that he suspected me—he thought I meant to kill Miss Auriol, or at any rate to allow her to die. Lechworthy did not suspect me at all; if I had wished to join the *Snowflake* for this preliminary trip he would have arranged it; he is really absurdly grateful to me. But even he would have thought my desertion of the patient queer, for he wishes her to be still under a doctor's care. Smith would have gone further, and would have sent a message to the skipper. Do you think a suspected man is going to have a chance to fool with the mail that's

entrusted to a sober Scotch skipper?" Here he loked steadily at Sir John. "Why, he'd have as good chance of scuttling the ship, and he'd have no chance of that. Suspected people don't have chances."

"This is most disappointing," said Mast, peevishly. "I had felt confident that Dr. Pryce would pull us through. And what has he done? Nothing."

"And what would you have done, you silly boozer?"

"Order," said Sir John. "These provocative expressions—"

"Very well. Let's hear what the Rev. Cyril Mast would have done."

"Naturally, I should have to think over that," said Mast.

"If you'd learned to think a little earlier, you would not have brought Lechworthy to the Exiles' Club. You made this trouble, you know."

"True enough," said Sir John. "I've told you so myself, Mast."

"I don't deny it. And I tell you once more that there is no possible act of reparation which I am not ready to make."

"I can't say anything about that," said Pryce. "Not at any rate within the present limitations as to language at committee meetings. And I don't think there's much else to say. I've one more little thing to tell you, and I heard it as I was on

my way here. A native, whom I was treating for pneumonia just about the time of Smith's rejection as a member here, recovered. To-day he came running after my gee in a highly agitated condition. He had something to say to me. Briefly it came to this, that the white men on the island were to be killed as he put it, pretty dam quick. If necessary, Smith was to be killed too. This was all decided, and I understood that he was one of the conspirators who had decided it. But, as he was pleased to say I had saved his life and he wished to save mine, I was to clear out on the trading schooner, I believe. Personally, if there's any conspiracy on foot, I think the conspirators are likely to get hurt. You were right about those piano-cases, Sweetling. Smith has got seventy-five men up at his house, and they all have rifles. I mention it in case you may think it of any importance. My own opinion was not altered by it. Lechworthy is not doing any detective or police-work. He's not sending over a list of names or anything of that kind. But I make no doubt that he has said something of the nature of the Exiles' Club. If we stay, we are lost. If we disperse, there's still one more chance. With many of us the scent is cold and the hounds have given up. And the world's wide. I propose, Mr. President, that the question of winding up the club, or of any alternative scheme be considered at another meeting to-morrow. I have not much more time now. And you do not want to decide hurriedly."

Sir John rather dejectedly agreed, and there was no dissentient voice.

"Then shall we meet again at this time to-morrow?" asked Mast. "That would suit me."

"What do you think, doctor?" asked Sir John.

"Meet then if you like. I shan't be here. I'm going fishing with Lechworthy. You know my views. The members of the Exiles' Club should disperse deviously, and as soon as Smith's rotten schooners can take them. As to the winding-up of the club, I'm content to leave it in your hands, Sweetling."

"So in a crisis like this you find it amusing to go fishing," said the Rev. Cyril Mast with offensive bitterness.

"Fishing is an occupation," said Pryce. "Pitching idiots through windows is another occupation—and it's difficult to keep off it sometimes."

"Order, please," said Sir John. "These suggestions of violence are most improper. At the same time you, Mr. Mast, are the very last person who should venture to offer any criticism. Now, gentlemen, as to the date of the next meeting. What do you think, Mr. Hanson?"

"This day week," said Hanson. "By that time we may know more—or other things may have happened."

"I can be here then," said Pryce.

The date was agreed upon, and Pryce came out into the hall. He was going to walk back to the

King's house, and he thought he would take a drink first. In the hall Lord Charles Baringstoke came up to him with Herr Mandelbaum in attendance.

"Oh, I say," said Lord Charles. "I've got my money now, you know. And I've got a lizard I'd like to back against yours—or against the clock if you like."

"Well," said Pryce, "can't a man have a drink first?"

"Funny thing—just what I was goin' to propose. What's yours?"

"Sherry and angostura," said Dr. Soames Pryce, impressively. "And I'll have two flies in mine."

Mandelbaum's deep bass laughter rolled upwards from a widely-opened mouth.

"Golly!" exclaimed Lord Charles. His look betokened no shame, but considerable curiosity. "You're on it, of course; but, I say, how did you know?"

"When you smashed a glass on the face of that native boy you nearly cut his eye out—but you didn't cut his tongue out."

"Goot! Ver' goot!" roared Mandelbaum.

"So you've been patchin' his face up?" said Lord Charles. "I see. Well, it's my mistake, ain't it? But you'll have a drink all the same."

"The cheek of it! What, you dirty dog, you try to swindle me and then expect me to drink with you? Well, well, one mustn't be too parti-

cular in Faloo, and you were born without any moral sense, Charles, and it may be—Lord knows—the last drink we'll take together. But you'll drink with me this time. Come on, Mandelbaum."

Mandelbaum quoted a German couplet to the effect that a drink in the morning has a medicinal value. Lord Charles protested, but permitted Dr. Pryce to pay. Sir John and Hanson joined the party. Mast had gone off by himself. He was sick of the alternate patronage and reprobation of Sir John. He was sick of his own miserable position—to be despised by the members of the Exiles' Club was to be despised indeed. His weak imaginative vanity pictured himself saving the situation, winning even from his enemies a frank and generous admiration. But his drink-bemused brains supplied no plan of action. He found an unfrequented corner of the garden in which to sulk and swill.

Pryce remained but a few minutes, promised Sir John that he would write if there were anything worth writing, and went on his way. And then Sir John called Hanson apart.

"You said very little at the meeting, Hanson. The modesty of the newly-elected, eh?"

"No," said Hanson. "I had something to say, but it was not the time."

"Too many listeners? Pryce?"

"I formed an idea of him—you also, probably."

"He had meant to do—er—something that was not discussed. But he managed to give me good

reason why he couldn't do it. I can't blame him. And I fear he's right in his conclusions. What was your idea?"

"That Dr. Soames Pryce does not care one damn what becomes of the Exiles' Club—or what happens to himself either."

"He's a very unemotional man, hates scenes, prides himself (so I should imagine) on his philosophical calm."

"He has himself well in hand, but it struck me that it was done with great difficulty. He would have much liked to kill our friend Mast. Unemotional? Why, the man's being burned alive with his emotions!"

"What emotions?"

"Not anger with Mast, nor sorrow, nor fear. There's one white girl on the island—isn't that explanation enough?"

"I hadn't thought of it. It may be that you're right. But that doesn't affect the main thing—we have got to quit Faloo."

"I agree with you that it doesn't affect that. But still—do you play chess, Sir John?"

"Rarely, but I'm not your class, and I shouldn't care for a game at the moment."

"I had not meant to suggest it. And when you play what is the object of your attack?"

"The King, I suppose."

"It is the same here—in Faloo—now. It is too simple to amount to a problem. We can win in one move."

"I must hear this."

"In the garden, I think. It's not talk to be overheard."

The two men went down the steps of the verandah together.

CHAPTER IX

SIR JOHN took a cigar from a golden and armorial case and snipped the end.

"Well, Hanson," he said, "you're a new man on the committee, and new men bring new ideas. So we are to attack the King, are we? It can be done, of course. You may leave the details to me, but if I saw the regrettable necessity, you may take it from me that Smith would be removed to-night. But what I do not see is how it would do us any good. Smith still stands between some of these angry natives and ourselves, though it's a question how much longer he will do it. If the King goes, there is still Lechworthy. Then the *Snowflake* is coming back here. So, you see—"

"Yes, yes," said Hanson. "But that is not the way the game should be played. Shall I tell you?"

"Certainly. That is what I want." Sir John lit his cigar, and was careful not to throw the match down on the lawn, for he disliked untidiness.

"Our first move is to make a feint of accepting the situation. At the next meeting we go through the formalities of winding up the club; we discuss quite openly the means of getting away from the

island, and speculate as to what will be the safest place to which to retreat. We allow Smith to hear all this, and from him, or from Pryce, it will go through to Lechworthy. Nobody but you and I, Sir John, will know it is a feint. We shall be doing nothing that will surprise Pryce, since he thinks it is the only thing left for us; and he had better not be told. I know the man is loyal, but I mean to cut out even the possibility of a mistake. The other side will continue the game according to their original plan. Lechworthy and his niece will sail away in the *Snowflake*, and take the next available steamer for England. Our second move is then—and not till then—to arrange for the disappearance of Smith. And that wins us the game."

"I don't see it."

"Smith, as is common enough in these islands, has no child; neither has he any official and acknowledged wife, which is much less common. The succession would certainly be disputed. The support and the weapons of the white men would turn the scale in that dispute. In other words, the new King of Faloo would be our nominee, and would have to carry out the conditions on which he gained our support. He would repudiate Smith's scheme entirely; he would refuse any business or political association with Lechworthy. What can Lechworthy do? Nothing. I doubt if he could have got Great Britain to give this weird sort of protection to Faloo, when the King and people of Faloo asked for it and would pay for it.

He is too practical a visionary to attempt it when Faloo repudiates anything of the kind."

"Yes, you've worked it out. Smith's a good life, and I'd never thought about the succession myself—you're sure of your facts there?"

"Quite sure. What do you think of it?"

"Good. We must do it. But it's no cinch."

"That's true," said Hanson. "You heard what that native boy told Dr. Pryce. A rising against the white men may take place any moment now, and might upset my scheme; we should have to deal with it as it came and wait chances."

"I think that's all gas. I used to believe in it, but it would have come earlier if it had been coming at all. I never met a native yet, except Smith—and he has got a dash of white man in him—who had the grit to start a thing of that kind and run it through. I'd something quite different in my mind. When Lechworthy hears from the new King he will know perfectly well that we are at the bottom of it."

"Probably."

"Then he will give us all away."

"I doubt it. He would find it too difficult to explain why he had not given us away before. Besides, he is not a vindictive man; his conscience is his only guide, and if his conscience does not prescribe a man-hunt now it will not prescribe it then. I know something of Lechworthy. He would cut his hand off—and do it cheerfully—to convert us, so that we gave ourselves up to what is called

justice; but to pursue and to punish is not in his nature. Besides, his gratitude to Pryce will hold him."

"You may be right. It is difficult to forecast so far ahead, and things we have not even imagined may happen, but you may be right. If it comes off the position is better than ever. We've dealt with Smith with moderate success, but there are not two Smiths and we shall do as we like with the next king. You've shown us the best game to play and we will play it. Then, for the present, we do nothing?"

"Nothing," said Hanson. "When the next meeting of committee is called we acquiesce in Dr. Pryce's proposals. We take first steps towards winding-up. They will be merely paper-work, and serve to fill in time till Lechworthy goes. Then—I leave it to you. You must be prompt. Smith must go."

"Yes," said Sir John. "I think it is likely that his death will be the result of a private quarrel. That will be the accepted version."

"Very well. You'll arrange all that. Lunch, eh?"

"I think so," said Sir John. And they turned back towards the club-house.

It occurred to Lord Charles Baringstoke to be curious as to the affairs of the club that afternoon. His method was direct. "And what did the committee do?" he asked Sir John, as they sat on the verandah together.

Sir John neither hesitated nor lied. He told the exact truth so far as he knew it—as to one transaction which had taken place in committee, while they were still waiting for Dr. Pryce.

"We've given provisional election to a Mr. Pentwin, whose credentials and application arrived by last mail. He himself arrives on Smith's second schooner. He should be here in a day or two."

"I got a newspaper by the same mail. He was Pentwin's Popular Bank, and the police believe he's in Barcelona. He's got the stuff with him too."

"We need not go into that, Charles," said Sir John, with dignity. "We do not discuss the mistakes that members here may have made in their past life, nor the mistakes which the police may have made. Mr. Pentwin sends his subscription and a letter of recommendation from the widow of an old member, Herbert Wyse."

"Didn't know him."

"No," said Sir John. "Poor Wyse was called to his rest before you arrived here."

Wyse had thought that he wished to get away from the police. After a few months on Faloo he had found that what he really wanted to get away from was himself and the thing he had to think about. He cut his throat.

The provisional election of Pentwin had been a matter of course. The only comment in committee had been a remark of Hanson's that he would sooner have had a recommendation from a living member of the club. As Sir John said, if

Pentwin was not suitable, he would not remain a member; one or two such cases had occurred before and had given no trouble.

As to the principal business of the committee, Sir John said not one word to Lord Charles Baringstoke, who believed that this provisional election of Pentwin had been the principal business and was quite satisfied. Sir John, as has already been said, had told the truth about the election so far as he knew it. He was exact in saying that a subscription and letter of recommendation from poor Mrs. Wyse had been received, and that the name given was Pentwin. Also the solitary passenger who was at present cursing the cockroaches and discomforts of Smith's smaller trading vessel, and enduring many things in order to reach Faloo, called himself Pentwin and was thus addressed by people who had time to talk to him. The initials H. P. were on his rather scanty luggage, and the Christian name of the hero, or villain, of Pentwin's Popular Bank was undeniably Hector.

