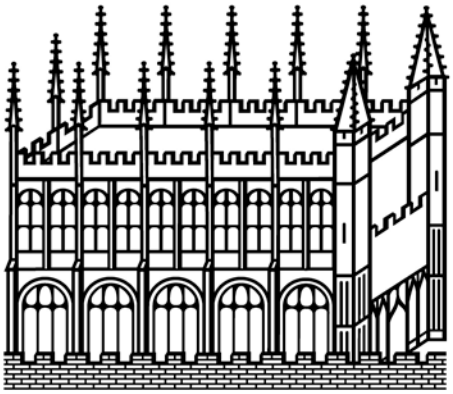

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FORTUNE MY FOE

E. A. WYKE SMITH

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Fortune My Foe

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By

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Author of "Some Pirates and Marmaduke," "Because of Josephine," etc.

Hodder and Stoughton
Limited London

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BILLING AND SONS, LTD., GUILDFORD AND ESHER

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AT a very early hour one morning rather more than twenty years ago, a stage coach was coming round the bend of a mountain road in Mexico. The off-wheels having gone up a gently sloping boulder and met with no slope on the other side, one of the five passengers, Mr. Powle (Miggotson and Powle, Solicitors, St. Cuthbert's Court, Westminster), was roused from an interval of unconsciousness. He grabbed an arm that had been thrust in front of him and stared wildly.

"Here, I say! What's the matter? Oh, I beg your pardon; I must have dropped off."

"You've been sleeping for the last ten minutes," said the man who had stopped him from pitching forward. "The last bit was fairly level and that sent you off."

"What a night! Heavens, what a night!" Mr. Powle rubbed his eyes and laughed dolorously. His face felt creased and his eyes felt goggling. His suit of grey tweed was wrinkled and the wrinkles held dust. His proper bowler had a circumferential crack, rendered permanent

by many contacts with the coach roof. "If I'd only known what I was letting myself in for! I'm not in training for these experiments."

"They're making pretty good time, and you'll be in Santa Clara by eleven or thereabouts. You should have tried it before the railway was finished. Ten or twelve days then."

"Ten or twelve days of this!"

"And nights. But cheer up. Look over there, the dawn's come." His companion, a sunburned man of about his own age, dressed in khaki riding kit, pulled back the leather curtain that took the place of a window.

Mr. Powle looked and gasped with wonder. They had jangled and crashed round the corner of a dark pass, and there below them lay a strange new world of forest-covered peaks and sheer ravines, vast and mysterious and beautiful in the dim light. Mists lay about like piled-up wool or thinned away to delicate floating veils. A gorge gleamed with a silver band where a stream fell silently to unseen depths. Above what seemed the horizon a jagged line of white turned rose-pink even as they looked.

"The sierras look well in the early morning."

"Look well!" echoed Mr. Powle. "Heavens, it's wonderful! But people won't believe it's like

this. It's far beyond—— Great God, we're over!"

They were not over, but something had given way. There were sounds of curses and of a conflict of opinion between the driver and the six mules, who had selected the present as a choice moment in which to try a gallop and had been pulled up in a struggling mass. The supernumerary official, a wiry young man in the usual big hat, tight trousers, and sandals, sprang down and seized some jagged rocks, which he flung with fury at the hindquarters of the mules and, quite contrary to the laws of reason, assisted them to become calmer. Then he picked up a blazing torch of tarred rope which he had thrown to the ground and beat it out in honour of the day. After that he selected another rock of suitable proportion and, disappearing from view, was heard hammering.

"What a relief!" said Mr. Powle.

"Like a headache stopping. Our fellow-passengers are rousing up. *Buenos dias, señor,*" he said to an elderly white-bearded man wrapped in a blanket of many colours.

"*Buenos dias, señor,*" answered the elderly one. He yawned and stretched himself and spat largely. "*Ay, que noche del demonio!*"

"Y buenos dias, señorita."

A pretty, patient faced girl, wedged in between some overflow mail-bags that had been lashed to the seat, and a fat woman—evidently her servant—who had passed the night in lamentations, smiled and responded. Then she produced a bag and took from it a brush and a small bottle of water. She removed a silk shawl from her head and, after smoothing her hair, tipped the bottle against a handkerchief and dabbed her face. With this and a few shakes of her dress her toilet was complete. Then she reached for a cage hidden beneath her skirts and brought forth on her finger a tiny parakeet, which she proceeded to feed with a piece of soft banana. The parakeet ate a little of it and threw a good deal of it about, eyeing the passengers with insolence the while.

"What is his name?" asked the man in khaki.

"Panuncio," replied the girl shyly, holding the bird up to her lips. Then there were outcries, for Panuncio had sprung from her finger and swarmed up by way of her hair to the pile of mail-sacks. By united efforts he was captured and placed, loudly protesting, in his cage.

The girl turned and spoke to the fat woman by her side, who answered chiefly with moans.

"*Ave Maria Purisima!*" moaned the fat woman.

"I feel I must have a stimulant," said Mr. Powle, producing a brandy flask. "Er—would there be any impropriety in my offering a drop to the young lady?"

"Not at all," said the other. He spoke to the girl and she replied at length. "She says that you are very amiable and that she will not take any herself, but if you could give a little to her servant, whose stomach is completely discomposed by the journey, she will be very grateful to you."

Mr. Powle handed a small cupful to the girl, who thanked him and gave it carefully into the hand of her companion. "*Toma, Concepcion.*"

Concepcion struggled into a sitting posture, and of her eyes only the whites were visible. "*Ave Maria Purisima!*" she said. She drank the brandy and then lay back and moaned again.

"*Te sientes mejor?*" asked the girl after a moment.

"*Ave Maria Purisima!*" explained the other, making as if to beat her head against the adjacent rail.

Brandy was then partaken of by the others.

Mr. Powle felt sufficiently revived to discourse on his surroundings.

"Would there be any risk in meeting that chap on a dark night?" he asked, indicating the young man, who was now doing some repair work to straps and buckles and scowling darkly.

"That one? No, he's quite a good sort. Jesus Lopez. I've known him for years. Why?"

"I suppose I can't get used to those big revolvers."

"Oh, that's Mexico. Five pounds' worth of hat and five pounds' worth of pistol, and the rest can go hang. Jesus wouldn't hurt a fly if he could help it."

"H'm! this country is not easy to understand. And who are these chaps?" Two mounted men, in leather jackets and bristling with weapons, had just halted near by and were talking to the driver.

"*Rurales*. They've been riding behind us all night."

"Oh, have they? And what's that for?"

"*Por si acaso*. Literally translated, 'for if perhaps.' One can never be sure on these roads. They're mostly recruited from bandits, so they know the tricks of the trade."

"Well, I'll have some interesting things to tell

when I get home. What does your friend Jesus say now?''

''He warns all hands to hang on tight. It's downstairs now to the hot country, so brace yourself. Cheer up; we'll change mules in about an hour's time and we'll be able to beat up some hot coffee.''

The morning wore on and Mr. Powle was comforted by the thought that his sufferings were coming to an end. The mountain road had changed for one which, while it could not reasonably be called level, was at least free of the larger form of boulders, and they were on the last stage.

''So you've got three more days' travel?'' he asked.

''Yes, but on horseback—which is good to think of after this. Two and a half days' if the river's not in flood, because I can make a short cut.''

''Fine adventurous life you mining engineers have,'' said Mr. Powle, with a tinge of the regret that comes at intervals to all who do their work between walls.

''Not so much. More hard work than adventure. And a good thing too: adventures always cost money. Are you going to stay any time in Santa Clara?''

"I don't know. It depends. I've had to come out suddenly on business for some clients of ours. And if I'd known what sort of trip this was I'd have hesitated before coming. The wilds of Mexico would have suited one of our young clerks better. But it's a matter that one of the firm had to attend to, and I'm the junior."

"I see. By the way, this is the civilized part of Mexico, not the wilds."

"Oh, is it? It's wild enough for me; I'm getting on for forty and I've never been farther than France and Switzerland before. I suppose there are a good many Englishmen here in mines and places?"

"Quite a number in the country. I've got three at my place. Very good fellows too."

"I suppose you find an undesirable one occasionally."

"Yes, occasionally. There was a very bad specimen in these parts recently. As a matter of fact he's in the gaol at Santa Clara now—or he was when I came through."

"An Englishman, you mean?"

"Yes. He'd been trying for work in one or two of the camps—or rather, not so much for work as for a place to get drunk and play the fool in. I gave him a job for a time, but I found

it was a bad mistake. Good looking fellow—speaks in a well-bred voice too—but he was absolutely worthless. He finished up by having a row with a Mexican over a woman and shooting him."

"Oh! Killed him, do you mean?"

"Yes, and it looks more like a murder than a fight from all accounts. But it's difficult to say, because there weren't any very respectable people about when it happened."

"And what will happen to him?"

"Hard to say. The man he killed won't be missed very much, but it's made rather a stir. If there happened to be plenty of money going he might get off somehow."

"How?"

"Various ways. It's not too difficult."

"And what will happen to him if he doesn't get off?"

"Well, he may get sent to the plantations. Or he may have better luck and get finished off on the road there."

"How do you mean?"

"They have a very convenient thing here—the *ley fuga*. A prisoner is told that he can escape on the road, and when he tries it he gets shot in the back and so everything's settled

nicely. But that's usually for political prisoners. Poor devil!"

"Yes, it's a melancholy case. The road is much better now. You could almost take a motor-car over it."

"Have you ever ridden in one?"

"No, but they're becoming quite practical now. Some people think they'll take the place of hansom cabs before many years."

"I shouldn't wonder. Hullo! there's the town. Your troubles are over for the time."

The stage went with a deafening spurt down a long cobble-paved street and pulled up in front of the hotel in the plaza. Among the little group before the door a man waited with two saddle horses and a pack mule.

"Here's my boy. The river's down or he wouldn't have the animals ready, so I'll get away as soon as my bags are on board the mule and I've had a bite to eat. I'll recommend to the proprietor that he looks after you properly. He's quite a good sort and he speaks French, so you'll be able to get along with him all right."

They took leave of their fellow-travellers with some ceremony. A few aunts and sisters and cousins had come to meet the pretty girl, so the air was filled with shrill greetings and question-

ings and they were introduced to all of them. Then they went into the hotel, which Mr. Powle found a cool and comfortably bare ark of refuge. After a breakfast which completed his restoration to a sense of the value of life he exchanged cards with his companion.

"I'm infinitely obliged to you for your help, Mr. Winfield," he said after a glance at the other's card. "When you find yourself in London again please give me a call."

"Thanks, I'll make a point of coming to see you. Well, I must be off now if I'm going to reach my next stopping-place before dark, so good-bye and good luck to you on your return trip."

They shook hands, and Winfield mounted and rode away. Mr. Powle watched him for a moment or two and then, blinking with the dazzling sunlight, turned and went in. The proprietor's strong recommendation of a siesta agreeing with his own inclination, he went straight to his bed.

At four o'clock he had taken a bath, though not without causing some commotion, since a large iron tub had to be borrowed from afar for the purpose. Then, shaved and changed, he was ready to go with a guide to the house of the lawyer whom he had come to visit; one whose

designation on a letter of introduction was El Señor Licenciado Don Guadalupe Ramirez y Ulloa.

The house, which was at a short distance from the hotel, had the appearance of a strong prison on the outside, but the massive front door passed, there appeared a pleasant courtyard, where a little fountain played and plantains rustled in the soft afternoon wind and many flowers in pots made splashes of colour in the shade. He was conducted to a large room, darkened by extensive crimson and lace curtains and filled to repletion with black and gold furniture, statuettes, and heavily framed pictures and mirrors, and there left to meditate.

After fifteen minutes' waiting he was rewarded by the appearance of Don Guadalupe, who bowed stiffly as he entered and waved to him to resume his seat. He was a stout middle-aged man, dressed in a black morning suit and button patent leather boots with cloth tops—a costume which, though professional and dignified, seemed not well suited to the sticky heat of the afternoon. His hair was strong and black and shiny, and his cheeks slightly overlapped his collar, which had wilted slightly. His expression was one of full belief in his importance to society.

"*A las órdenes de usted,*" he said as he took a chair.

"I have taken the opportunity of visiting you, Mr.—er—I mean Señor Ramirez—I must first beg your pardon, but I do not speak Spanish."

"It is no matter," replied Don Guadalupe; "I speak some English."

"So I am given to understand," said Mr. Powle. "And I see that you speak it perfectly," he added diplomatically. "I have called to see you with this letter of introduction from Señor de Soto, of Mexico City, who, I believe, has already written to you."

Don Guadalupe took the letter and glanced at it, then laid it on a table at his elbow. "Yes," he said, leaning back and crossing his legs and joining his plump fingers at the tips, "my friend de Soto has written to me that you wish my advice on a matter which he has no liking to put in manuscript. I am at your orders."

"The matter is this," said Mr. Powle. "As a partner in the firm of lawyers of a certain well-known family in England, I have been entrusted with a mission of singular delicacy. It is so delicate that the British Government's representative in the capital decided that—that—well, in fact that he could not give me any direct assistance.

The most I could get from him was a recommendation to confer with Mr. de Soto."

"Yes?" said Don Guadalupe.

"Yes. I—er—I conferred with Mr. de Soto. He considered the matter carefully and finally recommended me to visit you, mentioning—if you will allow me to repeat his words—that your abilities and knowledge were of a very high order. He said that you would probably be able to help me."

Don Guadalupe coughed slightly behind his hand; then rejoined his fingers in dignified composure.

"I—er—that is, the matter is this. A connection of the well-known family I referred to, by name Herbert Carpion, is imprisoned in this town on a charge of murder. This is, of course, a terrible and shameful thing."

"Yes?"

"A terrible and shameful thing," repeated Mr. Powle, wondering when he would get a hint of interest from the other. "The present head of the family is naturally aghast at the disgrace that has befallen the name. I may say that he is very deeply horrified."

"Yes?" Don Guadalupe, having been in expectation of this visit for many days, knew

exactly what was coming. "And in what way can I be of help?"

"I thought that possibly, with your assistance and recommendation to the proper authorities, some—some leniency might be applicable in the case, considering its—er—extraordinary character."

"How extraordinary?"

"Well—er—that is—I find I am putting my case very badly, Señor Ramirez," he went on after a moment's hesitation. "I think it will be best to speak quite openly to you."

"Ah!" said the other with a very faint tinge of irony in his voice.

"Yes, I must speak quite openly. Is there any way by which the payment of some sum in compensation, and—er—otherwise, could be considered as cancelling the deplorable act?"

"And why should you think the justice of the Mexican Republic is a matter for purchase?"

Mr. Powle felt very uncomfortable. "I am sure," he said after further hesitation, "that I had no intention of suggesting anything at all dishonourable."

There was silence for a moment or two. Don Guadalupe appeared to be considering.

"You were not advised by Mr. de Soto to

speak to the President of the Republic?'' he asked at length.

''No; he considered it would be useless to do so.''

There was then a longer interval of silence.

''The matter is difficult,'' said Don Guadalupe. ''This man has shot a Mexican subject, and evidently not so fairly. This, of course, cannot be passed over.''

''I do not attempt to exculpate my client's relation in the slightest.''

''There are, of course, special cases where some slight modification of the law can be applied. But in all such cases there is great difficulty. And great expense,'' he added, as if the point, though not of great importance, was still worth mentioning.

''I should naturally expect that all costs would be borne by my client.''

''If the President of the Republic had given some hint on the matter, it would have been less difficult. As it is, it is most difficult. But I will give it my consideration.''

''Thank you. Thank you. And when can I have the pleasure of waiting on you again?''

''Come here at ten to-morrow morning,'' replied Don Guadalupe unexpectedly, rising and

ringing the bell for a servant to show the visitor out.

"Thank you again." Mr. Powle was tremendously relieved at the turn things had taken. "I shall be here punctually at ten o'clock."

"Good-afternoon," said Don Guadalupe.