But this man was not Hector Pentwin, knew very little about him, and knew less about bank business than he did about some other things. Hector himself, flying from justice with a presentiment (subsequently fulfilled) that he would be caught and punished, would have been much surprised had he known that anybody was impersonating him. He could have imagined no possible motive. Yet the impersonator (whom we may con-

tinue to call by the assumed name of Pentwin) had his sound and sufficient reasons.

He was a round-faced little man with a cheery smile and an inexhaustible flow of rather commonplace talk. He had money to spend, and appeared immune to alcohol and anxious to prove it. In two days he seemed quite to have fallen into the ways of the club, and was on the best of terms with all the members.

"Pentwin will do very well," said the president, and the secretary agreed.

The Rev. Cyril Mast extended patronage to Pentwin, who received it with a seemly gratitude.

"Of course," said Mast, "as a member of the committee I have to exercise discretion. I can't discuss the committee's business."

"Certainly not," said Pentwin. "I shouldn't expect it. Besides, I'm the least curious of men."

"Apart from that, I shall be only too glad to put you up to things."

"That's really kind of you. I'm a new member, but I hope to spend many happy years here, and for that reason I don't want to begin by treading on the toes of other members. You understand what I mean. Nobody has said a word to me about Pentwin's Popular Bank, and I appreciate that. It shows nice feeling. Before I make any blunder, you can perhaps tell me what subjects to avoid with particular members."

They chatted over the subject, and Mast became from force of habit rather vinously and aggres-

sively moral on the sins of other people. He noticed it himself and half apologised for it.

"You see, Pentwin, I have never been able to shut my eyes to the serious side of life. Have another drink?"

"Thank you, I will," said Pentwin, and did.

All went smoothly and peacefully now at the Exiles' Club. A tentative order to King Smith had been received and executed with alacrity, and so far he had shown no disposition to quarrel with the men whose partnership he was renouncing. Members of the club who had had fears of what Lechworthy might do had been quieted by Sir John, or Hanson, or Mast. It had all been arranged, they were told. Pryce, clever fellow, had got Lechworthy's promise of silence in exchange for his professional services to Lechworthy's niece. Mast had the feeling of elation which comes to a man who after a period of depression finds himself becoming of importance. Sir John, after his talk with the chess-player in the garden, had talked very seriously to Mast. "We have a new scheme on foot," he said. "Pryce is not in it, and you are." Nothing could have made Mast better pleased. True, he was not told what the scheme was. Until Lechworthy's departure nothing was to be done except the first formal step towards the winding up of the club; and it was generally to be given out that Pryce had squared Lechworthy. "Once Lechworthy has gone," said Sir John, "you'll be called upon to act. You'll be

shown what to do. Do it, and you'll wipe out your past follies, and the new scheme will go through and we shall all be safe."

Sir John had considered that whoever killed King Smith would be very lucky indeed if he escaped being killed in his turn. Mast had made the trouble, and had professed his readiness to redeem his mistake. Mast could be spared, for he had greatly deteriorated since his election to the committee. He might as well die that way as from drink. Hanson had planned the game; Sir John would play it; Mast would be merely a miserable pawn, gladly sacrificed for the great end.

Meanwhile, the wretched cat's-paw felt himself the man of destiny. On some subjects he might chatter freely, but he preserved an iron discretion where Sir John enjoined it. To any member who pressed a question he was reassuring but gave no details. "We've gagged Lechworthy all right," was a favourite phrase with him. "You can sleep in your beds."

He did not mention Lechworthy to the new member, for so far he had no reason to be proud of the subject. But what Mr. Pentwin did not hear from the Rev. Cyril Mast he heard at length from Lord Charles Baringstoke, who had no more discretion than the club parrot.

"Lechworthy—you must have heard of him," said Lord Charles. "Portmanteaux and piety, you know. He's a G.T. at present, with a pretty niece

with him. Funny his bargin' in here, ain't it?"

"And where did you say he was living?"

Lord Charles closed one eye impressively. "No use, young man. The same idea had occurred to me, but there isn't a girl in an English high-class boarding-school who's quite so well looked after as Lechworthy's Hilda. She's up at the King's house, and you are not invited to inspect the goods."

"How do you mean?"

"Tell you what happened to myself. I thought I'd have a look, just to see if anything could be done. I never said a word to a soul, but I went off on my own. The garden of the palace is surrounded by a scraggy hedge standing on the top of a high bank, and it occurred to me that there was a chance the girl might be walking or sitting out in the garden. So I climbed up the bank and looked through the hedge. I didn't see the girl, but I did see four natives with rifles. Smith has got a young army of them up there, and they are picked smart men. I never thought I could be seen, but I suppose I moved the bushes or something. As their rifles went up to their shoulders I dropped and rolled down the bank. If I'd not done that I should have been jewelled in four holes, like Sweetling's presentation watch that he's so proud of. You leave it alone, my son. It's not healthy."

"You never tried sending in a native with a note to the girl?" suggested Pentwin.

"It's like this. There's a pack of servants there,

and there are the gents with rifles. But to every other native the place is taboo. There's not enough tobacco and coloured shirts in the world to bribe a native to try to get in. You might get a boy to go as far as the entrance and holloa. The guard would turn up, and he could hand over his letter. But the chances are that the letter would go straight to the King, or to Uncle Lechworthy, or to the doctor—who's a bit of a boss there just now."

"What doctor's that?"

"Soames Pryce. On the committee here, and a pretty tough proposition too. The girl fell ill—very ill—rotten. Pryce pulled her through and is stopping on. He's got Lechworthy in his pocket to do what he likes with, they tell me."

"I see," said Pentwin. "Well, things being so, I shan't bother about the girl."

To do Pentwin justice he had never in the least bothered about the girl. He knew that he would need shortly to communicate with a person in the King's house, and he wished to know how to do it, but that person would not be Hilda Auriol. He now permitted himself to be initiated by Lord Charles Baringstoke into the mysteries of lizard-racing, and took his losses with equanimity. He won them back, and more too, at bridge that evening, and had the honour of being congratulated on his game by the great Sir John Sweetling himself.

"A very pleasant, cheery little fellow," said Sir John when Pentwin had gone up to bed. "Self-made man, I should say. Not much education or

manners to boast of. But he is unpretentious and good-hearted, and his bridge is really excellent." Nobody values unpretentiousness more highly than the incurably pretentious.

Pentwin occupied the room which had been Bassett's. He had heard the story of Bassett, but he was not a nervous man. Alone in his own room, his air of careless cheerfulness vanished. He looked quite serious, but not in the least depressed. He had the air of a man playing a difficult game, but a man who had played difficult games before, and with success.

From his breast-pocket he took a small canvas envelope, which contained all the papers that he had brought with him, including a wad of Bank of England notes and a proof of his real identity. From the envelope he took a sheet of memoranda, and added to them with a sharp-pointed, indelible pencil in a microscopic writing. He wrote slowly, though he was familiar with the cipher which he was using, and replaced the paper in the envelope.

In pyjamas and slippers he paced up and down the room. Through the open window he could see high up in the distance a tangle of lights among dark trees, where the King's house stood.

"Well," he said to himself, as he had often said before, "one must see how things work out." He placed under his pillow the canvas envelope, a revolver, and a leather bag containing twenty-eight sovereigns and some odd silver. Then he put out his lamp and got into bed.

He could hear a faint murmur of voices below. Then steps came up the stairs, and the voices became audible. The two men were standing at the top of the stairs now.

"You've no reason to be nervous," said a querulous voice, which Pentwin recognised as Mast's. "You can depend on me, Sir John."

"But can I?" said a deeper voice. "It will be at the risk of your life."

"Why can't you tell me plainly here, and now what it is? Why wait? I've shown discretion."

"Of late? Yes. But don't talk so loudly."

"I don't care one straw about the risk of my life. When the time comes for me to make good my word I shall do it. I'm only too glad that you've given me the chance. It amuses Dr. Pryce to treat me as a fool and a baby. He'll see. Well, that doesn't matter, I don't want to talk about myself."

"Quite right. Don't talk—it's what you do which counts. Now you've got to be patient. You can't eat your dinner till it's cooked. You—"

The voices died away down the passage. Pentwin heard a shutting of doors. All was still. "Now," thought Pentwin, "I wonder what game is on there." But it troubled him very little, and in a few minutes he was asleep.

CHAPTER X

LECHWORTHY'S project for a pamphlet dealing with mission work in the South Seas had never been of

a very ambitious character. It was to be nothing more than the notes of a passing traveller, with no intention of comprehensiveness or finality, designed only to awaken more interest in the missions. Very rarely did Lechworthy lay aside any work that he had projected and actually begun; persistence and self-reliance had been the distinguishing notes of his commercial career. But now he gathered together the memoranda that he had already made, wrapped them in a big envelope, endorsed it and sealed it.

"Hilda," he said, "you remember an idea I had of writing something about the missionary work, you know—I've given that up."

"Yes," said Hilda, who understood him well, "I suppose so. There's a good deal else, isn't there?"

Lechworthy's mind had always been far less constricted than his opponents had supposed, and he was beginning now to adjust himself to the new ideas and facts that had lately come within his experience. Some change of view had been dawning upon him before he ever reached Faloo. His belief in Christianity as expounded by the evangelical section of the Church of England remained unshaken, the main pillar of his life as it had ever been. He still felt the encouragement of missionary enterprise to be part of his religious duty. But he had seen things and he had lost faith in some of the faithful.

He had found quite good men making hypocrites

and calling them native converts, and had regretted that the wisdom of the serpent is so seldom joined to the harmlessness of the dove. He had found that the teaching of Christianity had involved too often the teaching of much which was worthless in European civilisation and positively dangerous when transported to these islands. With many illustrations the King had made that clear to him. He had found, too, that much good work was being done by men whom he regarded as lost heretics and spoke of as "Romans." To write the truth as he had found it might do harm. And here, in this remote island, out of the political and commercial atmosphere that had sometimes distorted his vision, and far from the petty wars of sects, specious misrepresentation refused to be called by any prettier name. Hilda herself would not have shrunk from it with more acute disgust.

Accustomed as he was to regard all that happened to him as specially ordained by Providence, he meekly submitted to the change in his plans which it seemed to him that Providence had directed. The work which he had designed had been taken out of his hands; it might be that some vainglorious thoughts had mingled with that design. And other work had been given him. He regarded it as no blind chance which had brought him to Faloo, had saved him from Bassett's revolver and Hilda from the island fever, and had put him into the hands of this strange native king, with his scheme for making of his own little island

a refuge for some remnant of his race against the devastating inroad of an unsuitable civilisation.

In his new work Lechworthy was yoked with an unbeliever, or at least with one who doubted. The King made no profession of Christianity. With the fundamental facts of Christianity he was already acquainted, and for a philosophical discussion of them he was always ready. He professed a general toleration and a readiness to be convinced by events. But he left Lechworthy with no more than a conviction of his honesty and a hope for his future.

"You see," said the King, one evening, "we are very good and mild people here, and we wish to please. On some islands they fight very often, and they eat man. But my people are gentle, unless they are greatly hurt, and so also am I. You, too, I specially wish to please, and a little lie is easy and costs nothing. But suppose you find me out, what then? Would you be pleased?"

"I should not, sir," said Lechworthy. "I should resent it. In fact, it would make it impossible for us to work together."

"All right. Very good. That is what I thought. So I do not say I think just the same as you and repeat pieces of your sacred books. It would be pleasant but untrue. So when I say something else that may please you, then you can believe me. You go to get me British protection, to shut out the white men, to leave Faloo for its own people. But you want Protestant religion. I

say that shall be. In return I give this Protestant religion a very good chance. I bring in the best native converts I find, and they shall teach the religion. Not boots, and square-face, and English weights and measures, but just the religion. And I build a fine church all correct. If I do not do all I have said, then I am a liar and you may take the British protection away from us again."

Lechworthy smiled patiently. "You will keep talking as if I carried British protection in my pocket. I hope that something can be done, and I shall do my best. But how often have I told you that it is all very doubtful and may end in nothing."

"No," said the King, stolidly, "you are a political man, just the same as Gladstone. So you understand how this can be managed."

"But I'm not at all the same as Gladstone," said Lechworthy. "I have not the gifts, nor the position, nor the influence that he had. I—"

"But still you will do it. You have a newspaper, much money, many friends. I think you too modest. If you wish you will do it. If you do it I will give your Protestant religion a very good chance."

"Wouldn't the chance be better," said Lechworthy, "if you allowed one white missionary. I could select the man myself—a man who would be in sympathy with your views."

"It is not then a religion for all races?" asked the King. "Without the help of the white man

it cannot work—eh?" These were calculated questions.

Gradually he brought Lechworthy to agree with him. In the face of the doubter Lechworthy felt that he himself must show no doubt. In uplifted moments he did really feel enthusiastic and confident.

Lechworthy went on in a steady and business-like way, preparing his appeal for a native Faloo, and requiring from the King endless information. Were the people sober? They were. As a matter of fact they had no chance of drinking. Were they industrious? Here the King hesitated a little. The people of his race were naturally less active than Europeans. But they could be made to work —oh, yes. What were the statistics as to the prevalence of crime and violence? There were no statistics, but the King could give a general assurance. Above all, was the Government strong and stable, able to control the inhabitants, and properly representative of their interests?

"But I myself am the Government," said Smith, slightly aggrieved. "And what does it matter?"

"I must show that your people are quiet and orderly, and that they can with safety and humanity be left to themselves; that no interference, even in the guise of help, from the more civilised nations is required here. It is part of the foundation of the whole thing—the essential foundation."

And Lechworthy went on collecting such facts

and concrete instances as he could, showing an appetite for names and figures that dismayed the King. None the less, the King was quite docile and did his best. Either by the extent of his knowledge, or by the extent of his ignorance, he was always astounding Lechworthy.

The Exiles' Club also astounded—and possibly illuminated—Lechworthy. He got on well, amazingly well, with Dr. Pryce, whom he could not help liking and admiring, and to whom he was very deeply and sincerely grateful, but Pryce was very reticent as to his fellow-members. It was the King who was Lechworthy's principal source of information, and the King had many strange stories to tell of the Exiles' Club.

Lechworthy had not often been brought into contact with bad men and criminals, and his idea of the bad man was crude to the point of childishness. He would have admitted that we were all sinners, and that even the best of men have their trivial defects and lapses, but he had always thought of criminals as men bad all through, bad in every thought and act. He had never realised the share in humanity that even the worst men sometimes hold.

It did not surprise him that there were occasional scenes of disorder and excess at the Exiles' Club, but it did surprise him to find that as a rule all was orderly and well-organised, and that, without policeman or magistrate, they obeyed the laws that they had been forced to make. It did surprise him

to hear that the Rev. Cyril Mast, when he first came to the island, instituted a Sunday morning service, and that several members of the club, Sir John Sweetling among them, attended it regularly. It was Mast himself who, under an acute and slightly maudlin sense of his own unworthiness, had discontinued these services.

"Yes," said Smith, simply, "this Mast lives badly, talks badly, drinks very much. But he is a religious man and most unhappy about it. If he had a choice I think he would sooner be quite good."

"Every man has the choice," said Lechworthy, firmly; but to himself he admitted that every man has not the same kind of choice.

The King was perfectly fair, too, in speaking of the trouble between the exiles and the natives. It was due to one special cause, and it was a cause which drove the natives mad; it made them forget all benefits that they had received, and include both the innocent and the guilty in one condemnation.

"The innocent?" said Lechworthy.

"Yes, innocent so far as the natives are concerned. The native servants at the club are treated well as a rule, well fed and well paid, and they get many presents. Some of the members have handled them roughly at times, through drink or anger, but that is uncommon, and Sir John does not like it. If any of them is sick then Pryce comes and makes him well again, just as he is making your niece well again, and never anything to pay.

The native who has something good—fish or fruit or fresh milk—can sell it better to the white man than to another native. It is a few of the younger men at the club who have greatly wronged my people, but there are many of my people who would like to destroy them all."

"I wish you could tell me more of this Dr. Pryce. Apart from all he has done for us I like him. I can't understand your ideas about him."

"What ideas?"

"When Hilda was ill you said—truly, I think—that Dr. Pryce could save her. But you said it would be necessary to frighten him. Did you frighten him? Why was it necessary?"

"I thought he might like to kill her—you too. But I did not frighten him, and I believe I was wrong."

"And that story of yours about the *Snowflake*?"

"I do not know. He asked me to get him a passage on the *Snowflake*. I wondered—and then I warned you. I said the ship and all aboard her would be lost. I think I was right then, and that it would not be so now."

"Well, sir, I think you are wrong. He knows that I would give him that passage, that I'd give him the boat, that I'd give him anything. He has asked for nothing."

"That is because, when your niece was ill, I made a little mistake, and he saw that I suspected him. If he is suspected then his plan is no good. He would know that."

"It's not an easy thing to find a good man who'll sacrifice his life for his friends. Why should Dr. Pryce do it for the scum at the Exiles' Club?"

Smith shook his head. "I do not understand him," he said. "He is the one man there that I do not see through. He is straight—yes, but then he has plenty. He does not take much care of his own skin. I myself have seen him risk his life—just for a game, for the sport. Why not then also for the sake of the men with whom he has lived for so long?"

"But you think he means us no harm now?"

The King waved his hand, as though to put the suggestion aside. "I leave him here alone with you. He takes you out—you and your niece—shows you the island. Very well. Every day he has a hundred chances, if he meant harm. If I did not know that he meant no harm he would have no chance at all. You are the guest of the King of Faloo, and that is an important thing with me. Besides, on your safety all my plan depends."

"I'm glad you think that way about him now. You certainly would not be able to convince me of the opposite. Why did he ever come to Faloo?"

The King shrugged his shoulders. "I did once ask him that question. I have not asked it of many of the exiles. The man they call Charles will chat and laugh about anything, past or present. Bassett once, when he had drunk a little cognac, told me about himself. Mast has made

confessions when he was drunk, and said they were all lies when he was sober again. But most of them will not speak of the past, and questions make them very angry. However, I was very sick, and Pryce looked after me. Perhaps he saved my life—who knows? So I thought he would make me his friend, and one night when he had sat late with me I did ask him."

"And what did he say?"

"He said, 'Go to the devil!' and put the little thermometer-machine in my mouth."

"Well," said Lechworthy, "I've half a mind to ask him myself."

"If you take my advice, then no. If he wishes to tell you, he will tell you. If he does not wish it will be no good to ask."

The general tendency of Lechworthy's mind was optimistic. His perplexities did not lead him to depression. With a complete confidence in an omnipotent power of good, cognisant of and concerned in the smallest details of even the least of the human swarm, pessimism is impossible. Side by side with "I do not understand" comes the consolatory "I do not need to understand." It is probable that a patient submission to the limitation of knowledge, at those very points where the thirst to know is most acute, is one of the conditions of happiness. It is rare among the thoughtful men of the day.

His nature being simple and without vanity, the ludicrous had no terrors for him. When, for ex-

ample, Tiva and Ioia made for him a garland of flowers, he wore it with as little concern as he would have worn a hat, and met the cheerful chaff of Hilda or the doctor quite unperturbed. He took a paternal interest in Tiva and Ioia, but after one trial relinquished any attempt to instruct them in Christianity. Their readiness to make any declaration which they thought was wanted, without the slightest regard to its basis in fact, baffled him, and their unintentional irreverence appalled him. He had to admit that his knowledge of the native mind was insufficient for his purpose. He found himself at times regarding these pleasant, brown, graceful, unthinking creatures rather as some new kind of pet animal than as human beings; and, finding himself in this attitude, repented of it. He and Hilda learned from them a native game, a sort of "knuckle-bones." It was doubtful whether Tiva or Ioia cheated the more shamelessly at it; when detected, they laughed cheerfully. In return he taught them to avoid a frequent use of the word "damn" as a simple intensive, and answered so far as he could their many questions about Queen Victoria and the British method of executing murderers. He was equally ready to instruct them about tube railways and telephones. But when he spoke of such things they became very polite but asked no questions; they did not believe a word he said on those subjects and were not interested.

It was a time of relief after danger—danger to

his own life and to Hilda's. And of any further danger that threatened Lechworthy knew little or nothing. But the patrol at the King's house got plenty of shooting-practice under the direction of the King himself; and the King wore the air of a man who was watching and listening, always listening.

CHAPTER XI

LECHWORTHY, instructed by Dr. Soames Pryce, caught fishes with names like music and colours like the rainbow. Also, instructed by Dr. Soames Pryce, he mastered the management of his simple snapshot camera and learned developing and printing. Every day he was busy with King Smith in working out the details of the scheme for a native Faloo and preparing draft statements to advocate it in England. "My holiday!" he exclaimed to Hilda. "Why, I've never had so much to do in my life. And I like it."

Hilda, on the other hand, did very little. She had been since her illness quieter and gentler. She was listless and at times a little melancholy. She let her management of her uncle slip through her fingers, and even ceased to manage herself; she was ready for anything that Tiva or Ioia suggested, unless, of course, it happened to be something that she thought Dr. Pryce would not like. Her uncle, vaguely conscious of the change in her, said that she was still a little weakened by her

illness. Hilda put it all down to the enervating climate. Tiva and Ioia, who had their own ideas, produced for her a new music—songs in the native tongue that spoke also in the universal tongue. They sang one moonlit night on the verandah outside Hilda's room, when she had just gone to bed. It was the music of ecstasy and surrender. Hilda, in her night-gown, stepped bare-footed across the room and pushed the plaited blind aside. "Tell me what the words of that mean," said Hilda.

Tiva hesitated. She threw her head back and her dark poetical eyes looked up to the golden moon. "He mean," she said in a voice that was like a caress, "he mean, 'I love you pretty dam much.'"

"You darlings!" said Hilda. "Sing it all through once more, please."

"Thank you so much," she called when the music stopped, and gave one long sigh. These island nights, she thought, were, beyond words, too beautiful, overpowering.

On the following morning Mr. Lechworthy desired to speak with Dr. Pryce, and the two men walked in the garden together.

"Doctor," said Lechworthy, "I've said very little so far about all you've done for us. You haven't let me," he added plaintively.

"You see, Lechworthy," said Pryce, "you do exaggerate the thing so. If a bricklayer who had nothing to do came and laid a few bricks for you, you wouldn't think it anything to make a fuss

about—especially if he did it because he liked it. If an unemployed doctor does a little doctoring for you, and enjoys doing it, that's the same thing. It's what he's there for. Really, Hilda's case gave me some new and valuable experience, and I'm very glad to have had it."

The transition from Miss Auriol to Hilda had come at one point of Hilda's illness; it had come by natural evolution from the circumstances. Afterwards, when Pryce resumed the "Miss Auriol," Hilda wanted to know if he was angry with her about anything, and the "Miss Auriol" was then definitely abandoned.

"Well," said Lechworthy, "that's your way of looking at it. But you must see my way of looking at it too. Now I don't want to think about the financial side."

"There is none and can be none."

"So you have decided, and I've submitted to it. But I tell you this—if any doctor in London had done as much for me, my conscience would not have let me sleep until I had paid him a very big fee indeed; and even then I should have felt indebted to him every day of my life. If I can pass over that financial side it's because even in the very few days that I have known you I have come to regard you as a friend. I do not make friends easily. In questions of politics, and even, I fear, in questions of faith, we are as far apart as the poles. But I—I've formed a very high opinion of you, doctor, and I want your friendship."

"Well," said Pryce, "you force my hand. I thought it would come to it. Before you say anything further, Lechworthy, there is something you ought to be told. Sit down here, won't you? At one time, to save the men of the Exiles' Club, I was ready and eager to murder you and many others."

"You meant," said Lechworthy, "to sink the *Snowflake*?"

"I did."

Lechworthy did not look shocked, nor even surprised. "Well," he said, "the King warned me not to give you a passage. We speak in confidence, you and I; you will not let him know that I told you this and will not show any resentment."

Pryce smiled. "Of course not."

"Now at first, doctor, I said to myself that you must be a very wicked man. I was horrified. And then—I thank God for it—I heard the voice of conscience. That voice said, 'Before you judge others, look at yourself, Lechworthy.' Now I'm going to tell you. Some years ago a candidate for Parliament, a man not of my colour, asked permission to address the men at my works in their dinner-hour. I ought to have refused him altogether, or to have seen to it that he had a fair hearing. I could have done either, and either would have been right. I did what was wrong. I said that if he addressed them it must be at his own risk, well knowing that he would take the risk. And then I dropped a hint here and a hint

there that if intruders said that they would chance rough handling they could hardly grumble if they got it. That was enough. The candidate turned up and was fool enough to bring his wife with him. Stones were thrown, and the woman was seriously injured; it was a chance that she was not killed. There's a well-known saying, doctor, '*qui facit per alium facit per se.*' It's true too. If that woman had died it would have been I—and not the man who threw the stone—who would have been in the sight of God her murderer. Some of my men went to prison over that affair; when they came out I did what I could to make up to them for it—because they had been punished for my fault. That incident did me harm in my business and in my political career, and that I could stand; but it also gave the enemy their opening, and injured the good cause that I was trying to help. It's terribly easy to be misled by one's political passions; when one is doing evil that good may come one forgets that one is doing evil. That was one of the things I had to keep in my mind when Smith gave me that warning about you. But there were others. You won't mind if I put it plainly."

"By all means," said Pryce, rolling a cigarette.

"I thought about the Exiles' Club. Here are these poor chaps, I thought to myself, who have found a corner of the world to hide in. They no longer constitute a danger to Society. They ask nothing but to be left alone—to be hunted no

longer. Can it be wondered at that they thought my coming meant the loss of their liberty or their lives? I am no hunter of men, but they didn't know that. And if they thought that, can it be wondered at that they were ready to take any step, however desperately wicked, to get rid of the informer and save themselves? Ah! and I thought something else, doctor, and it turned out to be right too."

"And what was that?"