Mr. Powle went back to the hotel well content. He had heard that Mexico was known as the land of *mañana* and that he must never expect prompt settlement of business matters, but he considered this a calumny; short as his interview had been it had given indications that his mission was already in a fair way to be accomplished. And now, since he could do nothing to advance it to-day, he would give himself up to enjoyment of his novel surroundings.

After dinner he strolled out to the plaza, called there by the sound of music. He was struck by the extreme shabbiness of the regimental band which was playing—apparently every man with the exception of the leader wore sandals and a patch on the seat of his trousers—and by the fact that they were playing *La Tosca* in a manner that might be called brilliant. Two streams of people passed in opposite directions under the orange-trees; the inner stream consisting of girls in bright dresses and silk shawls and with flowers in their

hair, and the outer of men, most of whom wore the picturesque horseman's costume. On the outskirts of the moving throng Indians in gaudy blankets stood or squatted about, providing a background of riotous colour. The girls—was it the effect of the lights or were they all pretty?—moved as gracefully as swans, though not as quietly, for they laughed and chatted without ceasing. They signalled to distant Manuelitas, Conchitas and Angelitas with a dainty gesture of fluttering fingers. They glanced at their lovers, who passed them at regular intervals in the opposing current; they must not speak to them until later, when they would be separated only by the bars of mama's windows. It was the happy hour of taking the dew—*de tomar el sereno*—when Mexico of those days woke to music and gossip and a more subtle flirtation than obtains in northern lands, and wisely forgot that to-morrow would come. To Mr. Powle it was a strange unreal land of romance and colour. London and its drab wet streets roared far back in a former life.

He felt a great desire to converse with someone and express his appreciation; it was a great pity that he knew only half a dozen words of the language. But he might try two of these words,

since they would at least show friendliness. For the furthering of this harmless intention he strolled away from the plaza and down a silent street.

At a darkened, heavily barred window he saw a face of exceeding loveliness—there was no trick of the moonlight here—and a little white hand. It seemed appropriate that the little hand should be resting in the palm of a young man who stood in the street, leaning against the window and speaking in fervent tones ; a straight-backed young man, gleaming with silver buttons and braid, with mighty spurs, and a long nickel-plated revolver on his hip. Some yards away and half in shadow, a horse, trained to stand where he was left, patiently awaited his master. Here was the true romance.

Mr. Powle felt that the use of his two words would convey a sense of his friendly appreciation. "*Buenas tardes,*" he said, raising his hat as he passed.

The girl shrank back with an exclamation of horror and disappeared. The young man spun round with a jangle of spurs and glared murderously. Mr. Powle, with an uneasy thought for the long revolver, muttered an apology and moved quickly away. He did not know that to all persons with pretence to decency lovers are in-

visible. In recognizing their existence he had stamped himself for ever as an outcast.

He went to his hotel and to bed. The enchantment had fled. He remembered that his mission had yet to be accomplished; also that, whatever was the result of it, the soul-shaking return journey had to be made.

On presenting himself for his appointment on the following morning, he was received immediately by Don Guadalupe.

"I have thought since on this matter, sir," said that gentleman, coming straight to the point, "and have talked with Colonel Garcia Echegaray, the *Jefe Politico,* who is also a nephew of the Governor of the State."

"That is very good of you," said Mr. Powle.

Don Guadalupe did not dispute such an obvious fact. "Colonel Garcia Echegaray," he went on, "is of opinion that, though it is a fierce proposition to have Mexican citizens killed by foreigners, there are sometimes instances where the authorities show wisdom to exercise their discretion with regard to exact application of the law; as, for example, in a case where, though a citizen's life is taken, it can be proved that the said citizen's life was not of such great value to the nation. This appears to be such a similar case. Investiga-

tions have shown that so far as the good of the nation is concerned it is matterless whether the man was exterminated or not. So far we are clear ; but the law remains to be served still. The law of the Mexican Republic is fixed and inviolate, and no deviation from its actual fixedness or inviolation could be entertained whatsoever. I hope you understand my meaning."

"Oh yes. That is to say, I think——"

"Let me put it simpler. The fixedness of the law of Mexico is as steel—so strong. In this it differs from laws of other countries less happily constituted. But also, like steel, it has some spring. The question of when, and to what extent, this quality of spring can be utilized depends on what is considered desirable by the authorities in certain concrete, abstract cases, of which the present one may be referred to as a fitting example."

"Exactly. Then am I to understand that the —er—Colonel might entertain the question of applying the—the wise elasticity of the law in this case ?"

"He has already entertained it," said Don Guadalupe.

"I am greatly obliged to him."

"There is, however, one point of importance.

In order that the quality I speak of can be used with effect, it will be necessary for you to consider the expense of inducing such quality without in any way infringing the rigidness of the law."

"Will you allow me to ask what sum would be necessary?"

"Speaking of more or less," replied Don Guadalupe after majestic consideration, "I should say that fifteen thousand pesos would be required."

"Oh, fifteen thousand—that would be about fifteen hundred pounds."

"Speaking of more or less. Of course, if this sum appears to you too great, I have only to say so to Colonel Garcia Echegaray and he will have pleasure in dropping the matter."

"Oh, not at all," said Mr. Powle hurriedly. "I was not criticizing the amount. I think—yes, I think my instructions from my client will allow me to provide these costs at any time you may direct."

"As you please," said Don Guadalupe.

"There is one point, however," went on Mr. Powle nervously. "I should like to assure myself by inspection that the accused man is actually the nephew of my client."

"That is an easy one. I take you to see him."

"Thank you. And furthermore—I am a lawyer like yourself, Señor Ramirez, and you will understand my caution—I have to explain to my client that I have had proof of the matter being treated with—er—elasticity. I am trying to put it as delicately as possible."

"Let me tell you what the stunt will be," said Don Guadalupe, leniently coming down to earth. "Then you can judge. The prisoner will be sent under escort of *rurales* to Nieves, where he is to wait for his trial, which should be next year or perhaps a little later. Nieves is three days from here, and he will be accidentally lost on the way."

"Oh, I see. And—pardon my asking—there will be no risk of his being, so to speak, accidentally—er——"

"Shot? None at all. He will be told to go up north. He will be given a horse of some velocity, which you will pay for, and he will be told to go up north and keep quiet. And to keep moving."

"I see. And if he goes south?"

"Then he will be shot good and quick. You will give him some money and he will go up north.

I do not know where to and I do not care so much. Perhaps he will go to the devil. Most probably.'' Don Guadalupe was showing signs of impatience.

''Well, Señor Ramirez,'' said Mr. Powle after a few minutes of anxious thought, ''I will arrange that the costs are ready at once, and I am sure that—that I can rely on your carrying out the affair as you promise.''

''I hope, sir,'' replied the other with a faint approach to emotion, ''that you can always rely on the honour of a Mexican gentleman.''

Mr. Powle was not of a particularly trustful nature where the paying out of moneys was concerned, but he felt somehow convinced that the other would act his part fairly. In any case, there was no other way. ''I am quite sure of that,'' he said with a show of heartiness.

''Quite so,'' said Don Guadalupe, rising. ''Then we will go to the gaol now. But please note that you do not speak with the prisoner or look at him so much. You are an English gentleman on business of mines, and you wish to study our gaol of curiosity.''

''I understand perfectly.''

Don Guadalupe put on a dark felt hat and took a heavy gold-mounted cane and a folded newspaper. Then he led the way at a dignified walk,

holding the newspaper to screen his complexion from the sun.

The gaol was a large barren structure with massive walls, once a monastery. After a short conference at the gate they were admitted and passed, under the escort of a stalwart gaoler, through a group of untidy soldiers into a wide courtyard. Mr. Powle felt a sudden fierce repulsion at the sight of the narrow windows on either side, where tangled heads jostled together and grimy hands gripped the bars, and at the smell of crowded, unwashed human bodies that tainted the hot air. The sounds were of restless men who jabbered and wrangled and wearily got through the day in their close dens, and of the ring of rifle butts on the stones and the shuffling of sandalled feet as the guard was changed.

"The Spaniards tried to hold this place in the War of Independence," said Don Guadalupe, pausing and generally indicating the surroundings with his cane. "They wished to hold it against Hidalgo, the Liberator."

"That is interesting." Mr. Powle had to pretend the interest. "And they surrendered, I suppose?"

"They were not asked," said Don Guadalupe, moving on again. He pointed out what should

be objects of interest to an intelligent foreigner. "That is where the prisoners' food is cooked," he said, pointing to a cavernous room beyond an archway.

The gaoler, anxious to give the visitor an agreeable impression of his establishment, roared a fierce order, and two of the prisoners staggered out bearing a mighty caldron, which they deposited at his feet.

"Beans," explained Don Guadalupe.

"Exactly," said Mr. Powle, feeling sick and faint. "Er—very nice."

"And now, sir," Don Guadalupe said in an indifferent tone, "the man you want to see is inside the room over there. You will look through the little grating because you wish to see what the insides are like, eh?"

Mr. Powle looked. The gaoler wondered why the foreign gentleman was so pale.

The sunlight streamed like a shaft of flame through a window in the wall and lit up a dungeon that seemed a fit lair for some monstrous, foul-living animal; where corruption strewed the floor and clung to the walls and the air was like a revolting breath; a dungeon such as might have been in some festering medieval town; a place to haunt the memory and come back in dreams.

Seated on the floor with his back against the wall was a young man, lean and sunburned, with tousled light brown hair, dressed in riding breeches and a shirt open at the neck and darkened with stains. His face, for all the many days' growth of beard and the dirt upon it, was a handsome one, with reckless grey eyes and strong white teeth showing in a laugh. Truly the eyes needed to be reckless to go with a laugh in such a place.

Round about squatted some half-dozen men in various stages of filthy and disordered dress and matted hair, carefully leaving a half circle of free space before the Englishman, who appeared to have somehow—probably with his fists—established a right to it.

> "'There was old Potts and young Potts
> And middle-aged Potts as well,
> They were all Potts, jolly big Potts,
> Each Potts was quite a swell.
> They had whiskies and sodas,
> And everyone could see
> That all the Potts were out to have
> A regular damned good SPREE.'"

So sang the Englishman at the top of his voice.

"*Siempre canta de Poss,*" remarked the gaoler, with a grin for the eccentricities of alien people.

"Chorus, you perishers! How can I sing the songs of Zion in a strange land if you don't help out? *Andale! Todos juntos!*"

The chorus rose in the fœtid air; they had begun to learn and to love the strange chants of the English and were proud of their ability to sing them:

"'Ol poss, er yum poss,
Er middler posser swell,'"

went the howl. Mr. Powle drew back from the grating and turned to where there appeared a chance of a breath of purer air.

"So you see that is the man?" asked Don Guadalupe.

"Yes. That's the man."

"Then if we are sure we will go."

"Yes, let's go." He mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. "What a cursed thing! What Bedlam strain was in the blood to bring him down to this?"

He became aware that he was speaking his thoughts aloud, and he turned again to Don Guadalupe, who was pointing out other beauties of the stronghold.

"Can I do something to help him at once?" he asked. "I mean, to get him some decent clothes and food—and a wash?"

"I see to all that soon," replied the other. "Let us go back and we will arrange all matters."

A week later—a week of inaction and anxiety—Mr. Powle was bidden to go to the house of Don Guadalupe, who handed him a dirty envelope. Within was a piece of torn brown paper, on which was scrawled the following:

"DEAR SPORTSMAN, WHOEVER YOU ARE,

"Looks as if I was not going to be scragged after all, thanks to you. Sporting lot, these Mexicanos. If I ever get back to Piccadilly Circus count on me for drinks at the Empire—or Jimmy's if you prefer it. No time to write more. My late captors are shoving me off on my Arab steed. Thanks for the cash. Bless you. *Vive le sport!*

"Yours admiringly,

"BERTIE THE BAD BOY."

"You see," said Don Guadalupe.

"Yes." He drew a long breath of relief. "It is very satisfactory. I can't say how greatly obliged I am to you."

"We say no more about it. If I hear anything about him, I will let you know. But I do not think I will. He will go on to the frontier as I said, and in time he will go to the devil. Good-bye to you, sir."

Some months later Mr. Powle, in his office in Westminster, received a short letter from Don Guadalupe, asking him to peruse a cutting from a Mexican newspaper, but making no comment on it. He hurried off to a translator, and learned that the cutting was to the effect that a detachment of cavalry in the State of Sonora had found the body of one who was evidently either English or American, with a thigh bone and two ribs broken by bullets. The marks on the head proved that it was the work of Yaqui Indians. The body had the tattered remains of a shirt on which were the initials H.M.L.C.

"Poor devil!" said Mr. Powle after a long interval of meditation, rising and walking with the cutting into his partner's room. "So we can call that chapter closed."

Chapter II *A Long Handicap*

"WHAT you want to do," said Miss Briggs, a typist in the Home Counties and World Securities, Limited, "is to go to some seaside place where it's jolly and at the same time refined. Like Barthestone."

"I usually go for a walking tour," said Mr. Weddon of the Registry Department.

"Yes, I know. But don't you think that's rather a dull way to spend your holiday, if you don't mind my saying so. If you went to Barthestone you'd find some jolly people to talk with and go about with. And as you like old places there's plenty of old places round about. There's Bradcombe Castle. Motor trips go there every day in the season. You can get tea there. I've been twice."

"I've wanted to see Bradcombe Castle," remarked Mr. Weddon thoughtfully. "It's partly Norman."

"That's right," said Miss Briggs, who knew nothing about it. "And there are two bands at Barthestone every day. And very good shows at the theatre and on the pier. You should have a change. What I mean to say is it's not right to be so much alone, really."

"It's very good of you to take so much interest in my case," said Mr. Weddon.

"Oh, that's quite all right. I'm sure it would do you good. If you like I could write and engage a room for you in the same place where I'm going with some friends of mine. It's not expensive and yet it's quite select. What I mean to say

is it's almost a private hotel, really. And I could introduce you to some jolly people. Let me pour you out another cup.''

They were seated at a marble-topped table in a tea-shop, where they had accidentally met. Miss Briggs had youth, prettiness and amiability; she was typical of hundreds of other girls employed in City offices. Mr. Weddon was a man of no particular exterior, one whom nobody would turn to look at in passing; a man of middle size and middle age, quietly and almost shabbily dressed, with dark hair that was beginning to have a tinge of grey; a man in the dull respectable middle niche of everything. His features were well enough, and he had a clear forehead; he might even have been called good looking if the lamp within had been lit to some purpose. His voice suggested refinement, but it was the refinement that comes from association with the past rather than the living great ones.

He looked at Miss Briggs with a doubtful smile. He was trying to make up his mind to what, for him, would be a momentous breaking away from old moorings. He had felt one of his periodical useless revolts against the sameness of his life, and this time with a longing for human companionship. The weather had been fine and warm, and papers had been eloquent on the

strange yearly call to the sea, attributable to our Viking ancestry. With the coming of his two weeks' holiday he wondered if he should try to find out before it was too late whether joy was to be found in gregarious gathering. Also he felt touched by the interest that Miss Briggs showed; few with the qualities of youth and good looks went out of their way to talk to him. It must be remarked that she had no other interest in the matter than that which came from her large stock of good-nature, though she was rather flattered that the reserved and, in some ways, superior Mr. Weddon was being swayed by her opinion.

"I should like to go to the sea again," he said after a few moments. He had now made up his mind. "It's really very kind of you to trouble about my case, and—well, if you can let me have the address you speak of, I should like to engage a room there."

"I'll do it for you," said Miss Briggs enthusiastically. "I'll send a post-card this afternoon. You'll be glad you decided to come. You'll find me there when you come. The Morpeth's really select, with finger-bowls. I'll write as soon as I get back to the office. You'll enjoy it. There are beautiful sands at Barthestone."