"I thought to myself, the man who is to sink the *Snowflake* must face an almost absolute certainty of his own death. He must sacrifice himself —body and soul—to help the others. If ever I see him I shall see the finest man on the island."

Pryce laughed. "This is becoming grotesque, Lechworthy. If you can understand the line I took, and can forgive it because you understand it, that's far more than I have any right to expect, and I'm grateful. But for goodness' sake don't try to put me upon a pedestal. It—it won't wash, you know."

"Listen to me a bit, Pryce. Hilda fell ill. The King told me you were the only man here who could save her—otherwise she would die. But he pointed out that it gave you a chance—that there would be a great risk."

"That was nonsense. Smith's a barbarian and doesn't understand things. I came to you as a doctor."

"Anyhow, you came, and I saw you and talked

to you. I've come across many men in my life, doctor, and I make up my mind about them quickly now. If Hilda had died I should still have been quite sure that you had done your very best for her, and would have seen to it that the King took the same view. But you saved her. Now I'll tell you something else; if Hilda had not fallen ill, and we had disregarded the King's warning and taken you aboard the *Snowflake*—well, I don't know what you would have done."

"Don't know myself," said Pryce.

"But I do know that Hilda and I would have been safe. You would not have carried out your intentions."

"Possibly not."

"And for telling me of those intentions, which you were not bound to do, I respect you the more. You may have meant to be my enemy, but you have been indeed my friend. And that brings me to what I wanted to say. You've done more for me than I can say. Now then, what will you let me do for you? Out of friendship tell me. I set no limit."

"You're a good man, Lechworthy," said Pryce, "and you set no limit. But though I'm not a good man, I do. I accept your friendship gladly and I'm proud to have it, but we'd better let the rest go."

"I want to take you back to England with us. I believe in you, and I can't bear to see you wasting your life here. I don't know what you've done,

but I can't believe it is anything which can't be cleared up and put right. Anything that my influence and persistent exertions can do for you would be done. Now, is there any reason against it?"

"As I said before, you're a good man, Lechworthy. But, unfortunately, there is every reason against it. It would be quite impossible. Look here, I'll tell you the story. There was a woman who had been married for ten years. They had been for her ten years of hell—a peculiar and special hell that you know nothing about. And then her husband fell ill and I attended him. He was rather loathsome, but I did what I could for him and he began to recover. One day I was called to the house and was told that he was dead; I went up, satisfied myself as to the cause of death, and said nothing. I never told the woman that I knew what she had done, let her believe that I was deceived, and gave a certificate that the man had died from his illness. You see, she was a good woman by nature, but had been driven near to madness by ten years of—well, only a doctor could appreciate it. I was a very young man, and I was heartily sorry for her; her husband was better dead anyway. Three months later this woman, being a woman, broke down and confessed everything. Exhumation and discovery followed—arsenic was a stupid thing to have used. There was my ruin ready-made."

"So you came to Faloo?"

"Not then. It was not fear, but disgust, that drove me to Faloo. I settled my little account with the law. They gave me a year in the second division, and it was considered that I had been let off lightly. When I came out, I found of course that I had been turned out of my profession. Two stories were confidently believed about me, and both were false. The first was that I had conspired with the woman to kill the man—that had been distinctly disproved, but it made no difference. The second was equally false but less easy to disprove. It was the corollary that the knowing young man-of-the-world always puts to such a case—that the woman had been my mistress. The only reason why I was not turned out of my clubs was because I had forestalled them by resigning. Some old friends cut me, but I had expected that. The old friends who did not cut me were more difficult to bear—I could not stand the duffer who failed to hide that he was proudly conscious of being merciful. I happened to hear from one of these men that a desk-waiter at one of my old clubs had cut and run with a deal of the club's money. I remembered that waiter, and in many ways he wasn't a bad chap—he's our head-waiter at the Exiles' Club to-day. I hunted out his wife, thinking she might need some help. I saw her through a bad illness and gave her money, and she was grateful. She told me about Faloo, and I decided that moment to come here. The good people wouldn't have me, so I thought I'd try the wicked.

I've been here ever since—and, by God, I've suffered less from the sins of Faloo than I did from the virtues of my own country. It's over now. The exiles must leave this place, of course, and they know it. They are probably making their plans now. The only plan I've got is never to set foot in England again—never, never!"

It was in vain that Lechworthy argued. He did not pretend to condone what the doctor had done. But he pointed out that after all it was done under circumstances which would arouse some sympathy. The punishment, apart from the legal punishment, had been slanderous, vindictive and shameful; it might, if it were put before the public in the proper light, produce a strong reaction in the doctor's favour. He might be reinstated in his profession.

"Lechworthy," said Pryce, with rather grim good-humour, "when I was a little boy I did not like to have my head patted. And nowadays I don't think I should like to be defended and excused; it doesn't seem to me to be the treatment for a grown-up man."

"You're too proud, doctor," said Lechworthy. "Think of my position. If I'd never come here you could have gone on undisturbed. I must go on with the King's great scheme. I've put my hand to the plough and I can't look back. The saving of a race is a grand thing, and I feel called to do my utmost to help. It's work almost comparable to the work of Wilberforce, whose name

I bear. But if it succeeds, then I drive you from the island which you have made your refuge, and scatter the men whom you have made your friends."

"You may make your mind easy, Lechworthy. I've thought the thing over at length now, and I don't take quite the view that I did at first. There are too many people in England to-day who know of Faloo, therefore, sooner or later, the police would get to know of it. Faloo may be an independent nation having no extradition or other treaties, but in practice that would not amount to a row of beans. You do these poor devils who have been my companions for the last few years no disservice; if you put them on the run again, you at any rate give them a good start. You do me no disservice either, for I've grown pretty restless of late and pretty sick of things. I shall be glad to start wandering again."

"Then there's one thing you must let me do. When Hilda and I reach Tahiti we must part from the *Snowflake*. We've got fond of her, and we don't want to sell her. We'd sooner a friend had her. You can well afford to keep her. I shall send her back to Faloo, doctor, and in future she will be yours. You will start your wanderings in her."

Pryce reflected a moment. "Very well," he said. "I shall sail in the boat I meant to sink, but I don't know that it matters. Thank you very much, Lechworthy. I shall be glad to take the

Snowflake and to let you be disproportionately generous to me."

The meeting of the committee of the Exiles' Club had been fixed for the following day, but Pryce decided after all not to be present at it. He wrote a short note to Sweetling telling him that he would agree with any arrangements made for winding up the club, and that there was no further news. He added that a general meeting would of course be called and all the members informed.

That night, as on several previous nights, the King and Lechworthy went to their work directly after dinner, and Hilda and Pryce were left alone together. The air seemed hot and heavy, the smoke from the doctor's cigarette hung in lifeless coils.

"Hilda," said the doctor, "it ought to be pleasant down by the pool to-night. Shall we go there?"

"Yes," said Hilda. "I should like that."

Thy sky was powdered with stars. The falling water made an unending melody, and here by the pool the air seemed cooler and fresher.

Hilda, lying at full length on the mat that had been spread for her, spoke drowsily.

"I want you to know," said Hilda "that I've heard your story. My uncle told me. I made him."

"My very disreputable story," said Pryce,

grimly. "Well, it's better not to sail under false colours, isn't it?"

Her hand stole out and pressed his arm gently. "You must come back to England with us," she said, speaking quickly. "It's too horrible that you should have been wronged like this—punished and tortured and maligned for an act of mercy. That's a thing that must be put right. These blind fools must be made to see. Oh, when I think about it, there are people that I could kill."

"You're splendid, Hilda. But it can't be. One must take the world as one finds it. If doctors who gave false death-certificates were not severely punished, that would open the door—'open the door' is the recognised phrase, I think—to all manner of crime. You see it has to be. And though you might make a few kind people forgive what I did wrongly, you could never make the world forgive me for having been in prison. I should never get back to where I was. But it doesn't matter much, you know. Somewhere in these islands I shall find my place. And if I'm ever inclined to feel sore about it I can always remember that I've met you, and what you thought and said, bless you!"

"You won't come back to England?"

"Can't Hilda."

"Then I too . . . am not going back."

"What are you saying, Hilda?"

Her eyes closed. "Don't you know? I know, though you have never told me—said no word of

it. I know that you love me just as surely as I love you, dear. I know, too, why you have not told. It's because you saved my life, and because you think that if we went back to England and you married me you would ruin it."

"I should not have let you know; I've not played the game," said Pryce. "True? Why, it's the only truth in my life. I love you, Hilda. I worship you. I adore you. I know now that I could never have let you go without telling you. But I know, too, that I am not even worthy to speak to you—to kiss the hem of your garment."

"Come to me," she murmured almost inaudibly, and swayed towards him.

They lay side by side now, his arms about her, his lips on hers. For a while neither spoke.

"Three more days," he said at last. "Three more days in Paradise, dearest."

"Not only three more days, but all our lives," she whispered.

CHAPTER XII

"HANSON," said Sir John Sweetling, "you are leaving to me all arrangements for the removal of Smith."

"I am," said Hanson. "In fact, I would sooner know nothing about it."

"In connection with the—er—removal of Smith, I should like to take Mast fully into our confidence. We have the committee this morning, and Pryce

won't be there. I've heard from him. It is my belief that you are right, and that Pryce cares for nothing but Hilda Auriol, and won't come here again. You and Mast and myself will make a solid triumvirate."

"Very well," said Hanson. "I don't think there'll be any harm in it."

So Sir John Sweetling unfolded this scheme to Mast, and outlined the horrible part which Mast himself would be expected to play in it. But he put the best appearance on it, as he did upon everything.

"Smith is a traitor," said Sir John, sternly. "He owes everything to us. Before we came, he owned practically nothing but unsaleable land. Now he is established as a trader, and is doing really well. Suddenly he throws us over. Why? Simply because he thinks that with Lechworthy as a partner he will be able to screw a little more money out of it for himself. He betrays us all to Lechworthy, and I consider even now that disaster may come of it. For that crime—there is no other word for it—the punishment is death, and it will be for you to administer the punishment. It's rough and ready justice perhaps, but it is justice. When a coloured native race and a white race live together on an island, the natives must be made to take their proper position; the penalty for treachery must be sharp and sudden if it is to act as a deterrent. I'm speaking of principles which are tried and sound—principles that have helped to

build up the empire. Hanson is fully with me. The lesson must be given, if only as a salutary warning to the other natives."

"I'm to do this?" asked Mast, staring stupidly. "That was what you meant—that I was to kill Smith?"

"Precisely. The work of a public executioner is unpleasant work, though of course no moral responsibility attaches to it. The responsibility rests with Hanson and myself, who discussed the man's case and decided what was to be done with him. Of course if you find yourself too shaky and nervous, we must get another man for the work. But you've made a good many protestations, Mast. Precisely because it is unpleasant work, you ought to accept it and to be glad of a chance of repairing the injury you have done to the members of this club."

"I shall do it," said Mast, doggedly. "But I don't see how it repairs anything. I don't see how it helps us at all."

It was only then that Sir John spoke of the certainty that a disputed succession would follow upon the death of Smith, and of the use that the exiles would be able to make of it. It was so much better to represent Smith's death as a punishment for a past crime than as a murder for a future advantage.

Mast remained spiritless and rather sullen. He was a little stunned at finding what was required of

him. He had liked Smith—had been rather intimate with him at one time.

"There's no other way?" he asked.

Sir John became a little impatient. "That's all been talked out. Look here, Mast, if your promises were so much hot air, and you're too frightened to do what you said you would, own up at once and waste no more of our time."

Mast scowled. "On the day that Lechworthy leaves Faloo the King will die," he said. "I shall kill him. Does that satisfy you?"

"Quite."

"Well, I want to think it over. I needn't wait for this damned committee meeting, need I?"

"Of course you must wait. Pryce is away, and we must have three for the look of the thing. It won't take twenty minutes."

At the meeting Sir John read out Soames Pryce's brief letter. "Well, now," he said, "what do you think, Hanson?"

"Nothing to be done," said Hanson, stolidly. "Read and noted, that's all. In Pryce's absence we needn't go through a farce of winding-up. We can't call a general meeting of the members yet, because we can't yet put before them the alternative scheme (of which Pryce knows nothing) to which the majority of the committee are agreed."

"That is so," said Sir John. Mast nodded assent.

There was a meeting of three other men on the island that morning. The King and Lechworthy

had walked out together just beyond the garden of the King's house, when a little man came running along the road towards them. The King recognised him at once as the new member of the Exiles' Club. Pentwin had been presented to the King on landing. Now members of the Exiles' Club knew that they were not wanted in the neighbourhood of the King's house; moreover, the King reflected that one of these men had already attempted Lechworthy's life. The King was suspicious.

Pentwin took off his hat and bowed profoundly to the King. Might he be permitted? He wished to speak privately with Mr. Lechworthy. He had business of importance with him.

"I think you haven't," said the King, bluntly.

The little man was not in the least offended. "Oh, but I can prove that to Mr. Lechworthy's satisfaction," he said smiling, and dived one hand into his pocket.

In a flash the King's revolver was out, and covering him. "No, you don't," said the King.

Pentwin stepped back a pace. "It's all right, sir," he said apologetically, "it's only papers."

He drew an envelope from his pocket and handed it to Lechworthy. Smith toyed pensively with his revolver.

From the envelope Lechworthy drew a visiting-card printed in blue. It bore the name of Mr. Henry Parget. On the left-hand corner was

printed, "Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard." The envelope contained two other papers, and Lechworthy glanced quickly through them.

"Quite correct apparently," he said. "I don't think, sir, there is anything to fear. This gentleman really has business with me, and I shall be glad to talk it over with him."

"You may assure yourself that I carry no weapons of any kind," added the man from Scotland Yard who had passed as Pentwin.

The King did assure himself thoroughly—he had searched men before. "You must understand," he said, "why I am so careful, Mr. Pentwin. My friend, Mr. Lechworthy, has already been shot at by one of the white men here; the man who did it is dead."

"Quite natural that you should be careful, sir," said Parget, smiling. "And now may I get on to my business?"

"Certainly. You will take him up to the house, Mr. Lechworthy? That's right. And send one of the boys with him when he goes, will you? You see, Mr. Pentwin, a stranger wandering alone there would be shot at once; I am careful for you as well as for Mr. Lechworthy."

The King strode off down the road with a rapid and yet graceful gait.

"Now, then, Mr. Parget," said Lechworthy, "keep close to me and you'll be all right."

They turned and entered the garden.

"Grand place this, sir," said Parget, looking round him. "I've seen nothing like it in my life before. The King of this island seems a pretty active man—bit suspicious too."

"You mustn't mind that, Mr. Parget."

"I don't," said Mr. Parget. "I'd sooner be suspected wrongly than rightly any day. I suppose, sir, you have very little difficulty in guessing why I am here."

"None," said Mr. Lechworthy, "but I am wondering a little how it was that Scotland Yard came to send you."

"Well, sir, to tell the truth, it was a bit of luck. You may have heard of Pentwin's Popular Bank."

"I've seen his advertisements; we've always refused them in my paper."

"And quite right too; the thing was obvious. Well, this chap Pentwin seems to have realised that he'd come to the end of it, and he made his preparations for leaving. But he had to skip before the preparations were quite finished; in fact our men were into his house only twenty minutes after he'd left. A batch of letters came for Pentwin, and we took the liberty of opening and reading them. One was from a Mrs. Wyse, widow of a man whom we wanted and never got. It seems he came out here and committed suicide here. Well, Mrs. Wyse was a friend of Pentwin's—a friend and perhaps a bit more. That letter was full of references to the Exiles' Club, mentioned Sweetling's name, told Pentwin how to make his

application and send his subscription, and gave him his route to the island. There was another letter of introduction enclosed. If those letters had come one post earlier, there's not a doubt that Pentwin would have been safe in Faloo by now, and Scotland Yard would have been none the wiser."

They had reached the house, and Lechworthy pushed forward a deck-chair. "Sit down, won't you?" he said.

"Not sorry to," said Parget. "I've been on my feet for three hours, waiting for the chance to have a word with you. Well, as I was saying, it was thought worth while to look into this Exiles' Club, if only on Sweetling's account. We've wanted Sweetling for years and wanted him badly. He was the Hazeley Cement swindle, as you may remember, and the Tarlton Building Company, and a lot more."

"I do. In fact I wrote about him."

"And I daresay you were pretty severe with us for letting him get away—no matter, we bear no malice. The public says nothing when we hit, but it makes a lot of fuss when we miss. Well, I was told off for this job. I'd got Mrs. Wyse's letter. I'd only got to call myself Pentwin, and follow her instructions, and it was all plain sailing. And a pretty haul I've made: There's Sweetling my-lording it over everybody; Hanson, who killed his girl; Mast—a nasty case; Fellowes, who sold the secret explosive; Lord Charles Baringstoke,

who forged his uncle's name. Trimmer, of the Cornish coal fraud—a whole lot of back numbers nicely bound together."

"It's all very well," said Lechworthy, "it's all very well, but you can't touch those men. Faloo is independent, and has no extradition treaty with Great Britain."

"Very likely," said Parget, with a laugh. "I'm not going to touch them. All I've got to do is to report. I'm only a subordinate officer at present. The rest will be for my chiefs to settle, and if they don't find some way of dealing with this cock-sparrow of an island, I'm a Dutchman."

"Now to come to the point; what do you want with me, Mr. Parget?"

"I require you to assist an officer in the execution of his duty. I'm in a hole. They made all the arrangements for me to get here, but they left it to me to get away again the best way I could. Now if I tried for a passage on Smith's schooner, it wouldn't do. I've paid my subscription, and if I were Pentwin, Faloo would be the only place for me. Why should I want to go? They'd smell a rat. That man Hanson isn't any too satisfied with me; he tried a bit of cross-examination last night, and though I kept my end up I don't like it. What I've got to do is to disappear. There's been a case of that before. There was a chap called Duncombe who got too fond of a native girl that was already —well—appropriated. He went out one fine night and he didn't come back. Everybody at the club

knows that he was killed. So I talk a deal about the native girls up at the club. I've the reputation of a Lothario. Sir John Sweetling has given me a good dressing-down about it already. As a matter of fact I've had nothing to do with these wenches. I've got a girl at home and wish I was safe back again with her. But that's where it is, you know. If I go out one night, and don't come back, and leave all my luggage behind me, including two or three letters to Pentwin and Pentwin's pocket-knife with his name and address on it, then even Hanson will have no doubt that I was Pentwin, and that I have been speared or knived by a jealous man."

"Very likely. But what will you do really, Mr. Parget? How does my help come in?"

"The night I disappear will be the night after the *Snowflake* has come back. You'll send a note privately to the skipper that I shall be coming aboard. I've learned to work a native canoe all right. On the *Snowflake* I shall lie low until you're ready to sail. Nobody but the King knows that I've spoken with you, for at the club I've always professed to be scared of going near the King's house, and I gather that the King has nothing more to do with men from the club nowadays. Besides, I fancy a word from you would keep him quiet. And then—well, I should ask you to lend me some clothes, take me to Tahiti, and say nothing to anybody. I pay for what I have, of course, and after Tahiti I can manage for myself."

"Very well. I'll do all that for you."

"Thank you very much. And I'm sorry to give so much trouble. The luck's with me to find a gentleman like you touring these islands just now."

"That's all right. But I doubt if you'll make as big a scoop out of it as you think."

"You mean the extradition? Oh, that will be arranged somehow."

Mr. Lechworthy was not thinking of extradition at all. He was thinking that owing to his participation in the King's scheme of a native Faloo the exiles already had their warning, and long before Scotland Yard had got its gun to its shoulder the birds would have flown far out of range. But he said nothing of this to Parget at present; it might possibly make a yarn for a dull evening on the *Snowflake*.

"Of course," added Parget, "I needn't remind you, sir, that all I've said has been said in confidence. Not one word—"

"I assure you, Mr. Parget, that I have no inclination to say a word. I shall not even mention the matter to my niece until we are all aboard the *Snowflake*. Your instructions to me will be carried out absolutely."

"And when does the boat get in?"

"The King thinks that with luck it might be here to-morrow or the day after."

"I'll keep a look-out. Thank you again, sir."

Lechworthy himself escorted the little man back to the garden entrance. Parget saw the natives

with their rifles and seemed a little puzzled. "What does the King want all those men up here for? Where's the danger? What's he afraid of?"

"I can't tell you," said Lechworthy. "In fact, I don't know. But I have noticed that the King never does anything without a reason, and it is generally a pretty good reason."

"Well," said Parget, "they're the finest set of natives I've seen yet anywhere. I shan't be round here again. We meet on the *Snowflake*. *Au revoir*, Mr. Lechworthy."

"*Au revoir*," echoed Lechworthy, mechanically.

There is a kind of insolence in *au revoir*, a confidence in the future. Neither man ever saw the other again.

Lechworthy's mind was preoccupied, not only with his dream of a native Faloo, but with this Parget, this scrap of London that met him suddenly in the Southern Seas. He admired the courage and resource of the man, as much as he hated his profession—necessary of course, lamentably necessary, but scarcely ennobling and foreign to that way in which Lechworthy had come to regard all sinners. Obviously Parget had heard nothing of the impending dissolution of the club, and Lechworthy, who did not know that this was a secret reserved for the committee, was rather puzzled that Parget had not heard. On the *Snowflake* he would expound to Parget the scheme for a native Faloo, and his fears that the members of the club had got to hear of it and would now disperse. Of course

Scotland Yard might still be able to close its hand on them—or might not. Lechworthy smiled placidly. Those fibres of his being which had made him a great Christian were curiously interwoven with those other fibres which had made him a successful man of business.

Not only was Lechworthy's mind preoccupied. There was another reason why he could not read the story in Hilda's eyes. He was absolutely blind to all sex romance. Every engagement among his wide circle of friends and acquaintances came to him as a surprise, though it were a foregone conclusion to the rest of the circle. He had found many interests in life and absorbing interests outside the realm of sex romance. Hilda, doubtless, would be married one day, but the day was always very vague and very far away. Hilda had determined that her uncle was to be told nothing at present. On the *Snowflake* she would tell him all, and slowly win him over. She would make him see that her happiness was here with her lover—not in Europe without him. At Tahiti she expected to part from her uncle, and to remain there until the *Snowflake* brought Pryce to her.

"You see, dear," she said, "just at the beginning of things one wants to shut out all the rest of the world, even one's nearest relatives and people to whom one is devoted. In London that can never be. If our engagement had been the normal product of a London season, you would have had to take me to see people, and I should

have had to take you to see others, and it would have been all congratulations, and interference, and horrors of that kind. Here, thank heaven, that can be avoided. We will avoid it."

To everything Pryce agreed. "It isn't that I don't know, Hilda. I do. I know I have no right to accept such a sacrifice as you make. I know that nobody can think that I've been straight about this. It can't be helped. It doesn't matter. Since last night, down by the pool, it's seemed to me as if since the world began only one thing has ever mattered. Oh, it's too good—too good to happen. Your uncle will insist on carrying you off to England, and he will be right too."

"He would try to do that if he were an ordinary man with a conventional set of views. He would not succeed, because I am of age and in this —in this alone—I will not be controlled at all. But he is not an ordinary man. He is as broad in some of his views as he is narrow in others. He has little respect for social conventions, and he is losing some of his respect for the law. He thinks nobody beyond reclamation—except the ritualists and a few politicians. He has had the courage of his opinions all his life; whatever his convictions have been, right or wrong, he has always acted on them. Then, again, he trusts me as well as he loves me. If I tell him that I know where my happiness is, he will believe me, and he loves me too much to refuse it."

They talked a long time together that morning.

Yet still, when all was said, Pryce was haunted by the same thought. It was like a dream of unearthly beauty, such as before he had never even imagined, a dream to which the awakening must come.

When they all came out on the verandah after dinner, the silence seemed to oppress them so that they spoke in lower tones than usual. The King, as if to break the spell, ordered Tiva and Ioia to make music, but their song had a wild sorrow in it.

"What music is that, Tiva?" asked Hilda, who sat deep in the shadow.

Tiva answered abstractedly in her native tongue. The King translated, a little impatiently: "She says that it is the music of this night. She talks much nonsense."

There were a few moments of silence and then Lechworthy took his briar pipe from his mouth and fired a calm point-blank question.

"Doctor, what was it like, living with all those bad men at the club?"

"With some of them," said Pryce, meditatively, "one forgot that they were bad men at all. Some were weak rotters, but I've found men just as weak against whom, thanks to their circumstances, the law had never a word to say. I suppose the fact is that the bad are not always bad and the good are not always good; and for the sake of society the law has to make a distinction which sometimes has no basis in fact."

"You do not surprise me," said Lechworthy.

"You rediscover an old truth, that we are all sinners—God forgive us." He sucked diligently at his pipe for a few seconds, and resumed: "It's struck me sometimes that, even from the point of view of society, a man with habitual bad temper, or a man who drinks hard, or a man who won't work, or a man who gambles with money that his family needs, may, though the law lets him go free, do more harm than some who have robbed or even murdered."

Pryce, who had gone to bed earlier than usual that night, had been asleep for an hour when he was awakened by a touch on the shoulder.

"Come outside," said the voice of King Smith. "Quietly—as quickly as you can."

CHAPTER XIII

PRYCE did not wait to dress. Thrusting his feet into a pair of slippers, he hurried into the garden. There on the terrace the King stood, pointing downward and seaward. But there was no need to point.

Far below, amid the dark of the trees, a giant flame leaped hungry and quivering into the air. A column of smoke rose vertically, the head of the column spreading out in all directions against a grey sky; it looked like some monstrous swaying mushroom.

"Good God!" said Pryce. "It's the club."

"Scarcely fifteen minutes ago; and now look. I'm going down there directly, taking all the men here with me." The King spoke in a quiet, even voice.

Pryce shook his head. "No good," he said. "You can save nobody. The men who are not out of that place already are dead. The whole show will be burned to the ground in less than half-an-hour—you know how it's built. Wonder what started it. Some careless boozer, I suppose."