Weddon had a vision of breakers creaming on a sandy cove in Cornwall many years before, when

he had had his one expensive holiday. He also became enthusiastic. "It's very kind of you. Thanks, I shall be glad to go there. It's a long time since I stayed near the sea. I should like to walk along a beach again"—here he ventured on a quotation—"'And sadly listen to the tuneless cry of wheeling gull and clanging golden eye.' Er—I beg your pardon." For Miss Briggs had stared slightly.

"Oh, that's quite all right. But it's not sad at all at Barthestone, Mr. Weddon; it's quite jolly. What you want to do is to make up your mind to enjoy yourself. There're lots of interesting places to see round about. There's a smugglers' cave. They have a tea place inside the cave and it's quite romantic. Oh, and there's the old Leet House; that's more than a thousand years old I believe. A baron was once murdered there with pincers. You can get light refreshments there. Oh, are you going to pay for my tea? Thank you so much. But it's not right of me to let you, really."

They parted at the door. She hurried home to get a game of tennis, and he returned to the office to finish up some work.

Arthur Weddon had entered the service of the Home Counties and World Securities Association, Limited, as a junior clerk at the age of sixteen,

and it was then considered by his aunt and her circle that the troublesome question of how he was to pass the time between adolescence and final extinction was very nicely settled. The Home Counties and World stood high in reputation in the safe centre of the universe, and would probably remain so until the stars grew cold. Arthur could count on a life untroubled by either poverty or riches, and catch the 5.15 train home for an indefinite series of years.

The only one concerned who did not share in this enthusiasm was Arthur. Though he had outlined many careers for himself, in all of which he prospectively reached the summit, the career of a clerk was not one of them. But when the time came he did not object openly, because his aunt, who lived on a moderate annuity at Brother's Grove, N.E., was the widow of one who had been forty-five years in the employment of the Home Counties and World Securities and who had rarely missed the 5.15 home, and she would have regarded any expression of discontent as a wilful flying in the face of Providence and taken immediate action in the matter. So he took his seat on a stool in the Registry Department and began to fill in names on a stack of forms, checking each name as he wrote it and thickening the down strokes with care.

And it may be mentioned, as a coincidence and also to co-ordinate the dates of events, that at that moment some shots had echoed down a stony valley on the other side of the world, and some red-brown men were turning over a crumpled figure to see what there was about it to make it worth while.

Twenty-four years later young Weddon of the Registry Department was Mr. Weddon of the Registry Department, with a chair instead of a stool, but not greatly advanced in importance. It had long been noted by those in authority that though a conscientious and accurate worker he was not for high promotion. And by his fellow-clerks he was known as a queer sort who did not care for cricket or tennis and who never put five shillings on each way and who never went to celebrations because he did not own a dress suit. But his reputation for rather more abstract learning than the average secured him a certain amount of respect. If there was an argument as to a quotation or a date in history or the proper pronunciation of a word he was consulted as an authority. He had been known to read Virgil in Latin while at his lunch. He was called a highbrow almost immediately after the term arrived from America.

He finished some small amount of work that he had to do and then went home, but not to Brother's Grove. When his aunt and her annuity were no more, many years ago, he had made up his mind to snap his bonds and strive for the greater life, but the extent of his revolt was to change from London, N.E., to London, S.W.; the greater life was still a mirage. He lived with a dull respectable couple who had got used to his ways, and who conversed little with him because they had little to say.

His kingdom was his one room. It was not a striking room as regards the ordinary furnishings, but it was of fair size and there was space for his three bookcases and for the writing-table and chair which he had bought at a bargain. The books were not expensive ones; it would have been in vain to look among them for numbered copies or first editions. They were of the kind that fill the shelves of second-hand booksellers, but which are not displayed in the windows; cheap editions of the classics, books of history, essays, and early travels, and some novels that have passed the test of time. A dealer would have estimated the value of his library by application of a foot-rule.

"What is it all for?" he asked aloud as he

seated himself at the window and looked at the opposite row of houses, clean and smug, each repeating the other into a deplorable infinity.

"I suppose I must be of some use on earth, or the company wouldn't pay me to come every day. But I can't see how I am."

"Perhaps if I'd started to mix with the people I can know instead of waiting until now, I might have found out what the devil it all means." Half an hour had passed before he made this second remark.

He lit his pipe and went over the past, a subject that he usually avoided as lacking in interest. His parents he could scarcely remember, though somehow he was able to associate with his thoughts of them surroundings and accents of a better quality than was usual at Brother's Grove. He knew that his father had been a tutor and a Cambridge man, though not a successful one; and he seemed to remember some talk of his mother having come down in the world when she married him—and also to remember his aunt snorting with hostility when this was suggested by some person unknown. But his aunt was always reticent and dour and had always discouraged any talk from him on the matter. In any case, there could not be much of importance to learn about his parents.

It was quite plain that there was no money left when they died. In fact, he knew from explanations given ungrudgingly by his aunt that it would have gone hard with him if she had not taken him under shelter of the annuity and brought him up and sent him as a day pupil to an academy for alleged sons of gentlemen.

In the Family Bible which was part of the meagre legacy of the aunt he found names to prove that he had kinsfolk on her side of the family at least. He went in search, and was rewarded by the acquisition of a cousin, a piano-tuner with seven children, all of them—as he judged from a brief glimpse—nasty ones. Search in another direction turned up a chiropodist, who asked him if he was saved. Then he lost interest in his relations.

The school he was sent to might have been a worse one, considering the price and the sons of gentlemen who attended it. The proprietor was a disappointed man, but he could still take interest in boys that gave promise, and young Weddon was one of these. He coached him in private, with the desperate hope that his academy would produce at least one man of mark, and even went to the length of calling on the aunt to see if there was any possibility of her considering the question

of a University. The answer was in the negative, for two reasons. The first was, there was no money for it; the second (which now appeared superfluous), that it would constitute a flying in the face of Providence to waste three years, or whatever it was, on a University when his career was already arranged for in the Home Counties and World.

He had made one faithful friend at the school. Ernest Sampole, a boy of imagination and courage, a climber of forbidden walls, and a puncher of noses alien to sons of gentlemen, admired him as one destined for high places, and loved him as one who could be counted on for sympathy with his own likings and aspirations. He was a great reader of romances; for him the deeds of the past lived again in the pages of Scott, Marryat, Dumas, and (for he was not particular) Harrison Ainsworth, but most of all he loved to read of those glorious but irregular persons who made the Spanish Main unsuitable for peaceful trading.

Such a one was obviously destined to plough the seas, and he was duly sent to do so, apprenticed on one of the old cloud-raking clippers that are now as extinct as the galleys of Carthage, and young Weddon was left solitary, to wonder why

he should be condemned to a stool in the Registry Department while others could go to do business in the deep waters.

More than two years passed before he saw his friend again. On receipt of a post-card to say that the ship had arrived home the day before, he got an afternoon off and went to the East India Docks. There he found the ship, beautiful and redolent of hemp and tar, the essence of romance, with towering un-understandable tangle of gear, and a white and gold queen with a trumpet to breast the cataract seas. He was greeted with joy by young Sampole, now a hard-looking one with scars of sea boils on his wrists and many flags and anchors tattooed on his arms, and taken to the apprentices' quarters on the half-deck, which, he was told, had been washed out four times coming round the Horn. He was given tea and some stodgy shore cake, bought in honour of the occasion, and he listened to the talk of the six sophisticated youths, who cut up tobacco of exceeding blackness and smoked it with ease and enjoyment; learning that it was not wise to go ashore alone in Shanghai, and that 'Frisco knocked spots off Valparaiso for a good time.

The old man, it appeared, was not a bad old

man as old men go. He would often give one of them an extra watch below, or present a pot of jam to the mess. He was pious, reading prayers every Sunday ; but what made him drop his piety was the sight of a halyard incorrectly coiled on a pin. If an apprentice was the culprit it meant looking for icebergs from the cross-trees, which was a slow job near the line—but then it was easy to take a couple of turns round the middle with the end of a gasket and get a nap. Apparently the ship boy's eyes still got sealed up in cradle of the rude imperious surge.

But the first mate was the hard one ; one who hated to shorten down even when she had the lee rail under and who would stand no shenanagin. In this term was included reluctance to cope with a bucking t'gallant on a dirty night. Teeth and toe-nails he considered sufficient for the young who wished to grow up into sailors ; God meant hands for work, not for holding on. Weddon went home with a Japanese knife and a dried balloon fish that his friend had brought him, and for the next week the sides of his desk were as thick walls of stone.

From then many years passed without events, and he began to wonder whether his lack of all chance of change or advancement was due less to

perverse fate than to his own character. Other men had taken to the science of Securities and found deep interest in it. Brownson, for example, who had joined the office a year later than himself and with no better advantages, was now high up, with a big salary, and had been sent to inspect branches in Cape Town and Sydney and other outland parts. The doubt whether he would have succeeded greatly in any walk of life began to assail him, not as an occasional qualm but as a grim certainty. When this comes to a man his face shows it.

His one great chance came when, in 1914, the comfortable old nineteenth century turned over and died. For him had come a crowded hour of glorious life. Instead of passing through the office door at five minutes to ten, he stood in a queue at a recruiting office.

He had his hour and a little more. At twelve o'clock he was back at his desk writing hard ; his chest measurement did not have quite the proportion it should have to his height, and only the perfect man could be taken.

As time went on the authorities got over this scrupulosity and gave it out that men slightly less than perfect need not despair, but Weddon did not offer himself again. It had at last been borne

in upon him that he was destined to be for ever the unwanted man and one set apart. Even the poster with the pointing finger and the stern eyes that followed, announcing that his country wanted *him,* failed to induce him to try again. He knew better than to believe himself wanted, and he would not risk another curt dismissal as a wretch of insufficient chest.

At length the authorities became so reasonable in their ideas of what constituted fighting material that they invited him to call and see about it, incidentally mentioning what would happen to him if he did not. But the fate that insisted on his maintaining an even existence caused some confusion in the mind of an overworked official and he was classed as unfit for service, while a man who should have been in a hospital was ticked off as rather a find.

Weddon then knew that the world had no use for him except as a clerk who would never rise. He learned nothing from the example of young Pilkert, who had been refused at a dozen recruiting offices and who was branded as C 3. Pilkert had managed to get into a detachment of non-combatants known as the Chickweeds, and from there by corruption and carefully arranged mistakes to get transferred to the firing line, soon

getting his heart's desire and going over the top. That five minutes later he was a bloody bundle hanging on barbed wire has nothing to do with the moral that almost everything can be got by determined effort.

The shock that changed the earth passed Weddon by contemptuously. Heroism in air raids was not for him, for he had been for some reason transferred for a period to a branch in the Midlands untouched by Zeppelins. His war sufferings were limited to those due to the increased difficulty of living on a small salary and the lack of sugar. Everybody of his acquaintance had done their part ; one man in the office had the V.C. Sampole, who still wrote to him at long intervals, though the friendship had decayed for lack of material, was now captain of a Benyon Line steamer, with a responsible bearing, married and with three children, and owner of a house near Liverpool. He had done well in transport work during the war and received special commendation and an extra medal. He had been torpedoed so often that he yawned to think of how often.

These things and more occupied Weddon's reflections. When his landlady came to tell him that his supper was getting cold, he rose with

something like a groan and laid down his empty pipe.

"Only a bundle of wants and no pluck," he said. "Forty years old to-day!"

Chapter III *An Experiment*

THE Morpeth was as described in the Barthestone Guide, a select establishment, near the sea, excellent cuisine, separate tables. Weddon's room was half of one divided by a partition and near the roof. Though scantily furnished—the wardrobe consisted of a corner hidden by a strip of cretonne—it was crowded. When the door was opened smartly, pieces fell out of a small bamboo table and Highland Cattle had to be picked up and put back in their frame. But the room was clean and he did not have much outfit to distribute, so he expressed himself to the proprietress, Mrs. Mawns, as entirely satisfied.

Mrs. Mawns was good natured and capable and as strong as a mule. She worked incessantly and with a cheerful heart, for the season had started well and she had hopes of laying up a store against the days when Arctic blasts sweep

through the bandstands of Barthestone and no birds sing. From early morning to when she switched off the electric lights at 11.45 she worked and worked. She bought supplies, gave a hand with beds and brooms, interviewed people who came to see about rooms, and did the greater part of the cooking. At a few minutes before seven she would slip from the kitchen, wriggle into a black dress, hang on her curls, dab some powder on the bones back and front, and be ready to serve out soup at the last clang of the gong.

The house was nearly filled with people, chiefly girls and young men, and the sound of laughter and chatter was cheerful to Weddon. As he sat down to the midday meal with Miss Briggs and an engaged couple, another couple on the way to be, and a young man who saw in Miss Briggs his soul mate, he felt that he had chosen very well indeed with regard to his holiday. The ceremony of introduction was carefully performed and he knew himself a member of the jolly society he had been promised. The general tone was of friendliness and content, and there was striving to outdo in amenities. Offers of salad were received with gratitude in excess. "Thank you so much" was the lightest acknowledgment of salt. All in the

house took part in this orgy of graciousness except the small fierce family of the Gulbeys, who had the best table near the window and who were always served first. Mrs. Mawns liked to have them near the window because they dressed for dinner and set a definite tone; it had somehow become known at the Morpeth that they preferred to go without dinner if they were not in evening dress. Mr. Gulbey was a provincial architect and also agent for Lord Burdlemere; it had somehow become known that he was really more his friend than his agent. He was a small man of acrid appearance and very correct; silent as to his soup and convex as to his fork with peas. Mrs. Gulbey was large and composed, moving among the other guests as if wearing invisible blinkers; in the lounge men got up and offered her easier chairs. Miss Gulbey was angular, but daring as to length of skirt. Mr. Howard Gulbey, aged twenty-two, had a distant knowledgable look. He wore plus fours of the baggiest and his garters had pom-poms of the fluffiest. When this family spoke there was usually a silence in their immediate neighbourhood.

"Some news for you in the paper," said Mr. Gulbey to Mrs. Gulbey as he seated himself. "Gyp's engaged."

"Engaged!" Mrs. Gulbey was so interested that she laid down her knife and fork. "Not to Sir Kenelm?"

"Viscount Camberbrae. I suppose you must write."

"The sly thing! Yes, of course I must send felicitations." But Mrs. Gulbey had no intention of providing any such matter for amusement for Honoria, third and rowdiest daughter of Lord Burdlemere.

"She never gave the slightest hint to me about it," said Miss Gulbey, when the matter had been discussed. "*I* always thought it would be Sir Kenelm."

"Camberbrae's quite a good fellow," observed Mr. Howard Gulbey.

"Quite," agreed his father.

The family then conversing of asparagus the adjacent tables breathed again.

After luncheon Weddon resisted the temptation to look for wild scenery along the coast, and put the disposal of his time at the kind discretion of Miss Briggs. She suggested that he should go with herself and friends to get some tennis if it was available; after that to go to the Smugglers' Cave, where they would have tea. And after that they would see what they would do. Weddon

agreed readily, since he had come to learn gregariousness and jollity, and went to put on the grey flannel trousers and white linen hat which he had bought for his holiday and which, he hoped, would give him the appropriately sporting appearance.

The party secured a court, but as Weddon could not play he had to be content with looking on, applauding at intervals, and wondering what thirty-love meant. He was relieved when the game was over and the second item on the programme was due.

The cave was reached by a sloping asphalt path and some steep steps. Though by courtesy a smuggler's it had known no touch of contraband, being quite unsuited for the purpose. But local enterprise had founded the tradition, hung some obsolete weapons on the walls, printed picture post-cards, and offered for sale teas and minerals. The party sat at one of many little tables within, eating chocolate éclairs and absorbing romance. The young man who was enamoured of Miss Briggs, by name Jevons, a wit, bound a handkerchief about his head, borrowed a cutlass, and gave a piece of light comedy acting ; speaking of luggers and of the girl being his. This was well received. Post-cards were then pur-

chased for the ladies. Miss Briggs held Weddon's arm going up the steps, with the charitable idea of showing him that he was not neglected.