The King put one hand on his arm. "No," he said. "The fire started in two places at once, at either end of the building. It has come at last—the rising of my people."

From below came faintly the sound of a crash, and for a moment the stalk of that swaying mushroom was spangled high with a million sparks.

"I had seen signs, but I thought I held them still. The leaders I know—three brothers—men who—"

A shrill cry came up from the dark trees by the burning house, followed by a roar of voices; and then, short and sharp, the bark of the revolvers. For a moment the King lost all his self-possession. He wrung his hands. He flung his arms wide. "O my people, my people!" he cried.

"Yes," said Pryce grimly, "your people seem to have left you out of this bean-feast. They've forgotten you, Smith."

The King turned on him savagely. "And they must be made to remember. That is why I go. If

need be, of ten men nine must die, that the tenth may remember for ever."

"If that was Hanson shooting just now, you'll find some of the nine dead already. But you're taking all the patrol with you—well, what's left for this place?"

"What am I to do? As it is, I have only seventy-five men against many hundreds."

"But they're the only seventy-five who have rifles and can use them. There's your own prestige too, and all the hocus-pocus and mummery that you know how to work on them."

"I need all. I must win to-night and at once. If I fail, the prestige is gone and we are all dead men to-morrow. Besides, I shall be between this house and the rebels. How many of them will get past me? Very few. And you shoot well, Pryce."

"Oh, I'm not going to shoot any worse than I can help. But I can't be at fifty different points at once."

"You shall have six good men. You'll see Lechworthy and put as good a face on it as you can. Ah, they're bringing my horse. Good-bye, Pryce."

"Good-bye and luck to you," said Pryce, and turned back to the house. As he dressed, he could hear voices in the big room at the front of the house, and was not surprised; the noise had been enough to waken anybody. The sound of firing had ceased now, but that vague tumultuous roar of

voices went on continuously, mingling with the sound of the surf.

Tiva and Ioia cowered in a corner and wept. Hilda, in a dressing-gown with her hair loose, sat on the table and nursed a morocco-covered case. Pryce knew what was in it. They had practised shooting together. Lechworthy, fully dressed, paced the room, his hands locked behind him.

"What on earth is happening, Pryce?" asked Lechworthy. "It's—it's terrific."

"Some of the natives seem to have turned a bit unruly—started bonfires and crackers, and little jokes of that kind. Disgraceful behaviour. Smith has gone down with the patrol to check their enthusiasm. They'll all be quiet enough presently. They're in a mortal funk of the King."

"I've been out on the verandah," said Lechworthy, "and it seemed much worse than you say. There was the sound of firing quite undoubtedly."

"Very likely," said Pryce. "Some of these chaps are fond of loosing off their guns when they get excited. I daresay it looked and sounded far worse than it really is. By the way, Hilda, I thought your medical attendant told you to go to bed not later than half-past ten."

"So I did," said Hilda. "I—I was disturbed."

"Well, this little picnic won't last long, and really it's not worth sitting up for. You ought to be in bed, you know."

"You don't think there's any chance the rioters will come this way?" asked Lechworthy.

"No," said Pryce, boldly. "We're taboo. The ordinary native would sooner stand up and be shot at than set foot inside this garden. Besides, Smith will hold them. And if by any chance a few should be lucky enough to get through and mad enough to come this way, Smith has not taken all the men; he's left a small army to protect this place with myself as their general, and I wonder what funny job I shall take on next. Come, I don't want to hurry anybody. But you can all sleep peacefully in your beds, and the sooner you go to them the sooner I can look after my chaps."

Lechworthy seemed quite reassured. He said good-night to Pryce and Hilda, and went off, taking Hilda with him.

Pryce turned on Tiva and Ioia. He laughed heartily at them. He made comic imitations of their wailing and lament. They ceased to weep, and became very angry. And suddenly Dr. Pryce became very serious. He spoke to them in the native tongue. He gave them various instructions. There were some simple things which he wanted them to do, but they were things that might make a good deal of difference. They were quick to understand. They had great faith in Dr. Pryce, even if he sometimes made them very angry. As he sent them off, Hilda came back into the room again.

"What were you saying to them?" she asked.

"Oh—telling them not to be silly."

She clutched his arm. "I want to come with you, dear. Let me. You know that I can shoot."

He was very gentle with her. "Yes," he said, as he caressed her hair, "you're a good shot, and this is splendid of you. Well, it will only be waiting and watching for a long, long time yet. And if you were there, I'm afraid I should be watching you most of the time, instead of—other things. Most probably there'll be nothing happening at all, and you'd be up all night to no purpose, and I should feel bad about it. But if the very worst did happen, and one of these idiots did get past me and up to the house, it would be a great comfort to know that there was a revolver there waiting for him, and waiting where he would least expect it."

He managed to persuade her that it was in the house that she would be of the greatest help. "I wish you could get to sleep," he said.

She shook her head. "I would if I could," she said simply. "I like to do everything you say."

"Well, lie down at any rate."

"I will. You know my window. You might come there sometimes, if you get a chance, to tell me how things are going."

"Right. I expect there'll be nothing to tell. Good-night, darling." For one moment he held her in his arms and kissed her, and then hurried out, picking up his revolvers as he went.

He found his six men waiting for him. One of them held a torch, and Pryce made him put it out at once. Then he stationed his men at the different points from which they were to keep a look-out, not far from one another, along the hedge-crowned bank at the foot of the garden. Of course an attack from some other direction was quite possible, but the place was too large and the men at his disposal too few to keep a watch all round. It would have been impossible, even if he had made use of the boys who acted as house-servants, and he had decided not to use them for this purpose at all. They had no training and too much temperament; they would have been certain to see what was not there, and to make a noise at the critical moment when silence was essential. He kept them within the house, where under the direction of Tiva and Ioia they filed buckets and soaked blankets in order that they might deal at once with any attempt to fire the place. This being done, Tiva and Ioia, as Pryce had directed, extinguished every light in the house.

Going off by himself to see that all was right at the back of the house, Pryce was a little surprised to encounter Lechworthy, wearing his semi-clerical felt hat and calmly enjoying his briar pipe.

"Hullo!" said Pryce. "Thought you were in bed."

"No," said Lechworthy. "You don't mind, do you? I said nothing just now, because I didn't want to make Hilda nervous, but I should like to

be in this. I can't shoot, but I can keep a look-out for you. My eyesight's good and I can do what I'm told."

"Right," said Pryce. "I'm glad to have you. I was just thinking that I could do with another man. Come along with me and I'll place you. By the way, you might knock that pipe out. There's a breath of wind got up, and those beggars have keen noses. You see, my idea is that if they do come they shall think we are quite unprepared—all in bed and asleep, trusting to Smith and the men with him. Gives us a better chance, eh?"

Lechworthy's pipe was already back in his pocket. "I see," he said. "Quite sound, I think. Is this my place?"

"Yes. You watch the road. Neither to right nor to left—just the road. If they come at all, I hope they'll come by the road. It'll mean they're being pretty careless. If you see anything on the road, don't shout. Move along the bank to your left till you come to one of the men of the patrol, and tell him; he knows what to do. It's rather dull work, but don't go to sleep; the thing one's looking for generally comes ten seconds after one has stopped looking."

The rebels constituted about three-quarters of the native male population of Faloo. But, as the three brothers who led them were well aware, they were very little to be depended on. And for this reason the leaders had not dared to disclose the

whole of their plan. The Exiles' Club was to be burned down, and those who escaped from the flames were to be slaughtered. The leaders found it expedient to declare that no attack on the King or the King's property was intended, and that although in this destruction of the white men they would be disobeying the King's orders, they would really be carrying out his secret wishes, and would readily be forgiven. The feeling against the men of the Exiles' Club was immensely strong, and so far the leaders felt confident.

The second part of their plan they did not venture yet to disclose, for only in the excitement induced by victory and by liquor looted from the club could they hope to find followers to take part in its execution. It was proposed then to attack the King's house; the two white men there were to be killed, and an exact vengeance was to be taken on the white woman. The King's safety was to depend on the terms that he would make with the rebels. Now the taboo was a real thing to the natives, and equally real was their loyalty to the King and their superstitious fear of his powers; even their hatred of the men of the Exiles' Club would not have led them to enter upon its attack at all, if they had known what sequel to it was intended.

The first part of the plan was not well executed, and with prompt action it is probable that many of the members of the club would have escaped. Had any precautions against fire been taken, it is

possible that even the club-house, in spite of the inflammable material used in its construction, might have been saved. The task of firing the club-house had been entrusted to natives who were club-servants, and in their eagerness they started the two fires at least an hour before the time agreed upon, and before the cordon of armed natives had closed round the club-grounds. Several of the members had not yet gone to bed, and were still in the card-room; Sir John Sweetling and Hanson were among the number. But though the fires were discovered almost immediately, there was no fire-extinguishing apparatus and no adequate water-supply. The attempts made to beat out the fire failed completely and only wasted time. With such rapidity did the flames spread that, although the alarm was given at once, there were still men in the bedrooms when the sheet of fire swept up the flimsy staircase. Most of the men jumped from the windows and escaped. One, a little man who had passed by the name of Pentwin, broke his leg in his fall and lay fainting with agony in the long grass at the back of the house.

Those who had escaped wasted much time in saving such furniture and stores as they could, dragging it on to the lawn. And there they stood around it stupidly, wondering what would happen next. Half of them did not know how the fire had originated, and did not realise that the native rising, so long talked of, had taken place at last. Mast knew perhaps, but he was demented and

useless. Sir John and Hanson knew, but they were chiefly concerned in seeing that all had escaped safely from the fire.

They were equally unmoved when Mast, his eyes blazing with insanity, climbed up on a chair, flung his arms wide and raved. "The judgment of God is upon us," he shouted, "the judgment of God! This is the day of Tyre and Sidon. Not with hyssop but with fire must we be made clean of our sins—this is the commandment revealed to me. Come then to the baptism of fire!" He stepped down and would have thrown himself into the burning building, but Sir John flung him roughly to the ground, and he lay there weeping. Sir John had a club-list in his hand and Hanson at his shoulder. Together they checked the list to see if any were missing. A little distance away the parrot jumped and fluttered on its perch, rattling its chain furiously, drawing innumerable corks.

"Five not here," said Hanson, "and all men who slept in the house. I'll run round to the back to see if I can find any of them."

There he found a little man with a broken leg, moaning with pain. A canvas envelope had jerked out of the man's pocket as he fell. It lay on the grass with the contents half out of it. Amongst them was a visiting-card printed in blue, and by the light of the fire Hanson read it. The maimed man made a clutch for the other papers, but it was Hanson who got them. He glanced through them

quickly, neglecting those that were written in cypher, and then flung them into the fire.

"You've not played a bad game," he said, "Mr. Parget of the C.I.D."

Parget lay still now with closed eyes, breathing hard.

"You might have won," said Hanson, "or again you might not, for I had my doubts about you. Anyhow, our friends have pitched the board over, and it can't be played out. I bear no malice. We can't take you with us with that broken leg, and I don't like to leave you to the natives. Better put you to sleep, eh?"

Parget nodded his head twice. There was blood on his lower lip, as he bit hard on it.

"Keep your eyes shut," said Hanson. He took his revolver from his pocket and shot the man through the head. The crash of a falling floor drowned the sound of the shot. A volley of sparks flew skyward.

Hanson rejoined Sir John. "Only one man there, and he's dead—Pentwin. We'd better get together, go round to the back and make a dash for it. We might be able to get through."

A few minutes before, this might have been done, but it was too late now. The fire had given the signal, and the whole place was surrounded. Before Hanson and Sir John could get their men together, there was one loud yell and then an answering roar of voices, as from all sides out of

the dark of the trees the natives poured in upon the white men.

Some of the natives had antiquated fire-arms, but the greater number were armed with knives and spears. They were without discipline; they fired almost at random, and in consequence native killed native. Rotten barrels burst at the first shot. But numbers prevailed; a few revolvers could do little against this great tide of maddened humanity.

Yet, with no chance for their lives, the exiles fought desperately. Hanson, who had dropped on one knee behind a barrel, emptied his revolver twice and effectively before he went down, stabbed from behind in the neck. Sir John had already fallen, passing his weapon as he fell to an unarmed man behind him. Lord Charles Baringstoke was the last to go, and for a few minutes he seemed to bear a charmed life. He stood erect and smiling, his eyes alert and watchful; he never wasted a shot, and never missed a chance to reload. Possibly for the first time in his life he had realised his situation; certainly there was a nobility in his bearing that none had seen there before. His personal degradation seemed to have slipped from him, leaving only an ancestral inheritance of quiet and courage in the face of death. He was quick, quick as light; three times he swung round rapidly and dropped the native whose knife was almost on him. Then all around him came a gleam of white teeth and lean brown arms dragging at him. He was surrounded and went down. His

smoke-grimed hands clutched hard at the ground. "How could I help it?" he gurgled as he died, and spoke maybe his fitting epitaph.