They walked through the town, stopping to investigate curios and antiquities in a house built in the Tudor style, with a swinging sign denoting it as Ye Olde Shoppe. Within were many pieces of Jacobean and Sheraton furniture, skilfully worm-eaten, some monastic chests in good condition, and Oriental brass work brought overland from far Birmingham. Facing the doorway was a magnificent suit of early twentieth-century tilting armour. Mr. Jevons tried on the helmet, adjusting it with some difficulty. His suffocated voice was heard to say that by my halidom six and seven-eighths was a parlous tight fit, and he was rewarded by shrieks. The proprietor had to help him off with it; he reproved him for handling without permission so rare a specimen of Renaissance work. Souvenir spoons were then bought for the ladies.

They went on to a lending library and the ladies secured books. Weddon being referred to by Miss Briggs as an authority on literature was asked if he considered "False Fetters" superior to "When Dawn is Nigh." On his confessing that he had not read either, he was asked to

promise that he would do so, both books being strong. One of the young men recommended "The Sweeping Sword," because it gave such a perfect picture of desert life and the way of a sheikh with a maid. It also was strong, the author never hesitating to call a spade a spade. Caramels were then purchased for the ladies.

After dinner, rendered rather less happy than luncheon by the frozen presence of the Gulbeys, dressed, they went out and secured chairs by the bandstand. The music coming to an end, they strolled along the parade, for it was too warm to think of going in at once. They discoursed on the offensive behaviour of one of England's Intelligensia, who had deliberately put on his hat when the National Anthem began.

Mr. Jevons being missed, they went back to look for him and found him the centre of a small gathering. It appeared that he had considered it necessary for his happiness to follow the social reformer to a more retired spot and there remove his hat with a walking-stick. The other had challenged him to combat, but the offer being accepted he called a policeman instead. The policeman behaved ambiguously, saying, "Here, this won't do," and turning away to survey the coastwise lights. Mr. Jevons was rebuked by the

ladies for impulsiveness, though with feminine inconsistency they agreed that he had done the correct thing.

They returned to the Morpeth and compared sunburn on necks and arms and arranged for sea-bathing in the morning. Then good-nights were said, but there was a reluctance to go to bed. Though the upstairs journey was begun, progress was slow, for giggling had set in and seemed difficult to stop. Mr. Jevons appeared disguised as a ghost and shrill squeals were heard. The ghost, entangled with bath-towels, slipped down a flight of stairs, and girls clung to each other for support. Then some genius started a fox-trot on the gramophone below and partners were taken on the landing.

Mr. Gulbey opened a door and called, "Mrs. Mawns, Mrs. Mawns! may this unseemly disturbance cease?" Mrs. Mawns appeared in the gloom of the upper floor, clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful. She said, "Ladies, ladies, it is past midnight." Everybody said "S-sh!" and somebody flung a final pillow. The discovery that it had struck the protruding head of Mr. Gulbey was the signal for a general squawk in which joy and terror were curiously intermingled, and a quick subsidence into bedrooms.

Four days passed and the weather continued fine and warm, and the young people of the Morpeth still bathed and played tennis and went on motor trips and fleeted the time carelessly. Weddon had stuck manfully to his attempt to search for the secret of content. Each day he had joined Miss Briggs and her set and probed the resources of Barthestone and its environs. He had sat on the sands with them, been photographed with them, bathed with them (but he could not swim), gone to Pierrot entertainments with them, and had even thoughts of taking lessons in order that he might dance with them. But he knew that he had met failure. The fountain of joy from which these temporarily emancipated young people drank was sealed to him.

Barthestone, with its movement and brightness, held no happiness for him. After a year of streets and crowds, its cleaner streets and livelier crowds made but an improved prison. The sea was there, but bound over to orderly behaviour by groins dividing it into compartments. It had no cold grey stones to break on, but a mile or so of beach covered with chairs and bathing tents. It brought up shells and seaweed, and received in return tins, banana peelings, reams of pictorial newspapers and paper bags that had once held

buns. The town stretched far back, sweeping away fields and working up to the downland. On either hand it stretched along the coast, and in the distance a town could be seen coming out to meet it. Would the losing fight of Nature with the works of man result in England's being encircled by bricks and asphalt?

His sudden decision to call his experiment a failure and go away was confirmed by what happened to Miss Briggs. Though she had faithfully done her part in showing him the path to happiness, she could not be blamed for his inability to follow it, and now the power to assist him was taken from her. Weddon knew this when one night he found her on a bench in the garden of the Morpeth, held apparently to inconvenience by Mr. Jevons and murmuring that somebody would see them from the windows. On the following day she was not available for his guidance: Mr. Jevons had dragged her off with him in a charabanc to see a cathedral all alone.

Weddon asked Mrs. Mawns if it would be convenient for her to cancel the rest of his stay. She had no objection at all; as a matter of fact his room could be let ten times over; people were bothering her all the time to know if she had a room to spare. He thanked her and said that he

would leave on the following morning. Then he put a few necessaries in a haversack which he had luckily brought with him, and despatched his bag to his lodgings in London. He arranged for an early breakfast, said good-bye to his new acquaintances, and thanked and congratulated Miss Briggs and her fiancé.

By the time the people at the Morpeth had greeted at the breakfast-table he was far off, with his haversack slung over one shoulder and a stout ash stick in his hand, long since clear of the town. He went along a highroad, tarred and otherwise specialized for the crushing weight of motor-buses, for a mile or two; then he turned into a by-road, crossed a field, and reached a shaded lane, and the age-old English countryside received him into its solitudes.

His intention was to walk to the limit of his holiday, as he had done many years in succession before. This time, however, he would have no fixed itinerary, but would turn as it pleased him and as he was called by distant spires or red-roofed hamlets or waving woods, avoiding main roads as far as possible. He had nine days in which his soul would be his own.

He was a good walker, having had long training; it was the only form of exercise in which he

could excel the ordinary. The haunting doubts and feeling of incompetence and uselessness left him as he went on; here, at least, was one thing he could do well. The soft warm air and the stillness around filled him with content, and he walked steadily up steep rutted lanes, and down into hollow places where the elms met overhead and corners of hedges, left untrimmed, grew into little woods, and the fields sloped down to him overflowing with ripening corn.

In his new-found peace he philosophized on the pleasures of being without things, always a comforting occupation for poor people when it can be managed. Certainly no one but a pedestrian could enjoy to the full the glory of that morning, he thought. An idea of writing an account of each day's journey occurred to him; with his philosophies added, it might be a solace in the dark days when he would be back in London, S.W. and the trees were bare. Perhaps he might begin with a debit and credit statement of his position, such as Robinson Crusoe made for his consolation on the island. The idea seemed a good one, so he outlined it:

I have no motor-car and am condemned to walk afoot.	But if I had one I should pass all these sweet bowers without seeing them, snorting and stinking.

I have no motor-bicycle to get me over the ground.	But I could not ride a motor-bicycle if I had one; besides, I loathe the sight and sound of them.
I have no push-bicycle, no, not even a second-hand one.	But neither have I learned to ride a push-bicycle, being ignorant of all things human. And if I had one could I cross fields and go into little woods as I hope to do?
I have nothing to shift me but some socks and two shirts and some vests wanting complete buttons.	My load is therefore the lighter and I can step out briskly.
I am solitary and have no one to speak to me.	But this is just as well, for apparently I am the kind of fool who does not know the answer when people do speak to him.

He decided that this would do well for a start. He would buy a notebook at the first opportunity and write down these and other thoughts, as bees lay up honey for the winter.

As he walked on, taking cross lanes at random or passing over pastures and fields, with only a general bearing to the north, he came to higher ground and, in time, to a path that went across a shoulder of the downs, where sheep were feeding on the steep slopes and the wind blew stronger,

making the long grass flow like a river, and the gulls, hawking inland for food, turned their wings vertically or stayed awhile motionless in the air before sweeping down the hollows.

From the track he followed, though the swell of the downs hid the country in between, the sea could be seen like a blue-grey sickle, too far off now for him to distinguish passing vessels. And there, since this would be the last view of the sea he would have for many a day, he threw down his bundle and lay on the grass and looked his fill. The humble-bees buzzed as they clung to the clover flowers and swayed them over, the gulls cried, the grass whispered. Far out of sight a solitary lark had the sky to himself, yet he filled it with sound. Weddon lit his pipe and thought out more philosophies for his book.

Chapter IV *Enchantment*

A WEEK later Weddon had walked some hundred and fifty miles, though with his turnings and twistings he had gone scarcely half that distance as the plane flies. The roads on which the motors snarled might cut England into tarred ribbons, but

there was still room for the old things between them. By dodging highways, which he now did instinctively, he had passed nearly all the time in country as unknown to the tripper as that disagreeable part of Africa where they put hot pots upon the heads of strangers.

It was early in the afternoon, and he was tramping along a quiet, sun-spotted road, his face tanned and his clothes and boots white with dust, for the weather had been fine throughout his holiday and no drop of rain had fallen. A lane even more shaded than the road appeared on the left hand, and he stopped and considered, leaning on his stick and looking at a sign-post in the approved fashion, though consideration was only a matter of form. "Biddingly 6 miles," said the sign-post. So he decided on Biddingly as his halting-place.

Half a mile along the lane there was a turning to the right. This had to be seen to, especially as it had an overgrown, untrodden look. He went along it, and it came to an end at high iron gates and a high brick wall, on which lichen and grasses grew like a miniature forest. Beyond the gates, rusty and flaking away as to the bars and surmounted by two rampant iron leopards, he could see a tangle of tall trees and undergrowth,

and a weed-grown drive that went curving through it into deep silent shadows.

He noticed that one gate was slightly ajar and that a chain and padlock hung loosely on it. He decided to explore, so with something of an effort he pushed the gate open enough to admit him, and went through and along the drive, expecting to see presently some ruined house or the marks of where a house had once been. And with this expectation he was not prepared to come suddenly out of the tangle of trees on to a sweep of fair turf, rising gently up to where huge beeches made a wall of greenery and shade. A park, and a well-kept one. Therefore it must be Glynning, the county seat that a carter had spoken of an hour or so back.

He went up the slope and into the shade of the trees; on the outskirts of the shade sleek cows were lying, but they saw no reason to move as he came. The trees had been young, he thought, when Elizabeth was queen. Many of their trunks were riven and hollow, yet they sent out a roof of leaves that made twilight beneath them.

It was but a little distance to where the open turf began again on the other side, and there, perhaps a quarter of a mile away down another gentle slope, he saw the house against a dense

green background of woods. He walked on till he had it at what he considered the proper distance for a view and then sat down and studied it at his ease.

It was of warm red brick and old, but not old enough to have any touch of the comfortless ages ; probably it was of the later years of the seventeenth century. It was not overloaded with ivy, nor, though it did not stand on a terrace, was any part of it hidden by the garden trees. It was regularly built ; evidently the original size was sufficient for future generations, and it showed no added wings to alter the symmetry. Facing it was a perspective of soft lawns and formal flower-beds and rows of clipped yews, and on the left hand a rose-garden, separated by a row of cedar-trees, showed glimpses as of pink and white foam. On the other side, where the ground fell away in shallow terraces, there were paved walks and statues and more little clumps of colour and shade. From where Weddon sat he could see no sign of life. Nobody walked about, no gardeners worked among the beds, no movement showed at the windows ; yet the hall door stood hospitably open, as if inviting an adventuring one to enter. There was a strange air of completeness and finality about the scene. It was as if the house had been

swept and garnished and the last bush trimmed before some enchantment had come upon it and left it, alluring and beautiful, to bathe for ever in the warm sunlight.

"'Was naught around but images of rest;
Sleep soothing groves, and quiet lawns between,'"

quoted Weddon after a time.

"But I wonder how long that will be," he went on. "You're doomed like the rest, I suppose. Will you be turned into a democratic school, or a rest-cure for Labour Ministers—or sent brick by brick to America?" He sat on in silent meditation.

"Well, young fellow, and what may you want?"

Weddon turned with a start to find a man standing near him. He was a man of hardy look, wearing breeches and leggings but no coat, and he stood with his arms folded and stared at the intruder.

Weddon got to his feet and went a couple of steps towards him. "I don't want anything," he said. "At least, nothing I'm likely to get. I came through an old gate over there and found myself in the park. I hope I'm not trespassing?"

"Well, you are." His tone was less aggres-

sive ; he saw that this was not a tramp, in spite of his dusty clothes and bundle. "Did you say the gate was open?"

"Yes, an inch or two. There was a chain and padlock hanging loose."

"That's that fool Richards," said the man. "I'll let him know about it all right. Well, if you've seen enough——?"

"I haven't," Weddon replied cheerfully ; "but apparently I have no business here, so I'll go. I'm glad I've had the opportunity of seeing something of the place, though. I don't think I've ever seen anything more beautiful ; that is, taking it all together, house and park and gardens."

"Ay, it's a fine place. There's bigger places of course, but, taking it all round, Glynning's hard to beat." He strolled on by Weddon's side, chewing a stem of grass. "Sir Charles used to let people come in, but trippers and that sort used to leave tins and paper and muck about, and it kept me and the others all their time picking up, so he shut it up. And quite right, too, damn 'em!" concluded the man, whose political opinions were strongly Conservative-Labour.

Weddon produced from his jacket pocket two or three empty cigarette packets and a mass of crumpled picture newspapers. "I found these in

the road outside and meant to bury them somewhere, but I forgot to. That's one of my self-imposed jobs on my walks—but it's like stopping one hole in a sieve."

This attitude appealed to the man. "Pity there's not more like you about. Look here, I don't think there's any harm in your taking a look round the house. If you cut along that path, it'll bring you out just by the rose-garden, and you'll get a closer view of it. Have a squint at the stables."

"Thanks," said Weddon gratefully. "I'll go there. Who did you say was the owner?"

"Sir Charles Carpion. That is, he was the owner, but he died a little bit ago. General Carpion was the heir, but he died sudden, too, just a few weeks before Sir Charles. Rather rough luck after waiting all these years."

"Very," agreed Weddon, knowing nothing about it. "By the way, can you tell me why that part by the gate is left wild?"

"That's the old west gate, and it's been left that way best part of two hundred years." The keeper was evidently proud of his domain and well up in his history. "The third baronet was killed in a duel in 1743, and his son let it run wild, and the others that came after him left it wild too—

that is, they clean it just enough to show there's been a road. They fought with swords, as they used to in those days, and Sir Gervas got killed. I know most of the happenings in the family ; been here all my life, barring the time I was in the army. Yes, they was always a fighting lot, the Carpions. And great sportsmen. When my grandfather was a young chap he saw Sir William Carpion fight a duel. He drove him over to a place by the river and saw it all. That was in 1830. And Mr. Hill—he was a gentleman from London—shot him through his top-hat, and Sir William says he must have it over again. And he got another shot through his hat and he says, 'Damme, Hill, but you're expensive!' My grandfather heard him. Rare sporting lot they was in those days. Sir William 'd take on any man with bare knuckles—go out looking for gipsies and the like for a friendly mill. But here, I've got to go. You just nip along that path. Don't go too near the house. If anybody asks what you're doing, say Garnet said you could."

Weddon thanked him again and went along the path. It led to a broad walk of fine turf, with the hedge of the rose-garden on one side and the foliage of the woods on the other. Through the

trunks the ground could be seen falling away into mysterious depths.

A sudden break in the trees showed a wide slope covered with the same soft turf; it was as if the walk were a green river that had broken its banks at that point and rushed smoothly down, cutting a swath through the forest growth. Below was seen the corner of a lake, with reeds and overhanging bushes, silent with enchantment as all else about. Beyond the ground rose again, and then as far as the eye could reach there was nothing but billowy leaves.

Weddon was stirred with a feeling almost of vertigo as he looked down—or was it the faint recollection of a dream that had once disturbed him? He stood and considered the scene carefully.