Now torches were lit from the burning building. The casks of liquor were set flowing, and a dense crowd gathered round them, treading the dead men under foot, stretching out cups made of the half-shell of a cokernut. The noise was terrific, and the leaders were powerless to restrain the men who had followed them. The three brothers stood apart and conferred together, quarrelling violently. So far they had won, but two of them thought that nothing further could be done with this disorganised mob. The youngest was for marching immediately on the King's house. He had a small personal following on whom he thought he could depend. His elder brothers shrugged their shoulders. Of what use would those few be against the King and his well-armed men?

They did not know that even as they spoke the King was not a hundred yards away from them. The reckless victors had kept no watch of any kind, and the King had been able to bring his men into the orange-grove unperceived.

Suddenly into the great mob that sang and struggled round the casks on the lawn, there poured a volley from sixty-nine rifles. The noise of shout and song stopped abruptly; there were moans from the wounded on the ground and no other sound at all. Scarcely knowing what had happened, astounded and helpless, the survivors

looked to their leaders. But before they could speak there came a rush of big-built men from the trees. Two of the leaders were bound hand and foot; the third, the youngest of the brothers, managed to escape.

And now the King himself rode out on to the lawn. He worked his horse in and out through the crowd, speaking to them as he went. If they wished to live, he told them, they must remain where they were. They shrank from him in shame, turning their eyes away, like unruly schoolboys caught by their master. As he passed they squatted down on the earth and watched to see what he would do. He rode to the upper end of the lawn. The building had burned low now; there was a great mass of red-hot embers over the surface of which a light flame skipped, dropping down and bobbing up again. Here, in front of the fire, the two leaders were brought to him. He dismounted and looked at them long, till they grew afraid of his eyes. Then he gave the order and four men of the patrol took one of the brothers, swung him rhythmically and hurled him into the red-hot furnace.

With the other brother the King dealt differently. As he looked at him, he began to loosen the cord on the man's wrists, speaking softly as he did so. "See," he said, "what has happened to you. You can no longer move except as I will it. There, your hands are no longer bound; I have taken off the cord; but one wrist clings to the other and you

cannot get them apart. Your feet also are no longer bound, but they are stuck tight to the earth so that you cannot raise them. The fingers of your hands are cramped and useless—quite useless. Here is a knife to kill me; you cannot grasp it and it falls to the ground."

The crowd watched breathlessly. They saw the proffered knife, and their leader's failure to hold it.

The King spoke to the man again. He told him that he was a very fine man and a great house should be prepared for him. "Turn round and you will see it."

The man turned, expressionless, his eyes wide open; he stared at the pile of glowing timber.

"A beautiful house with many lights," said the King, softly, and the man's face smiled now in response. "They wait for you there. You are tired, and they will spread soft mats for you that you may sleep. Go quickly. You must."

The man ran forward, floundered for a few steps among the red-hot embers, then threw up his arms and fell full length. The flakes of burning wood closed over him like a wave of crimson sea; a gross and yellow smoke rose where he had fallen.

The King mounted his horse and called aloud. "You have seen—remember it well, remember it well! To those who throw down their arms and go back forthwith to their huts, I grant their lives."

Helped or driven by the men of the patrol, they threw down their knives and spears and slunk away

down to the huts that were massed in a straggling street on the shore.

CHAPTER XIV

MANY of the rebels had fallen to the revolvers of the white men at bay, and many more to the rifles of the patrol. Two of their leaders had perished before their eyes, and the death of one of them, slave to the fixed eyes and whispered words of the King, had seemed to them miraculous. How could they have been mad enough to contend against such a power? Spiritless and unarmed, thrust on by the patrol with the butt of the rifle, they staggered down the slopes to their huts on the beach.

But the King knew well enough how dangerously incomplete his victory was. The youngest of the three brothers had got clear away, and he had taken men with him. They should have been followed of course, but the King had been reluctant to spare a man until he was certain of the main body of the rebels. The first sign of his mistake was a cloud of smoke rolling up from his offices and stores on the beach below. The King thought of his spirit-vats and galloped off.

The fire was extinguished soon after the King reached the spot. There were plenty of buckets, and the beaten rebels, no longer rebellious, worked hard to prove their return to loyalty. They formed a line down to the sea, and the buckets passed

quickly from hand to hand. Very little damage was done. But the incendiary had gained all he wanted—a certain amount of time and a clear road up to the King's house.

But the watchers up at the King's house also saw the cloud of smoke, and it made them alert again, just when they had come to the conclusion that all was well over and that the King had won.

Pryce snatched a moment for a word with Hilda, and went on his round of his men. On his way back some minutes later Lechworthy came towards him.

"Come and look at this, doctor. Those lights far down the road—are they coming or going?"

Pryce looked in silence for a few seconds. "Coming," he said. "Also the chaps appear to be singing. You've done well, Lechworthy. Now you go on to the house while we teach them to sing a different tune."

He went off along the bank. Lechworthy did not go to the house; he stood back where he could see what happened without being in the way.

Pryce returned with his six men and placed them. They could not be seen, and their rifles commanded the road. They were steady and quiet. Pryce showed them a point on the road. When the rebels reached that point, Pryce would give the word to fire. They seemed to come very slowly.

But they neared the point at last. One man walked before the rest, waving a torch and singing loudly. At parts of his song the rest broke into

laughter. They came noisily, in disorder, without precaution; evidently they looked for an easy and certain triumph, in the absence of the King and the patrol.

"Sampson," said Pryce to the man nearest him, "what's that chap singing?" Pryce could not make it out, though he knew something of the native language.

The patrol man whom he had addressed as Sampson prided himself on his English. He translated a few phrases of the song. They concerned the white woman at the King's house.

"Thanks," said Pryce. "I'm just going to give the word. Mark the singer, Sampson, and let's see if you can shoot. Fire!"

There were about a score of men on the road, and four fell at the first volley; the singer was one of the four, and Sampson smiled. The rest stood gaping, taken utterly by surprise. A second and a third volley followed in quick succession. The few who were left fled down the road in panic.

Sampson straightened his back and patted his rifle. "Very good," he said complacently. "Dead shot. Very good."

"You're all right," said Pryce, "but the two at the end of the line spoiled the bag." Pryce sent them off now to the back of the house, and as he turned saw Lechworthy. "So you meant to see the last of it after all," he said.

"But it's terrible," said Lechworthy, "terrible. I've seen nothing like this before, you know. One

moment dancing and singing—the next moment dead."

"Well," said Pryce, "we didn't invite them. And somebody had got to die over this game."

"It's self-defence, I know. Doctor, where should we have been without you? We owe everything to you."

"Me?" said Pryce, cheerfully. "Why, I've had my hands in my pockets all the time. I haven't done a blessed thing. I—"

He stopped short. Far away down the road came the sound of rifle-fire.

"What's that mean, doctor?"

"In all probability it means that the few who escaped from us have had the bad luck to run into Smith and his patrol on their way back to the house. They'll be here in five minutes. You might go and tell Hilda that the show's over."

"I will," said Lechworthy. He had been much moved. He almost resented the flippancy with which Pryce spoke, though he knew that this flippancy was but part of a mask that hid something fine.

Lechworthy was about twenty yards away when a dark figure rose suddenly from the bushes and made a dash at him with knife raised. Pryce's revolver was just in time; the man dropped almost at Lechworthy's feet.

"Run for the house," shouted Pryce, and at the same moment he was stabbed with two quick thrusts in the back and in the right arm. His

revolver dropped on the ground, and he flung himself on it. His assailant rushed on towards Lechworthy, who still stood irresolute.

Pryce raised himself on his knees, taking his revolver in his left hand, less conscious of physical pain than of pleasure in his knowledge that he had made left-hand shooting his speciality. Lechworthy was in the line of fire and he had to be very careful; it was his second shot that brought the native down.

He still waited on his knees, his revolver in his hand. He did not know in the least who these two men were who had appeared just at the very moment when all danger of attack seemed over. It did not appear that there were more than two. He could hear his own six men running towards him—they had heard the sound of firing—and he could hear distinctly on the road the sound of a horse's hoofs and the tramp of men. It was all right then, and the King had returned. The warm blood poured steadily down his right arm. Suddenly he was conscious that Lechworthy was standing by him. "Are you hurt, Pryce?" Lechworthy was saying anxiously. "Are you hurt?"

"Bit of a scratch," said Pryce. "Better say nothing to her. Probably looks worse—"

And then he collapsed, just as the King and the patrol entered the garden.

It has already been said that the youngest of the three brothers who led the rebellion had by firing the stores and offices on the beach gained time and

a clear road to the King's house. He had drawn the King and the patrol down from the point which they should have occupied. But he started on his way up to the King's house with his small following absolutely out of hand. They had triumphed over the white man, the King himself had failed to lay hands on them, they had burnt the King's stores; and now they would burn the King's house, and it would all be perfectly easy. They had drunk freely on the lawn of the Exiles' Club, and had found more liquor on the beach. Their leader would have had them go up in silence, without torches, working their way through the thick of the plantation. But they found the road easier, and in their intoxication insisted on treating this last advance as a triumphant procession. Noisy and disorderly, they never noticed that their nominal leader had left them, taking one man with him, and turned into the plantation by the roadside.

These two men advanced parallel with the noisy crowd, but at a long distance from them. And when the rifle-fire was drawn, and the attention of the defenders concentrated on the road, they took that chance to rush across the clearing, up the bank, and through the scant hedge into the garden. They knew the game was up. Their one aim was to sell their lives as dearly as might be.

When Pryce came to himself, he lay on his bed. His coat, waistcoat and shirt had been cut off. The early sunlight filtered through the green plaited

blinds. There were two dark shadows by the bed, and the shadows slowly became the King and Lechworthy.

"Who fixed the tourniquet?" he asked.

"That was Hilda," and then Lechworthy's voice seemed to become a dull rumble. Pryce caught stray words: "Huddersfield . . . ambulance lectures . . . Providence."

"Hilda?" he said.

"She came out when she heard the firing so near to the house."

"Better get some sleep soon," said Pryce. "The jab in the back is nothing much—must have glanced off a rib. Breathing's pretty easy. Bad shot of his—but he was hurried."

He began to get drowsy, but roused himself.

"Might bring those chests of mine in here—dressings, clips, and so on. I'll tell you what to do. Then we can rest."

"Hilda's getting them," said Lechworthy.

There were steps outside, and Lechworthy went out of the room. Pryce could hear low voices outside the door. Then Lechworthy and Hilda came in together, Lechworthy carrying a tray of things.

Hilda looked towards the bed. "We've changed places," she said in a low voice. "You'll have to be my patient now." Then she went over to the window. "We shall want more light, I think."

Pryce made a quick sign with his left hand. The King nodded and turned to Lechworthy.

"Come with me," he said. "We can do nothing more here for the present."

A little surprised, Lechworthy looked at Hilda. "Yes, that's right," she said. "If I should want you, I'll send; but I've got Tiva and Ioia, you know, and servants besides."

"I'm not going to bed," said Lechworthy when they were outside the room. "Who knows? I might be wanted. And I shall sleep in a chair all right—or anywhere. I'm done."

"A chair will be good enough for me," said the King.

They sat down in the verandah in the sun.

"You see it all, I suppose," said the King.

"Hilda and Pryce? You don't mean—?"

"I do. I thought you knew."

"I was a little puzzled. She was very quiet and very—useful. But she looked—almost as if she were going mad. Yes, I suppose it is so."

"If he recovers, they marry," said the King. "At least you will find it very difficult to prevent it; and he will not go to England, you know. But he has lost very much blood. Perhaps—"

"Don't say that," said Lechworthy sharply. Then he went on: "It will have to be as Hilda says. I daren't interfere in such a case—wouldn't anyhow. If any man has the right to her, then he has. Not a great marriage, of course—there will be people in London who will think she has thrown herself away. They'll condole, I daresay, and

make themselves unpleasant in other ways too. But there are too many people in England who sacrifice too much to get the good opinion of a few others who don't really care for them. Are you awake?"

The King opened his eyes. "Awake? Oh, yes. What was the name of that thing Miss Auriol put on his arm?"

"Tourniquet."

"Ah, tourniquet—new word to me. I must remember." And in two seconds he was fast asleep.

Lechworthy watched him with a smile, and then closed his own eyes.

When he woke again, the King had gone and Hilda stood on the verandah beside him.

"Dear me!" said Lechworthy. "I've slept a long time, I think. How is he?"

"I thought he would have fainted again when we were dressing the wounds. But afterwards he seemed more comfortable, and now he's fallen asleep. He made me promise to go and rest as soon as he was asleep—one of the boys is waiting in the room with him, to fetch me if I'm wanted. He's—he's so sensible, you know. He tells us exactly what to do, just as if it was some other case he was attending. And he will thank for everything—I wish he wouldn't. Only, he used to be so active—so quick, and now he can't move much." There came a catch in Hilda's voice. "And he doesn't seem to know, not in the least, that he's done anything much for us, or even to think about it. He's—"

She dropped into a chair and covered her face with her hands. For a few moments she could not speak for sobbing. Lechworthy stood over her, trying to soothe her.

"Don't you know?" she wailed. "Don't you know?"