"Now where can I have seen a painting of this?" he said to himself. "Not in last year's Academy, that's certain. Perhaps it was in *Country Life*. That's it! I must try if there's some way of looking up the old numbers when I get back."

"To finish off this walk properly," he went on after a moment or two as he turned again to look at it, "there should be a circular lawn at the end, with high hedges, all clipped as smooth

as a wall. And as garden seats would be horrible I should have classical stone seats here and there. And in the middle just one statue. I'll look at the proposed site of my lawn.''

He went on, and the walk stopped at a ten-foot hedge with a low arch like a postern gate. He passed through the arch, and then stood still in utter bewilderment. He was in a circular lawn with a high smooth wall of green just as he had imagined, and four stone benches were set about it. In the middle stood the great god Pan, in stone stained and mossy with age, with his pipe to his lips.

Chapter V *A Goodly Heritage*

WEDDON was on the last steps of his tour. Another hour or so would find him in the train, and an hour or so after that he would be in London, taking a bus to his lodging. At ten to-morrow he would be back at his desk, with an accumulation of work that would prevent him thinking of anything else.

The fine weather had broken during the past two days, and he went on in a drizzle of rain, with mud instead of dust on his boots. His sur-

roundings were no longer congenial, for he was walking through a district which was being cut up into eligible building sites and which would soon be a settlement for City men who desired attractive residences at not too great a distance from town. Notice boards told of areas and frontages, and scaffolding and stacks of bricks and timber arose on all sides. Half-built roads with granite kerbs stabbed into fields that would grow corn no more, and men slashed hard at coppices or lopped off branches of fallen trees. A farm stood in the midst of this progressiveness, but it would soon disappear ; the farmer had been bought out at a fair price, and the beams of the old Saxon barn were being wrenched away. There was the grinding sound of motor-lorries arriving with more bricks. From the farmyard came the bitter cry of a pig all unaware that as prospective pork he was not dying in vain.

In his annoyance at being reminded that people insisted on building new houses, Weddon did not consider it in the light of a disaster when, a little farther along the road, he saw two cars crash together. The smaller of the two had been coming down a lane, meek and lowly, and tooting a conciliatory note, and the other had been coming along the high-road at great speed, the

prosperous-looking owner evidently convinced that the hearty curses flung out by his horn absolved him from responsibility to anybody or anything in the way. He caught the small car at an angle, and there was crashing of glass, rending of iron, a wail of female terror, and many expletives.

"Didn't you hear my horn?" shouted the prosperous one, hopping out and waving his arms. "You can't say you didn't hear it! Either you're stone deaf or you heard it!"

"Oh, I heard it," replied the other, a quiet, undemonstrative man, shaking bits of glass from his clothing. "Almost as plainly as I hear you now. But why talk of outside matters? Let's talk about this business. I'm ready to hear what you have to say."

"To say! What *I* have to say! Well, of all the damned cheek! You come smashing down a side road and try to cut us in half and then ask what *I* have to say! Did you hear that, Fay?"

"Such people," sobbed his sixteen-stone wife, "should be given ten years' hard labour and have their licence taken away."

The other man heard this severe sentence with a smile. "This gentleman," he said, indicating Weddon, "was nearly close enough to be caught, so he can say what he saw."

"I saw plainly enough," said Weddon, "that the car came along at a very high speed, and that there was no attempt to slacken it at the lane."

"People who tell lies like that," cried the lady, "should be *beaten!*" She sobbed louder.

"Thank you, sir," said the owner of the small car. "Then will you oblige me with your name and address? Thank you. And now, sir," to the prosperous one, "the same from you, if you please."

"Here it is," shouted the other. "And I'll fight it up to the House of Lords if you like!"

Weddon left them to it and went on, not at all pleased to know that he might have to go as a witness in the courts before long. He reached the station, found that a train to town was leaving shortly, and in due time came to the stale roaring streets.

Arriving at his lodgings, he was greeted by his landlady, who remarked that he was brown and asked him if he had enjoyed Barthestone. On his replying, "Not at all," she said she didn't wonder at it, for she had spent a week there once and found it slow. At Bridgate-on-Sea, now, they had an amusement park with switchbacks.

For the three days following he bent to the

oar at the Home Counties and World, with plenty to occupy him. At five o'clock on the third day he found time to confer with a fellow-clerk, one Charmer, who was known to be well up in the law and worldly matters in general.

"Let's see the letter," said Charmer, before Weddon could get very far. "'Miggotson, Powle, and Powle, St. Cuthbert's Court, Westminster.' Looks like an old-fashioned firm by the paper. But all they say is that they'll be greatly obliged if you can call to see Mr. William Powle at some time convenient to you, and so on. Civil enough. Well, what you have to do——"

"Yes, but first——"

"Look here, it seems to me from what you tell me that the man with the small car's their client. Now what you have to do——"

"But what I wanted to ask——"

"What you have to do is to have your facts ready and tell a plain tale. The lawyers will tell you how to do it. Just speak up and say what you have to say, but don't let the opposite counsel get you flustered or he'll bamboozle you. Lord love you, that's what he's there for! Did I ever tell you about when I was a witness in that kleptomania case? The counsel was one of those you-be-damned sort of fellows, and he'd made

up his mind to twist me up if it could be done." The tale took some time; it appeared that there was slight applause (instantly suppressed) from the spectators at some of Charmer's replies. "So bear all this in mind," he concluded, "and you'll find it quite easy."

"Thanks for the advice," said Weddon, "but what I principally wanted to know is when the case is likely to come on."

"Then why didn't you say so at first? Of course the case may come on at any time in the next six months. The lawyers will tell you when."

Weddon left his work an hour earlier on the following day by special arrangement and went to Westminster. He found the offices of Miggotson, Powle, and Powle on the third floor of one of the older buildings in the court. A middle-aged, responsible-looking clerk to whom he was referred glanced at him over his glasses for an instant and then greeted him with respect, asking him to kindly take a seat in a waiting-room while he informed Mr. Powle. He returned in a few minutes and said that Mr. Powle would be glad to see him now.

Weddon entered a large room and found himself confronting an elderly man with a closely trimmed

white beard, who had risen and was holding out his hand.

"Mr. Weddon," he said, with a look that seemed to take in the whole of his appearance, though it rested only on his eyes, "I am very glad that you were able to come so promptly in reply to my letter. Please take this chair."

Weddon murmured something and sat down. The position of the chair left his face towards the light and the other's rather in the shadow; this is as advocated in works on diplomacy. There was a brief silence, during which Mr. Powle tapped with his fingers on the table with the air of one considering how to begin. He was between sixty and seventy years of age, of prosperous and dignified appearance, carefully dressed in a dark morning suit, and wearing the stiff, snowy linen of a past and more precise generation. His face showed kindliness as well as ability. So much Weddon was able to notice while he waited for him to speak.

"Am I right, Mr. Weddon," he began, "in supposing that you have no knowledge of the matter about which I asked you to call?"

"Well—not exactly that, sir," replied Weddon. "I think I do know."

"Indeed? Then, though that will make the

matter simpler, I must confess it is a surprise to me.''

''I didn't think it a very clever guess of mine,'' said Weddon with a smile. ''I suppose you wish to have my testimony about that motor accident.''

''Ha!'' The lawyer seemed pleased. ''I thought I couldn't be wrong. No, Mr. Weddon, I know of no motor accident—at least none that concerns either you or me. I asked you to call on a matter of very much greater importance.''

''Oh.'' Weddon, with lightning glance at his own personality and career, wondered whether there was a mistake somewhere.

''Yes. Now first, if you don't mind one or two almost unnecessary questions, you are Mr. Arthur Weddon, at present living at 98, Chatfield Road, South-West?''

''Yes.''

''Of course. My head clerk, who has had opportunities of knowing you by sight, tells me you are, but as a matter of form I ask your corroboration. And your father was Mr. Arthur James Weddon, and your mother's maiden name was Grace Wenstay Carhew?''

''Yes. Grace Mary Wenstay Carhew was my mother's complete name, I remember.''

''Exactly.'' Mr. Powle glanced at a paper

in front of him. "I see that I omitted the second name. Thank you, I have no more questions to ask you for the present; and as I have been pretty thoroughly into matters before I ventured to ask you to call, those questions can be considered, as I said, almost unnecessary ones. Well, Mr. Weddon, to come straight to the point, I have the pleasure of saying there is an inheritance for you."

Weddon's thoughts gave a startled jump to the possibilities conveyed in this statement. Could the piano-tuner—no, he had seven objectionable children to leave money to, in the wild case of his having any to leave. Perhaps the chiropodist—no, that was beyond an absurdity. It must be somebody else—some relation he had not heard of—Oh, Lord, it might be several hundred pounds—or even thousands! These thoughts flashed through his mind in the couple of seconds or so that elapsed before he spoke.

"I am very glad to hear that, sir," he said in a thick voice. "And," he added with a slight smile, "I may say that I am surprised."

"Yes." Mr. Powle grasped his chin and considered for a moment. "Exactly. But you are going to be so very much more surprised than you think, Mr. Weddon, that I find a difficulty

in going on. Now let me see. Yes, we will begin here. Have you ever heard anybody—your aunt with whom you lived so many years would be the most likely to—have you ever heard that lady, or anyone else, mention anything about your mother's family?''

''No, sir. That is, nothing of any interest.'' He found a difficulty in getting the words out.

''Exactly. I did not suppose so, judging from my past knowledge and from information I have collected more recently. Then it will be news to you to hear that your mother's father was a cousin of the late Sir Charles Carpion. The family seat of the Carpions is Glynning, in Hampshire. You may possibly have heard of it.''

''Glynning! Why, I've just been there!'' exclaimed Weddon. The second nail had driven out the first.

''You have been to Glynning, Mr. Weddon! As a visitor?''

''No. I was walking—on my holiday—and I only went in to look at the park.''

''I see. Well, Mr. Weddon, that is certainly a coincidence. But to continue. You are a descendant of a cousin of the late Sir Charles Carpion, and the results of that fact with which we have to do would be considered an exaggera-

tion in a work of fiction. Before I go further I will tell you that I have been investigating everything connected with you and your forbears. I did so without letting you have any suspicion of the matter, in order to prevent raising hopes that might never be fulfilled. Now everything is completed ; the inheritance I refer to is a settled and incontestable fact. Do you feel ready to hear something momentous, Mr. Weddon?"

Weddon only nodded.

"Then when you visited Glynning some few days ago, you were visiting your own property. You have inherited the whole estate of Sir Charles Carpion."

Mr. Powle had seemed to be growing smaller and smaller, until now he was only a little white-bearded doll, speaking in a voice that was a long way off, though very distinctly. Then, suddenly, he sprang back to full size.

"Come, Mr. Weddon," he was saying in a voice of some anxiety, "don't let us have anything ladylike. Here, take a—— Confound it, there's nothing to drink in the place ! Have a—have a cigarette."

"Thank you," said Weddon, taking his hands from his head. "I'm all right again. But I—can't—understand."

"You will in a little while. Take it quietly.

I can quite appreciate your feeling bowled over for the moment. The matter will need a good deal of explanation, which we will go into at length. I'll give you only main facts to-day and we will tackle the details at our leisure to-morrow. As I said, I have been careful to let you know nothing of this until I was certain, but now everything is clearly established and it is only a question of some legal formalities, which we will endeavour to get concluded as soon as possible. The estate consists of Glynning and a great deal of land connected with it, and also, what is most important—since Glynning is an expensive place to keep up and the profits from the land pay about half the servants' wages—there is money in various investments to a total of rather more than two hundred thousand pounds."

Weddon had nothing to say. He only looked at Mr. Powle and wondered and tried to understand.

"This news must come in the nature of a shock," went on Mr. Powle. "But one that differs from most shocks in that it is undoubtedly a pleasant one."

"Do you mean it's all mine?" This was the best that Weddon could get out. And he looked before him stupidly as he said it.

"All yours. Let your mind be at rest about

that. As I say, I have been careful to leave no loophole for doubt."

"An idea occurs to me," said Mr. Powle after an interval of silence, during which he had studied Weddon's face carefully. "There is a small matter of business that I have to attend to in my son's room—he is my only partner now; my other partner, Mr. Miggotson, died some years ago—and in the meanwhile I will have some tea sent in to you, and some—some rusks or something like that, and you can think the matter out by yourself for a time. A dose of brandy is what you need, but unfortunately I have none in the place; but my young ladies make tea perpetually and that will have to do for the present. Sit here and think it out comfortably. I will be back in fifteen or twenty minutes."

When he was left alone Weddon walked to the window and stared down into the quiet court, trying to get some holding ground for his thoughts. But the only thing he could think of was a black cat that sat cleaning itself in a dull doorway opposite. A girl came in with a tray and appurtenances and asked him if she had made the tea too strong. He thanked her and said—but without looking at it—that it was not at all too strong; then, when she had gone out, he turned to see

how the cat was getting on. It was doing quite well, though it was at the difficult stage where one paw has to be licked and then rubbed over the top of the head; and still this was all that Weddon could think of.

Suddenly the cat stopped its ablutions. A sparrow, hopelessly out of range, was hopping on the pavement, and the cat began to stalk it, lashing its tail from the neck downwards, and so passed slowly out of sight. Then Weddon woke from his stupor with a start and turned and sat down at the table.

He drank the tea and began to feel his head clearing. Suddenly he started up and raised his hands with a wild gesture. It was true! My God, it was true! It was not a wild dream from which he would awake to curse the fate that made him dream it!

He was roused from an almost delirious reverie by the return of Mr. Powle.

"How's the tea?" he asked. "Have some more? No? You're different from my lady clerks; they make tea every time the clock strikes, I believe. Well, do you feel ready to go into details? Then have a cigarette."

Weddon lit the cigarette thankfully; it was just what he needed to still the confusion within.

"Now let me show you how all this has come about," went on Mr. Powle. "I'll leave out technicalities and put only bald facts. You had better keep this copy of the pedigree before you while I talk. Now then, the late Sir Charles Carpion, seventh baronet, died last March in his eighty-eighth year, outliving his two sons and a daughter—here they are. His seven grandsons were every one killed in the war. Before the end of '18 they were all dead. Like all Carpions, great fighters. Here they all are, marked off. Only one of them was married, and he had no children, and his wife had died. There was no one to inherit in the straight line. You have it so far?"

"Yes, sir."

"The estate should have come to his younger brother, General Carpion, but he died of heart failure a few weeks before Sir Charles, due indirectly, I think, to the sudden loss of his only surviving son, who was killed in that accident on the Paris-Bordeaux express, which you may remember. You will note here that he had three other children. One, a girl, died in childhood, one was killed many years ago in Mexico, and the other was killed in the war. You will also note that for the past century the Carpion family has

been dying out. It is an example of the decay that may come to an old family without assignable reason. The war finished it. In 1918 there were only three Carpions left, two of them men well advanced in life, and the other a middle-aged man who for some reason or other had never married. In March of this year, as you have seen, the line and the baronetcy were extinct. Have I explained that clearly?"

"Quite clearly, sir."

"It was plain at the time that the next heir-at-law was a cousin, Mr. Theynell; here you have the line. He is a gentleman of standing in the Malay States Administration, and was very well known to both old Sir Charles Carpion and his brother. He has several children, so there would have been no lack of heirs to carry on a new line, and in every way he seemed a worthy successor. Of course, his chance of inheriting was small before the sudden death of General Carpion and his son; the latter might have lived another forty years, or he might have married. The chance, as I say, was small, and the news came as a great surprise to him. He believed himself the heir for two or three days only, for I found by an accident that you, Mr. Weddon, were of nearer kin than he was."

Mr. Powle leaned back in his chair at this point and waited a little as if expecting Weddon to make some remark. But Weddon only nodded; he really felt that he had no comment to make on this miracle.

"You will naturally wonder," went on Mr. Powle, "why this was a matter for late discovery, but it is simple enough. It was believed that you had died when you were six years old. And even if you were known to be alive the chances of your inheriting were not worth considering, and nobody troubled at all about the chances or—to put it plainly—about you. The facts are, your mother deeply offended her parents and the family generally by her marriage—some prejudice which we have now no means of judging, Mr. Weddon—and finally withdrew from all knowledge of them. Sir Charles was a hard man in many ways and according to modern ideas with exaggerated notions of duty to the family on the part of his descendants and connections, and though your mother was once something of a favourite of his—or possibly because of it—he never forgave her, and even went out of his way to foster her parents' resentment. So when he and others heard through some misunderstanding that you, the only child of the marriage, had died, it was

accepted as a fact, and—to put it plainly again—a fact of very little importance. Your parents had both died, and so far as I remember the opinions expressed at the time it was considered that the whole matter was very comfortably settled. Hard, but typical of the point of view held by Sir Charles and others. I may mention that both I and my late partner endeavoured to get some mitigation of the severity with which your mother was treated for marrying a man of her own choice, but we were unsuccessful. Her own parents, if I may refer so to your grandparents, treated her very harshly ; they were of a narrow type which is, I think, almost extinct—and happily so. You have, I suppose, no recollection of your parents, Mr. Weddon?''

''I have only a very faint recollection of them. I can't remember their faces.''

''Exactly. Well, Mr. Weddon, it is perhaps well for you to remember that your mother suffered a good deal for both your father and yourself. Now, to come to how I knew that you were alive. It is simply this : I happened, by a mere accident, to catch sight of your full name on a list of voters, and, my memory for names being a good one, I made an inquiry about you ; but without expectation that the inquiry would result

in anything of interest. To my astonishment I learned your parents' names. However, the details of my investigations can wait; let it suffice that I did all that was necessary and made all official representations and so forth, and took care to let no rumour of this reach you until the whole thing was proved beyond possibility of doubt. You will observe the marvellous combination of circumstances that led to your being left in ignorance of your descent, and the wild accident of chance that led to my noting your name on the list. Here is the list. I keep it as an illustration of the inscrutable ways of Providence. Had I been in a busier mood, perhaps the name would never have caught my attention. Twenty things might have stopped me from making investigations after I had seen it."

"It sounds very wonderful," said Weddon, after a few moments had passed in silence.

"Yes, I may say that it is by far the most extraordinary case in my experience. And I had a very strange experience once before in connection with the family too. The son of General Carpion, who I mentioned was killed in Mexico, had got into some trouble there previously, and I had to go there and straighten it out; it constituted the one journey with a flavour of adventure to it I have ever made. He was a very wild

young man—strangely wild ; it looked almost like a touch of insanity. And he had every advantage too. He was a cavalry subaltern when he had to leave England. However, I mustn't talk of old scandals. He was killed by Indians eventually, and he paid for his faults long ago. Well, now let me hope that you are getting used to your good fortune to some extent."

"I think I am," said Weddon. "Though I'm still too unused to it to say what I should—in the way of thanking you, for instance."

"Oh, I am your lawyer, Mr. Weddon. Let that pass."

"There is one matter I should like to mention," Weddon said after another interval of silence. "When I was at Glynning the other day the place seemed unaccountably familiar to me—that is, one part of it—and I put it down to my having seen a picture of it somewhere. And then I seemed to connect it in my mind with an old grass court—a round court, with a statue in it and some stone seats. The strange thing is that I found just such a court as I had imagined. Now, do you think—it has been very perplexing to me, and it is the only solution I can suggest—do you think this has some—well, some psychic bearing on the wonderful news you tell me?"

"No, Mr. Weddon, there are no spooks in the

case. The matter is easier of explanation. Your mother, unfortunate lady, took you there when you were about four years of age, in the hope that Sir Charles would show recognition of you at least. You stayed there several days with your mother; and at one time it looked as if there might be some form of reconciliation, but it came to nothing. She died in the following year. Doubtless you played in that court—the Pan Court it is called—and it is just the place to impress a child's imagination and cause the memory of it to come back half a lifetime afterwards."

"Yes, now I see that that must be the explanation."

"Undoubtedly. Well, Mr. Weddon, you can take possession of Glynning at almost any time now. There are some formalities, as I said, but they will soon be settled. Oh, by the way, I should mention that Mr. Theynell, who some months ago, and for a few days, believed himself the heir, came back from the East this year. He is a near neighbour of yours. In fact, the grounds of his place—a very humble place compared with Glynning—adjoin the park. So you will probably see him shortly."

"I wonder, Mr. Powle," said Weddon, "whether it would be possible—as I appear to

have supplanted him—for me to do something for him.''

''In what way, Mr. Weddon?''

''Well—perhaps—giving him some proportion of the money. I don't know whether that would be the correct thing to do, but I make the suggestion—and the amount seems enormous to me.''

''It shows generosity on your part to make it. But I can't give any opinion as to whether, or to what extent, Mr. Theynell would take money if it was offered him. I think, on the whole, Mr. Weddon,'' the lawyer went on dryly, ''I should be inclined to shun the experiment. And by the way,'' he added, to give Weddon a chance to recover from a slight consciousness of having said the wrong thing, ''I should mention that the sum you inherit is, of course, very much smaller than it was originally, owing to the heavy death duty. Luckily, Glynning is one of the few old estates in England that would not be taxed out of existence by it. You will, of course, feel it your duty to prevent a repetition of this misfortune by living as long as possible.''

''I will try to do my duty in that way,'' replied Weddon, with a smile which had now little trace of disquiet, for conviction had come to him. ''It

seems to me that I have every inducement to do so.''

''You have indeed, Mr. Weddon. And now let me give a practical turn to our affairs. I suggest that we meet here to-morrow, together with my son, and go into further details, but that in the meantime, as it is possible you may need some money for immediate expenses''—his eye scarcely rested on the sagging coat and stale collar—''and possibly a change of address''—his hearer's heart leapt at the thought of leaving Chatfield Road for ever—'' I suggest that I provide you with funds. Nothing like hard cash to make one feel that business is doing, Mr. Weddon. Shall we say a cheque for two hundred? More if you say so. That will do for the moment, eh? Then we will have it made out at once. Now, if you will allow me to advise, you will go forth now and commune with yourself and make plans for your future movements, which we can discuss at our leisure to-morrow. I am inclined to think that your business training will stand you in good stead as regards your future duties.''

'' Duties?'' Weddon did not quite understand this.

'' I mean your duties as a large landowner in a

new and very difficult period. Everything exacts its penalties, as you know ; but luckily you differ from some holders of county seats in that you have an ample reserve of money, but the investment of that money, and the control of the estate generally will need your closest attention, of course.''

When, shortly afterwards, Weddon found himself in the street, the former feeling of bewilderment came back. Now that he was away from the document-littered room and no longer had the shrewd, kindly face of the lawyer before him, the extravagance of this turn of fortune began to oppress him again. He caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror in a shop window and saw a shabby, dull figure, bearing a cheap umbrella, and with a book under his arm—a battered copy that he had found outside a bookshop just before he had gone to his appointment. He found three shillings and some pennies in his pocket when he went into a tobacconist's to buy a packet of the cheaper kind of cigarettes. Truly a large sum for the owner of Glynning and more than two hundred thousand pounds !

Suddenly, while he was waiting to receive his cigarettes, he dropped his umbrella and book with a crash that made the tobacconist and two

customers turn and stare, and grabbed from his pocket a faded old leather case.

The cheque was there. It was no dream. He was safe.

"Lost anything?" asked one of the men.

"No," replied Weddon with a sickly smile, wiping his damp forehead. "No, I thought—you, see, I thought I had lost something."

"He's been doping," said one of the men when Weddon had left. "White as putty. That's how they go, sudden."

The others agreed that it was a case of dope. There was a good deal of doping going about, they said. They recounted instances from the papers.

Chapter VI *In a New Land*

THE drawing-room of Netherfield, the home of Mr. Theynell, had two large windows. The front one gave a view of the lawn, a narrow bit of the road showing between rhododendron bushes, and, beyond the road, the first outer bastion of trees that defended the privacy of Glynning Park, all mellow with the ripeness of mid-August. To this window came Mrs. Theynell.

"And now if there isn't a black cloud coming up!" she exclaimed. "It's going to pour this afternoon. Charles, look at that black cloud!"

Mr. Theynell came with his hands in his trousers' pockets and looked at the cloud. He agreed as to its blackness.

"And only a minute ago the sun was blazing! Yesterday afternoon it was beautifully sunny, then this morning we had heavy showers, then hot sun again. And now look at that cloud! The climate is too absurd!"

Mr. Theynell said that its arrangement was defective. He was a tall, thin, rather sunburned man who was never moved to emotion over anything. He had been speculating at the moment whether it would have suited him better if Netherfield had been left to somebody else; seemingly the time had gone by for keeping houses in families. In any case, he wished he had not taken his leave for another two years; he would have had more money to spend on the place then.

Contrariwise, Mrs. Theynell was delighted to come home. She had had enough of the East for a time, and it was a joy to get back to housekeeping in England, even if it was terribly shorn of pre-war comfort and seemliness. She was tall, with a handsome face and figure; very kind-

hearted, and always interested in current happenings. She was proud of her husband, though she told intimate friends that he had almost no sense of either logic or humour.

The black cloud came up and did as was expected of it.

"And the children are out in it! They'll have to be changed all over! Oh, by the way, Charles, you mustn't forget to nail a few planks on the potting shed. It's leaking terribly."

"No. That is, I'll not forget to tell a man to do it."

"That's you all over, Charles! For every little thing it's a man. I told you to put some more netting over the raspberries yesterday, and you said the same thing. It's always a man."

"I have confidence in a man and none in myself."

"Just a few nails and a hammer! Really, Charles!"

"I should only hit my thumb. And it's all right about the raspberries. I told Jimmy to do it this morning, and he set about it at once."

"You told Jimmy to! When I'd forbidden him to go near them! I suppose now he's eaten pounds."

"Now you mention it, he did have a distended

look when he reported the job finished. I'm sorry, dear. I'll nail the planks on the shed in penance."

"Oh, Charles, you really *are!* You never pay attention to me. I told you to call on Mr. Weddon a week ago, and you haven't done so."

"It's a doubtful point. Should I call on him first or should he call on us? I think it's his job to make overtures. He took over the place that would have been ours if he had had the decency to die young."

"Don't speak so callously, Charles; suppose he were to hear you say that! No, we belong to the county and he's a newcomer; it's only laziness on your part. And it's so necessary for you to show that we are not at all disappointed because the property came to him."

"Let's hope I'm a good actor," remarked her husband.

"And he's a sort of cousin of yours, too. Of course it's your part to make the first call. Why cannot you be logical?"

"I doubt if the case could be reduced to a syllogism. But I'll do as you say, my dear. I'm convinced you're right."

"Of course I'm right. It's a pity we don't know what sort of man he is."

"I gather—indirectly—that he's been a cheap kind of clerk all his life."

"But what has that to do with it? Didn't your brother once work in a City office?"

"Yes, but they sacked him in three months. The case is different."

"Oh, Charles, I shall never get you to look on things in a logical way. Couldn't you form any opinion of Mr. Weddon when you saw him at the station yesterday? You might at least have noticed if he looked like a gentleman."

"As I told you, my dear, I didn't see him very much. He had just got into his car, and there was little of him to see but his knees."

"But you might have formed a general opinion. It's not necessary to make a prolonged inspection to know if a man is presentable or not."

"So far as I could judge he had the knees of a gentleman."

At that moment a mackintoshed stranger was seen coming up the drive.

"Why there he is, I really believe!" exclaimed Mrs. Theynell. "Yes, I'm sure it's Mr. Weddon. Now, that is a most amazing coincidence! Exactly at the very moment when we are speaking of him. Oh, Charles, if it is

Mr. Weddon, be very careful not to let him think we are disappointed!"

"I have already decided not to upbraid him," replied her husband.

The lady's guess was correct; it was Weddon who was brought into the drawing-room. This being the first afternoon call of his life, he was resigned to the commission of errors; also, as he was awkwardly conscious of appearing in the character of a supplanter, to sayings of the wrong thing. He was sustained in some degree by a well-cut suit and shoes from a first-class maker, but he did not know what he would be expected to talk about and he heartily wished the affair over. A month's stay at a patrician London hotel while the formalities of his inheritance were settled had helped him to little more than a superficial understanding of the ways of the class he now belonged to, for his diffidence had prevented him from making even passing acquaintances.

But he found no difficulties at all. He was greeted with an ease and friendliness that put him at rest immediately; besides, Mrs. Theynell did most of the talking, the while she served out tea.

"Doesn't it make one quite choky in the throat," she said, apropos of their recent return from the East, "when one is in the train after

years away? To see the dear little quiet fields and churches and cows, and the real green grass that one sees nowhere else?''

''I can quite understand the feeling,'' Weddon replied, ''but not from actual experience. I have never been out of England.''

''Oh, then you can't really appreciate what it is to come back after years abroad. And to meet the dear English people, so bluff and independent! Only the other day in town I was so amused by a man on a bus. I was looking round for a seat and he slipped into the only vacant one. He said, 'You should be livelier about it, mum.' But not rudely at all. It struck me as so typical and refreshing.''

''The sturdy Anglo-Saxon spirit,'' commented her husband.

''Yes, Charles, but it was the humour of the thing that struck me. *Do* tell me you have a sense of humour, Mr. Weddon.''

''Er—I like to think I have,'' Weddon replied to this difficult request.

''Oh, I'm sure you have. I suppose in one way I see the humorous side of things more than most people—a sort of sixth sense, I believe. I was nearly ill the other day with trying *not* to laugh. I was in the train on a visit to my sister

in Cheltenham, and there was a man in the opposite corner of the compartment eating sandwiches, one after another. As fast as he finished one he began on another. I am sure you would have been amused ; it was all I could do to control myself. The stolidity of the man was so remarkable, you know, with a red face and a fringe of whiskers, just like a picture in *Punch*."

She laughed again at the recollection. Weddon laughed too, and hoped he was doing it naturally ; but he wondered whether the lady had left out some vital part of the narrative.

"There now !" She indicated Mr. Theynell, who was sprinkling salt on a watercress sandwich and whose face wore its usual calm. "It's perfectly hopeless trying to make my husband see anything funny."

"I admit that the situation had its possibilities," said Mr. Theynell.

"Oh, well, I gave you up long ago, Charles. Once we were giving a dinner-party, Mr. Weddon, and one of the new house coolies was told to put six bottles of champagne on ice—he had been well recommended and naturally we thought he knew what to do. But we found that he had put the ice in a pail and poured the six bottles over it. I was hysterical with laughter—I really felt quite

ill with laughing—but my husband was as solemn as a judge."

"Be just to me, my dear," said Theynell. "At the time I was a judge."

"Only acting judge, Charles. And even then, judges often have a strong sense of humour; you see instances in the papers almost every day. Oh, here come my small children, Mr. Weddon. Jimmy—who should be at school but they have scarlet fever there—and Joan, my youngest daughter."

Jimmy had the look of a boy who had changed and washed and combed himself after a deluge accompanied by avalanches, a clean-limbed boy of about ten years, with marks of recent excoriations from brambles on his face and a strip or two of plaster on his hands. Joan was a year or so younger, with a pretty, serious face and wavy light hair falling over her shoulders. With her crisp white frock and dainty colour she looked like a flower freshened by rain—as indeed she had been.

"I hope you don't mind a nursery style of tea, Mr. Weddon," said Mrs. Theynell brightly. "We have another boy in the navy— a midshipman. My eldest daughter I hope you will meet this afternoon. She went to play tennis at the Vicarage, and she said she would be back early."

"John wears a dirk sometimes," remarked Joan, when she had finished a second piece of bread-and-butter. She had been studying the visitor with care, and now decided that he would pass.

"Oh, does he?" said Weddon. "Does he use it in battle?"