"Yes, dear," said Lechworthy, "I know. And —that'll be all right. With God's help, we'll pull him through, for he's too good to lose, and—and that'll be all right, dear. You've been doing too much, and you mustn't break down now. Come and get some rest. You promised him, you know."

Hilda went to her room.

. . . . . .

Some days later the King and Lechworthy stood on the lawn of the Exiles' Club. A long line of natives, laden with flat baskets, passed and repassed, carrying the debris of the burned house down to the shore. It was forced labour, the punishment given them by the King, and six men of the patrol, armed with rifles, watched them at their work. Other gangs had been sent out to work at road-making. They hated the work, but they did it submissively, lest worse should befall them.

The King pointed to a safe, looking incongruously official among charred timbers, with sunlight streaming on it and birds singing around it.

"That must be got out," said the King. "If it is claimed by those who have the right, I hand it over."

"I think nothing will be claimed," said Lechworthy.

"Sir John Sweetling chose well," said the King, with a sweep of his arm. "Look—the finest site on the island. Here your native church might have stood."

"It may stand there yet. I know, sir, how much you feel my abandonment of your scheme. It is no longer possible, but the results which you wished to obtain by it are still possible. Listen—in one night many British subjects were murdered here. Remember that, whenever you think that I could still do as I had intended."

"They were criminals."

"Great Britain would not recognise the right of your people to punish them. And one of the men was a police-officer, sent here, doing his duty."

"But my people—think how they were provoked into rebellion. Have they not been punished? They have given more than a life for a life. And those that survive are still being punished. I have done all that I could."

"That is true. The blame is not with the responsible government of the island. Be thankful for that; otherwise you would have had a punitive expedition here. As it is, the whole story must be told to Scotland Yard and to those of my friends to whom I have already written. I hope that I shall convince and satisfy them, and my story will be supported by the sworn statement which I shall

get from Pryce. I think you have nothing to fear. But you must no longer expect protection of the kind you wanted. At the best, that would perhaps only have been possible if there had been raised a strong public sentiment, in France as well as in Great Britain, on the depopulation question, and if the two powers had been willing to co-operate. If this story were told, public sentiment would be dead against you. You may understand, and I may understand, how all this happened, but the public would never understand. Your people would seem to them cruel and bloodthirsty; your government of them would seem unstable and impotent; they would not wish to perpetuate either. There would be no public sympathy. If I attempted to carry out your scheme, the only result would be that a few travellers would turn out of their course from curiosity to visit your island, and that precautions would be taken, of a kind which you would resent, to see that they came to no harm."

"My people are not cruel," said the King. "They are gentle, a little lazy, but good-humoured, if the white man will leave them alone. To-day I have more power than ever before; I shall not be again disobeyed."

"I believe that to be true," said Lechworthy. "But we are a cautious people, and this outbreak is dead against you. It spoils the record. Facts matter less than the way people will look at them. Once one has to explain away, one exposes a weak-

ness and provokes a mistrust; the chance was never too strong, and with that weakness the chance vanishes altogether."

The King wrinkled his brows. "I do not much understand these political affairs, but I trust you. If you say that it is so, it is so."

"You had much better trust me," said Lechworthy, without temper and quite placidly. "You see, Scotland Yard has lost a man, and it knows the route to Faloo, and it does not let things slide. It is only my story of what happened which can save serious trouble for this island."

"Still," said the King, "when we discussed this last night, I did think what might happen if you said nothing of this—this mistake of my people."

"That is already answered. If I do not tell, it is likely to be worse for you. Not in any spot in the globe can the treacherous slaughter of many British subjects be overlooked."

"And yet you tell me that, though the scheme goes, its results are still possible."

"I do. And it depends principally on you."

"On me? There is nothing I would not do."

"You have made money, and might make much more. You have adopted the English language—our names and dress. You have studied much. You could let that go?"

The King snapped his fingers. "Like that," he said.

"Very well. Go back to your people. Speak

their language and wear native dress. Be a King and not a trader. Break up the stills and empty the vats into the sea. Sell your trading-vessels, the one link that binds Faloo to the world outside. You tell me that the island produces all that a native needs; limit yourself to that. It may be that trade of its own accord will come to you; some soap manufacturer may try to buy your plantation or even the entire island. Refuse him. Do not be tempted. If chance visitors should come here, treat them with humanity but without hospitality; make it unlikely that they will return. The story of the Exiles' Club will be known, and the island will no longer be a refuge for the uncaught criminal. Go back to the simplicity of your fathers and trust to the obscurity of your kingdom, and here the race may recover."

"No communication with what you call the world outside. No mail. No trade. You would lose by that, Lechworthy."

"Yes, yes, never mind about that. Did you not tell me that you had used a bad weapon once, and that it had hurt your hand, but that you would burn it with a little powder and it would be clean? It has been burned with powder. It is clean now. The chance for the native Faloo begins to-day."

Late that evening Lechworthy found himself alone with his niece.

"So it comes to an end," he said. "To-morrow the *Snowflake*. You're sure he's strong enough for it?"

Hilda laughed. "If I didn't feel sure, I wouldn't let him go."

"And in a month—five weeks—some such time—you will be married. And after that when shall we meet again?"

"You must come out here. We've been talking about that."

"Well, it's quite likely. And perhaps, not now but, in a few years, he will come back to England."

"He says he cannot. I—I don't think I should like to try to persuade him."

"Certainly not. Possibly the suggestion will come from him. His views may be altered by—er—circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

But her uncle changed the subject.

THE END

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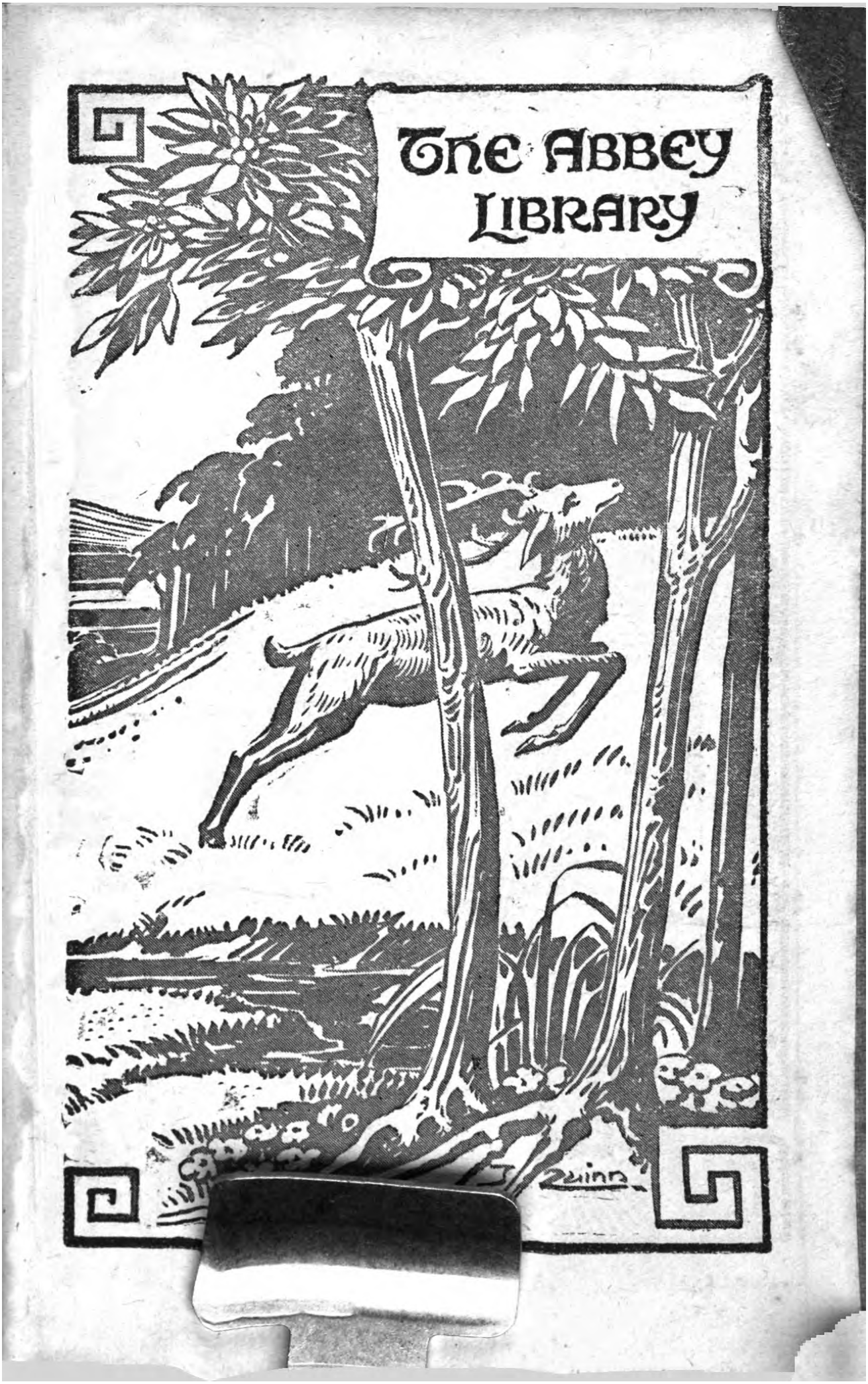
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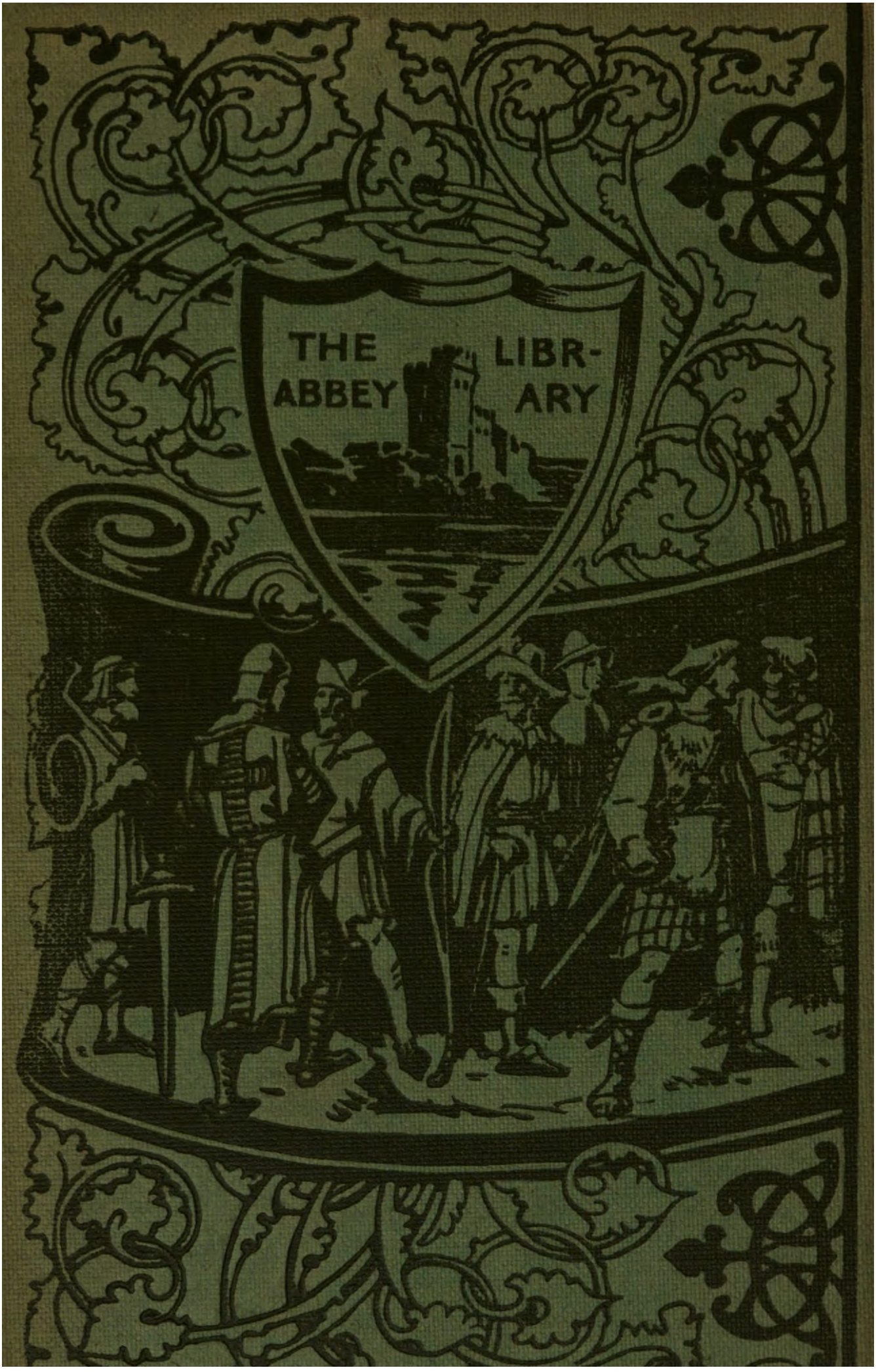
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