"No, it's really only for pure swank," Joan replied confidentially. "It looks rather nice dangling down though. We saw him once with it on. It was at Portsmouth, when the King went to see if the ships were all right. Can we have our cakes now, mama?"

"One each," said Mrs. Theynell.

Two hands went out without delay and took cakes; selection had been made during the bread-and-butter stage. Then Joan spoke again in the clear, beautiful voice that had delighted Weddon—the voice of a Court lady in Fairy-land.

"Mums," she said, "I think every one is broken." She always recounted disasters from the effect to the cause, as getting the worst over at once. "There *may* be a few sound ones, but I doubt it."

Her father looked up quickly. "Come, Jimmy, out with it—now that you've both got your cakes."

"I'm sorry, dad. It's those flower-pots. You see, they were all stacked on those planks——"

"The wobbly planks," suggested Joan.

"Yes, the wobbly planks. We scarcely jumped at all on them, and some planks seemed to come out all by themselves, and the pots came down."

"Didn't they just come down!" said Joan, with a sigh that was not wholly one of regret.

"The force of gravity, Mr. Weddon," explained her father.

Mrs. Theynell for once did not see humour in the situation, but she could not take action with a visitor present. "With children it is one piece of trouble after another," she said. "Joan's governess is away to-day, so I expected some sort of disaster. Oh, here is my daughter Marjory, Mr. Weddon."

Marjory was a rather plump girl of about eighteen. She did not inherit any of her mother's good looks, but she appeared good tempered and happy and brimming over with health. She shook Weddon's hand rather shyly and then took a seat by her father.

"Did you get wet at all?" asked Mrs. Theynell anxiously.

"No, mums, we broke off and went in just in

time. And when it stopped I thought it best to run home, as you wanted me this afternoon, and I didn't know when it would start again."

"Who was there besides Millicent?"

"John Planchet and a cousin of his—I didn't catch his name. And the two Gransell girls, and a curate who's staying at Calthorpe for a holiday —Mr. Thuddersby. He's the nicest little curate you ever saw."

"But, my dear girl, you shouldn't speak in that way of anybody in the Church!"

"Then I won't. But he is really nice. Do you play tennis, Mr. Weddon?"

"Unfortunately I do not. I'm afraid I'm rather a hopeless person at games of any sort."

Miss Theynell lifted her eyes from her cup and glanced at him. Certainly to her the new owner of Glynning had no look of the athlete.

"Mr. Thuddersby was rather an amusing person," she went on. "He asked me if he should serve in a dainty and chivalrous way, or whether I would be offended if he did. I told him to do his worst, of course, and he said, 'Very well, you've said it,' and he simply smashed them in. Oh, and he's got a black eye!"

Mrs. Theynell put down the teapot and stared stiffly.

"A black eye," observed her father, "sounds rather well. You mean you got annoyed with him?"

Miss Theynell spluttered a little over her tea. "He's got a living in the East End of London, dad, and he gets into trouble with men occasionally. He says sometimes the only way to save a soul there is to give a man a thrashing, but now and then he has the misfortune to find one who hits back. He made us laugh tremendously."

"I hope he's a proper person to meet," said Mrs. Theynell doubtfully.

"Oh yes. Millicent said her father told her that he was doing awfully good work. He doesn't really thrash men, of course—he's rather too small for it—but he stops men hitting their wives and so forth."

Weddon now began to wonder whether he had reached the time limit of a first call, and, if so, what he ought to say next. While he was hesitating he noticed that the little girl, who had retired to a sofa with a book, was looking earnestly and invitingly at him. He went over to her, and she arranged her little white frock to make room for him close beside her.

"I don't know if you ever read this," she said.

"Oh yes. But rather a long time ago, I'm afraid."

"They speak so rudely, don't they? When Alice said she didn't know that any cats grinned, the Duchess said: 'You don't know much, and that's a fact.' That was a nasty one."

"Wasn't it? Isn't there a part where they put the dormouse in the teapot?"

"Yes. Here he is, going in. That is a very choice bit. Of course, the whole thing is pure imagination, but I love it. I'm glad you do, too. Have you ever read a book called 'Treasure Island,' Mr. Weddon?"

"Many times. Do you like it?"

"I love it. Jimmy told me most of it, and then I read some of the nice parts myself—like the fight in the stockade, and so on. But don't you think it was rough luck on John Silver at the end?"

"Well," said Weddon doubtfully, "he was rather a hard kind of pirate, wasn't he?"

"Perhaps he was. But all the same, I like him, and I feel sorry for him. And he had only one leg, poor thing."

The voice of Mrs. Theynell, who had come across to ask him if he could dine with them on the following Wednesday, put an end to further

discussion on literature. He accepted the invitation with thanks and gradually took his departure, fervently hoping that he had done everything according to rule. Mrs. Theynell shook him warmly by the hand, and her husband escorted him as far as the gate, discoursing on the probability of a fine evening.

"I rather like him," said Mrs. Theynell a few minutes later, noting that none of her children were within hearing distance. "He's quiet, but he's got rather a nice smile."

"He's not a bad sort, I think," said her husband. "And he evidently wishes to be friendly."

"Yes, I like him. I wonder if anybody has called on him yet. And where have you been to, Joan?" she asked, for the little girl had come running in out of breath.

"I ran after him to lend him my copy of 'Alice,'" replied Joan. "He said he hadn't read it for a long time, so I thought I'd better."

"But, Joan, you should never do a thing like that without permission!"

"But it's quite right, mums. I told him not to make any dirty finger-marks on it."

Chapter VII *The Best Laid Schemes*

AT the time of his visit to Netherfield, Weddon had been installed at the great house for three weeks, and was in some ways getting used to its greatness. Mr. Powle had accompanied him there and stayed for a day or two, going over the bailiff's accounts with him and advising and suggesting. But there had been no loose ends to pick up and no problems of management to solve; all had been left orderly and controlled, and Weddon had only to take up the reins of government from where they had been laid down.

He soon saw that he must accept the responsibilities of his new life exactly as they had come to him, for Glynning would brook no interference. At first its air of state oppressed him, and he half proposed to himself to make changes that would bring it more in accord with his own ideas of tranquil retirement; but he found that this was impracticable. The enchantment he saw on his first view was not from a magician's spell, but from the efforts of hosts of servants of high and low degree; and he must take them all or none, for to reduce their number would be to bring decay upon the house, where moth and rust would corrupt,

and mournful ruins out of doors. He could not rid himself of the burden of farms that gave no profit, for that would bring disaster on men already fighting a bitter fight with the agricultural problems left by the war.

To his hard-living, high-handed predecessors the care of the house and lands were matters of their life and in their blood. To ride over their domain and plan to fence and plant and drain, to talk out the troubles of their tenants, to know the inhabitants of every cottage for miles around, and to concern themselves with their needs and behaviour and opinions, these things were what a gentleman of birth had to do. To Weddon, coming to this realm late in life, and ignorant of its wants, there was promise of travail and little leisure.

He found it easy enough, however, to adapt himself to the conditions of material comfort. The servants smoothly accepted him as their overlord, and such directions as he gave were obeyed as if the giving and obeying were in accordance with one of the great natural laws; servant problems belonged to a lower plane than his. He soon learned to pass all care of himself to these silent, perfected beings; to the butler who could do no wrong, and the footmen in quiet livery; to those

who saw to it that choice viands were prepared for him and that his decanter wanted not liquor ; who took with reverential hands his hat and stick when he came into the hall ; who laid changes of fine raiment to his hand, and would even have invested him in it if he had not intimated that this was one of the things he preferred to do without assistance.

What to do with the leisure this new life would leave him was still an undecided matter. He saw that his first delightful anticipations of a scholarly retirement alternating with periods of travel would have to be revised ; the mere decorative edges of his duties, the flower shows, cricket clubs, cottage gardens, and many other institutions which had been for generations under the patronage of the squires of Glynning, would alone keep him busy in unaccustomed fields. The head keeper, Garnet (who still took furtive glances at him as either a case of marvellous resemblance or the biggest enigma of his life), had taken him into coverts and talked enthusiastically, though unintelligibly. All Weddon could see was that there were a lot of birds to be killed shortly and that he did not want the trouble of doing it. Hunting was another matter that filled him with doubt, for all the Carpions of the past had crammed their hats down hard and ridden straight. He looked at the

four silky hunters as they went past him to be exercised, and wondered whether a course of lessons would enable him to sit one of them by October. It was the efforts of one of these noble specimens to unseat a stable-boy that decided him to postpone, not only the lessons, but the very thought of them.

At first the beauty of his new world, held alone for him by its rampart of woods, haunted him almost to his disquiet. That he should be kept from his birth on so meagre an allowance of joy and possessions, and then be so suddenly and extravagantly endowed, was a mystery that brought a touch of uneasiness. The hand of fortune had been too lavish for complete tranquillity.

Since his arrival he had scarcely set foot beyond the limits of the park. There was enough to keep him occupied with exploration; little nooks in the depths of the woods; the site of the old fortified manor—the stronghold of Glynning in Plantagenet days—where one crumbling tower was still held from falling by the ivy; the tangle of growth by the west gate, where his ancestor had stripped off his embroidered coat and crossed swords with his guest and given up his life. He had found an account of the affair in an old

register. Captain Humbleston of Bligh's Foot was the man; he had quarrelled with Sir Gervas as they sat at their wine, accusing him of Jacobite leanings and sneering about Popery and wooden shoes, and Sir Gervas had given him the lie and struck him. Friends had tried to patch it up, but it had gone too far and they went out there and then. They tried to keep it quiet on account of my lady, who was expecting a child; but she saw her husband carried in and laid on his bed half an hour afterwards. Strange to think he had such ancestors. Had never a drop of the hard fighting blood or a tinge of the strong passions come down to him?

The house itself, with its lofty rooms and ancient furnishings and relics, was too overwhelming for his comfort. No guests of his would cause hospitable fires to be lit in the bedchambers, or the large dining-table to be prepared. Where was he to find them, he who had no friends?

He had early decided that the library should be his own retreat; some slight alteration would turn it from a rather gaunt and little-used apartment into a comfortable scholar's living-room. Books at Glynning had collected themselves accidentally through the ages. The background was formed of calf-bound classics, indigestible sermons, and

old forgotten plays and fiction. The working part consisted of treatises on stock-breeding and agriculture, venery and woodcraft from black-letter days to the latest reminiscences of fox-hunting, and novels and other light food of the past generation or two. He spent some hours picking the plums out of this pudding and segregating them from bare shelves into the glass-windowed cases. Near the window that gave on to the south, and near the fireplace, he had a large table placed, and he anticipated in imagination its cosy look on winter evenings, with the curtains drawn and in the light of a shaded lamp and the fire.

He allowed himself one touch of sentiment in connection with the house, which had no personal associations for him. In his first exploration of the shelves he had found, crammed away and forgotten behind old pamphlets, a photograph of a handsome young man in a lancer uniform. It was signed "Herbert M. L. Carpion," and Mr. Powle told him that he was the family wastrel who had ended his headlong career in the Far West a quarter of a century ago. Since he had recounted details of his expedition to Mexico to the old baronet the lawyer had been constrained to silence on the subject—hard on a man with only one

adventure to his life—but now he could conscientiously enlarge upon it and philosophize.

The portrait attracted Weddon unaccountably. There could be no greater contrast than between himself in the twenties and this debonair subaltern —surely all women, old or young, must have turned to look at him—but he felt pity for the life so full of chances and yet cast away like an old glove. He might have been now the owner of Glynning, with an ancient title and a family of comely sons and daughters to carry on the line; but he had chosen to have his mad fling, and was dust of a rocky valley long ago.

He had the portrait cleaned and framed and placed it over the fireplace in the library, where he could look at it with friendliness and a sort of perplexed admiration. He did not concern himself with the escapades—and they were many and flagrant—that led to the final casting forth to join the legion of the lost ones; it was the gross waste that made him pity. And since he had got all that the other would have had he would at least give him his place over the fireplace and not in dishonoured obscurity behind the old books.

The visit to Netherfield made a sudden change in his outlook. It proved to him, first, that he had become oppressed with a new variety of loneli-

ness, and, secondly, that there were congenial friends to be made after all—and, more especially, one small friend. He went on his way through the wet trees bearing the copy of "Alice" under his waterproof; no spot of rain must reach that precious volume. He thought of white-frocked, wavy-haired Joan as she ran back to the house after her last hurried promise to show him her terrier puppy when he came again. She had held her little hands apart to indicate the approximate dimensions of the puppy, but said she could not stop to give him further details because mums would rage furiously. The sun came out and sent slanting beams through the trees and lit them up with myriad points of light—drops falling or ready to fall. He took it for an omen. There must be some quality of greatness about him after all: he was worthy to see Joan's puppy.

Then again Mrs. Theynell's friendliness and flow of talk had put him so entirely at his ease. Her sayings were quite devoid of brilliancy, but there was a quality in them new to his experience—the restful quality of sureness. She might say things that lacked all wisdom in plenty, but never by any chance the thing that should be left unsaid. And not only had he taken a strong liking to Theynell, but he saw in him a helping hand, for the birds that must be killed to quiet the

keeper would be killed by him—and by his friends too, of course, if he would bring them. And if he—or his friends—were short of horses at any time, there were four fine spirited beasts which they were very welcome to. Decidedly his visit had shown him a way out of many difficulties and he felt greatly comforted. It may be considered, by the way, that in view of his recent change from poverty to fortune it was early days to be looking for comfort.

On the paved court before the hall door he saw a tall, slight man in clerical dress, holding his hat in one hand for the convenience of smoothing back rather long silvery hair with the other, while he spoke pleasantly to the butler. He turned on hearing footsteps and held out his hand.

"I took the opportunity of calling this afternoon, Mr. Weddon," he said with a smile. "D'Esterre is my name—the Rector. I saw you coming across the park so I waited here for you."

"I'm very glad that I came back in time," replied Weddon, greatly impressed by the refined, clear-cut face and mellow voice of the visitor. Truly an appropriate rector for an old, well-endowed country living. Suggestive of the Vicar of Wakefield in the days of his prosperity.

"Thank you. I should of course have called

before, but I have been away on my little yearly holiday. It is delightful to find Glynning inhabited once more, Mr. Weddon." He enlarged gracefully on the theme as they walked towards the library.

"Ah, I note some changes here." He looked about him in a satisfied way and then went to the large table, littered with new and obviously expensive books. "Ah, ha! 'Ponsoby's Tudor England'—'Medieval Diarists'—'Rahere and His Times.' Yes. I see. An historian, of course, Mr. Weddon?"

"A student in a small way."

"Delightful! I also have interest in historical matters. But a dabbler—a fumbler. I see you have made your library your abiding-place. And I judge," with a wave of his hand towards the recent additions on the table, "that the shelves will now begin to grow apace."

"I hope so," replied Weddon, charmed with the discovery of such a congenial spirit, and ready to expand. "I have been prevented from collecting in the past and am tempted to make up for lost time. Have you seen this yet?"

"'Norman Defensive Architecture.' No, but I have wished to. I have seen it reviewed, of course. Oh, this is very delightful!" He sat down and turned over the leaves.

Discussion and comparison of sentiments made half an hour pass like a few minutes. It seemed to Weddon that his visitor was more enthusiastic than profound, but he knew that a clergyman's duties take the greater part of his time and that hobbies must necessarily occupy second place.

"Perhaps I know the room rather better than most people," said Mr. D'Esterre, rising and walking over to a bookcase and running his finger along in his search for a volume. "But I think it fair to warn you, Mr. Weddon, that I am a hardened and shameless book borrower."

"I shall be aggrieved if you don't use the library as your own," replied Weddon.

"That is very good of you," said Mr. D'Esterre, still searching. "Ah, here is a very perfect copy of Cowper's poems—the first complete edition. Is it not an extraordinary thing that Cowper wrote so little about hares, considering the great interest he took in them?"

"Hairs?" said Weddon, rather mystified.

"Yes, hares. He made great pets of them you will remember."

"Oh yes, of course. You mean that—er——"

"I mean that though he was so interested in them he gave the world no literature on the subject. Strange, is it not?"

Weddon agreed that it was, but rather doubtfully. Cowper was not to him one of the giants, and he did not grasp the point.

"Yes, it is a mystery to me," went on Mr. D'Esterre. "One would think that he—— Ah, here we have it! I think, Mr. Weddon, I will put my predatory instincts into practice and borrow this book—and perhaps this one. And," he added as if struck with a sudden idea, "these two also. Ha, ha!"

"Please take any you want," said Weddon gratefully.

"Thank you, these will do for the time. And now I am afraid I must tear myself away, as I have a small parish matter to attend to."

"Let me send the books for you," said Weddon. "Or, if you don't mind, I'll walk back to your gate with you and bear a hand with them." He did not wish to part with this new and charming acquaintance so soon.

"Oh, would you? That would be delightful. Then we will take two each."

Weddon took his two and saw that one was "Hares and Rabbits: Their Care and Management," and the other "Rabbits and Hares: Their Diseases." His curiosity aroused he took an opportunity of glancing at the two borne by

Mr. D'Esterre. One was "Hare Breeding for Profit and Pleasure," and the other was, almost defiantly, "Hares." Evidently the Rector was one of those earnest men who if their right hands find anything to do, do it with all their might. Here was an interesting sidelight on the manifold duties of a conscientious country rector.

They went down through the terrace gardens that flanked one side of the house and across the turf to where a path led through the woods. Mr. D'Esterre had a scheme for restoring the old lych-gate of the church in a way that would leave little signs of the restorer's hand, and he talked enthusiastically about it. The one defect of the scheme, he said, was that it would cost money. He spoke also of the Cottage Hospital, which was not in a good way financially; but he must have patience. Weddon asked him how much was really needed, and he promised to supply the figures of both matters if they interested him.

A short walk down a shady lane brought them to the back gate of the Rectory. Mr. D'Esterre insisted that Weddon must come in, so they went through avenues of loaded dwarf pear-trees and came out on a neat lawn at the back of the house, a beautiful creeper-covered place, decorous and

groomed and peaceful as a country rectory should be.

Weddon was left alone in a pretty, low-ceilinged drawing-room while Mr. D'Esterre went about some matter of parish interest which he said would occupy him for a few minutes. The room gave an impression of chintz and old miniatures and dainty china; there was a flavour of peace and faded rose leaves about it. Weddon sat in a low easy chair and looked out on the quiet garden and felt that content had come to him that day.

In addition to meeting the Theynells and making a friend of charming, self-possessed little Joan, he had found a kindred spirit who would share in his enthusiasms. The sense of loneliness that oppressed him had gone, for he now seemed rich in friends. Of course he would in time find others, and he could reasonably look forward to a life of peace and congenial study, far above any cares about ways and means and untroubled by the passions of ambition and love that wreck the lives of other men.

The Rector came back. "Apologies for leaving you so long alone, Mr. Weddon," he said. "Shall we go on to the lawn? I should like to show you—— But here comes my daughter."

A GIRL came quickly across the lawn, and a very young Aberdeen terrier leapt at a tennis ball she held out, at last managing by a frantic effort to knock it from her hand. But she swayed down as she came and had it again before the inexperienced youngster could get his teeth into it. So might Diana have recovered a fallen arrow. Then she became aware of the presence of a stranger and gave one touch to her hair as she slowed into a walk.

She smiled as she gave her slim cool hand to Weddon. Her lips were still slightly parted as she listened to her father's confession that he had already fallen from grace and borrowed books from Mr. Weddon.

"Papa always does borrow books," she said, "but that is his only wickedness."

She was slender and sweet and twenty, and as straight as any maiden that bore garlands on the slopes of Latmos. Weddon's throat was dry with dread that his reply to this radiance would be a fatuous one.

"Th—then I know the worst now," he said with a slight stammer.

Miss D'Esterre smiled again—a friendly smile—and he felt that he had at least missed disaster.

"There is no news yet, I suppose," said her father, half aside to her. Weddon noticed anxiety in his tone.

"No, not yet. Mr. Stubbs said he would drive by here on his way back. You mustn't worry."

"No, of course not. He may be here by nine, and it is now—— Dear me, it is half-past seven. Can we persuade Mr. Weddon to stay for pot luck?"

Weddon accepted the invitation with a tremor of delight—and doubt. For one thing he had misgivings as to whether he ought to rush home and dress; but a moment's reflection reminded him that the invitation was to stay, not to go home and come back and stay.

He thought with a grim smile as he used the Rector's hair brushes that he was keeping a butler and at least two footmen waiting for his presence at his own table of state, though two months ago he had not dared to encourage a tea-shop waitress to activity by a gentle tap on the bell. Certainly he was adapting himself quickly.

Dainty and flower-scented was the dining-room at the Rectory, and dainty and flower-scented

seemed Miss D'Esterre as she sat at the head of the table, the chatelaine of that charming home. The dinner was modestly perfect. The talk was chiefly of local happening, and to these Weddon, as a newcomer, could act the easy part of a listener and questioner. When the Rector, apropos of rural discontent, quoted from Horace, Weddon was able to cap the quotation. Miss D'Esterre, as a miss that has forgotten the wee bit of Latin she had learned, asked what that was all about, and Weddon was happy to translate.

In the drawing-room Weddon was shown photographs of her mother, dead many years before, and of her two brothers, one a barrister and the other in the army. He learned that Jimmy had once made a century in the Harrow-Marlborough match, a matter on which he was unable to comment as he did not know what it meant. A vague recollection of some novel—probably one of Jane Austen's—prompted him to ask her to sing, though he wondered at his daring. She sat down at the piano at once and turned over some music.

"Do you know 'The Eve of Crecy'?" she asked.

"No; but will you please sing it?"

"It's really a man's song. You must think of me as a fierce knight-at-arms."

"I—I'm afraid I can't," he replied.

Her voice would have been lost in a moderate-sized concert-room, but it was sweet and clear. Weddon sat partly in the shade, so that he was able to glance at her face. *"Ah, quel est belle la Marguerite!"* Could she sing that and not know how perfectly the lovesick warrior's cry applied to her?

When the last soft note had died away the Rector, who had sat deep in thought throughout, sprang to his feet.

"Was that Stubbs' cart?" he asked.

She went to the open windows and then outside. "Yes, it is." She ran across the lawn and disappeared. Voices were heard, and then the sound of a dogcart driving off.

She came back and put her hand caressingly on the Rector's arm.

"So sorry, papa."

"Tell me, Milly," he said.

"Only honourable mention. Isn't it disgusting?"

"Honourable—oh! But who can be responsible for such a thing?" He choked and turned away.

"A small matter, perhaps, Mr. Weddon," he went on after a moment, turning round with a brave smile. "But something of a disappointment. My best hare, Lady Godiva, which all good judges considered the finest in the district, has not received the first prize as I hoped. Nor even second or third. But"—with a little laugh—"she has been given honourable mention! Ha, ha!"

His daughter took his arm tenderly and rubbed her soft cheek against it. Weddon murmured words expressive of indignation and hoped they sounded real.

"Thank you, Mr. Weddon. We all have our keen interests, apart from our more serious duties, and it is always a disappointment when our efforts to produce excellence are met with—well, shall I say petty jealousy?"

"It's that pig Saunderson," said his daughter.

"I don't think I should apply the word 'pig' to him, Milly. Let us say that Saunderson is a misguided man—one who allows a certain personal bias to affect, perhaps unconsciously, his judgment. But enough of this. We all have our trials and must bear them. Let us go in."

Weddon felt somehow that it would not be

decent to stay in this time of sorrow, so he said that he had had a delightful evening and intimated that he was for home. The Rector did not press him to stay, and he saw he had acted wisely, though to his own detriment, for he must now part from Miss D'Esterre. But her next words brought joy to him.

"I'll show Lady Godiva to Mr. Weddon," she said.

"Do so, my dear. He will then be able to judge of my disappointment. Good-night, Mr. Weddon."

"Dad feels this tremendously, poor thing," said Millicent as they went through a rose-covered arch into a place sacred to hares. "I'm sorry too, because she is really a good hare. Ah, here is Lady Godiva."

Weddon stooped and examined a fat animal who was making a tour of inspection round her hutch after an annoying journey in Mr. Stubbs' dogcart. She came up to Millicent and sniffed at her hand.

"This is the hare that didn't get a prize, Mr. Weddon. And after all our hopes of her! Ah! Disgraceful little woman!"

"She certainly ought to have got the first prize," said Weddon indignantly. He noticed

then that Miss D'Esterre's face showed two dimples near the mouth, and he was disquieted.

"So you are a judge of hares, Mr. Weddon?"

"I—I'm sorry to say I'm not. But I *wish* this one had got the first prize."

They walked on through trim avenues of fruit-trees until they came to the side gate. The air in the warm dusk was heavy with scent from every tree and hedge and distant meadow. A big beetle sailed by, winding his "small but sullen horn." And Weddon raged inwardly at the dulness that left him almost inarticulate.

"I want to thank you for singing," he said. "Perhaps you'll let me hear you again soon."

"Of course. I like to think that people like my singing; though I know it's not too good. Good-night, Mr. Weddon."

"Good-night, Miss D'Esterre. And thank you again."

She lifted her eyes and looked at him for an instant as she took his hand. Then she stepped back with a friendly smile and turned away.

Weddon walked on till he found himself beyond the wood on his own domain, and paused to survey his own great house with the lights shining out on the gathering dark. Truly he had inherited a place in a strange and beautiful world; and to-

night he had met with the greatest wonder of all. He sat on a fallen log and remained there long, thinking of the wonder.

When at length he reached the house he found the butler on the paved court, looking out anxiously.

"I stayed to dine at the Rectory, Miller," he said. "Sorry I didn't let you know."

"Oh, not at all, sir." Miller was shocked at the apology. "Shall you require anything now, sir?"

"No, thank you, Miller. And—er—don't wait up for me. I'm not going in yet, so you can leave the door open. I'll close it myself when I come in."

"Very well, sir." Miller was obviously doubtful about leaving the squire to struggle with his own bolts and bars. But his not to reason why. "Then good-night, sir," he said after a momentary pause.

"Good-night, Miller."

He lit a cigarette and walked slowly up and down before the door. The warm night and the rising moon tempted him farther, so he made his way out to the green walk and then to the old Pan Court, where the god stood half in light and half in shadow, playing his silent tune on the

mossy stone pipes ; the tune that once made men mad.

Two rabbits scuttled close by Weddon's feet. He roused himself from his reverie and got up from the bench on which he was seated, and went back to the house. Before the door he stopped and stared across the distant tree-tops.

"That's queer," he said.

But it was not queer really. The short summer night was over and the dawn had come.

Chapter IX *Ensky'd and Sainted*

SUNDAY came, and Weddon looked forward with a mixture of shyness and most unaccustomed longing for church-time. He furbished up his memory with a prayer-book and entered the church porch just before the bell stopped tolling.

He evaded the beckoning eyebrows of a sidesman and stepped into a pew near the back ; he had no inclination to stand conspicuous in the stately Carpion pew, to be sized up by furtive glances of the villagers. An old woman in a shawl and a faded bonnet made room for him with a

timid air, for she belonged to a generation that had respect for rank. Across the aisle were such of his servants as the butler had selected to represent the house. A second glance round showed him the Theynells and the wavy curls of Joan as she bent at a conscientious little preliminary prayer.

His pulse stirred as he saw Miss D'Esterre pass by. She went to a pew in front—one of three at right-angles to the others and filled with children—and knelt. Then she sat up and looked over her flock, gave a whispered reproof to a boy who suffered from the fidgets, and remained looking composedly before her, "a thing ensky'd and sainted."

The Rector came in flowing lawn, and the service began. Weddon wondered how he could have missed so long and so wilfully in the past the æsthetic delight of the sonorous old words. Beside him the old woman murmured the responses and turned the leaves of her prayer-book with gnarled and trembling fingers, and her worn face was filled with blissful content. She had not come for æsthetic rapture, but for the renewal of a promise that work and woe should cease and she should meet her man and two little ones that had died early. She put a silver threepence into

the offertory bag, as she had always done—except in very bad times—even though it meant pinching.

Mr. D'Esterre's text had evidently been selected after the distressing news about Lady Godiva. "For the thing which I greatly feared has come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me." The sermon left the congregation with a general impression that nothing on this earth was really worth while. Our fondest hopes, our most cherished ambitions, nay, even that which we looked upon as certain of reward, might be scattered like chaff and leave only a mournful memory. Therefore it was best to train ourselves to resign willingly and at any moment such transient happiness as comes from our worldly efforts.

The old woman listened with rapt attention and hands folded at peace in her lap. Whatever small hopes or ambitions she had cherished had been scattered like chaff long before her eyes were dimmed and her cheeks had fallen in; but here again was the promise repeated, as it would be repeated to her until she could no longer walk to the church.

On his way out Weddon stopped to examine the old lych-gate—he felt he had a good right to

use it as an excuse, since he was going to repair it—and was rewarded by the approach of Miss D'Esterre. She was walking with the Theynells, and the little group stopped to greet him. Joan beamed on him, looking like a pocket Society beauty. She had had a good slice of devotion that morning and was ready for the world again.

The narrowness of the lane brought Weddon side by side with his divinity, and he found himself talking again to her. Though everything that was part of her—her face that was like a flower to him, and her dainty dress and her light walk—filled him with wonder and a good deal of fear, he was more at his ease to-day. If she was conscious of his shyness—as of course she was—there was no sign of it in her friendly manner.

"I suppose Sunday is not exactly a day of rest with you," he said.

"It is like one great big washing day," she replied. "Everybody else takes it easy on Sunday, but parsons and their families have to work. When do you think you will be able to help me, Mr. Weddon? With a catechism class, for instance?"

"I'll do anything you tell me to do. But I have grievous doubts as to my ability."

"Well, I won't risk it; unless you bring me a certificate for equable temper."

"Oh, I meant to ask you," broke in Joan, turning round excitedly and walking backwards; "did Lady Godiva get first prize?"

"No, Joan, she didn't. So I gave her a little dust and ashes to pour on her head, and she's very busy at it."

"That's rather a sweet idea," said Joan. "Make her a little pair of sackcloth trousers."

"Joan!" said Mrs. Theynell, "this is Sunday!"

Joan spun round again and walked on with the mincing step of the really good girl.

Mr. D'Esterre came up calm and smiling. He had worked off his grief in the sermon and felt at peace; he was even able to laugh at his misfortune. A few minutes more, and he and his daughter had gone in at the Rectory gate, and Weddon felt a woeful pang at the thought that perhaps many days would pass before he saw her again. He walked on with the others as far as the turning of the lane that led to Netherfield.

"*Wasn't* that a sermon!" said Joan confidentially to Weddon, during a pause in the talk.

"You must not speak like that," said her mother severely. "Sermons are for the improvement of children, not for their criticism."

"Yes, mums. Do you think Mr. D'Esterre will ever be made a dean, dad?"

"I have never given thought to the matter, Joan. Why?"

"Oh, I was just thinking, dad, that perhaps he'd make rather a gloomy one if he——"

"Joan!" cried her mother. "*Did* you hear what I said? Now, don't forget Tuesday evening, Mr. Weddon," she went on to him. "Sir Joseph and Lady Bansted are coming, and Mr. Cust and his wife. He is the man who discovered those old tombs in Peru—I mean China, of course—and you will find him *so* interesting. Do you play or sing, Mr. Weddon?"

"I am sorry to say I do not."

"Then of course you play bridge."

"I'm afraid you will think me a very hopeless person, Mrs. Theynell, but I don't play bridge."

"Oh, well, then, you must talk to Miss D'Esterre. She is coming too."

When Weddon reached home he would have been hard put to it to say what objects he had passed on the way.

His books were neglected again that afternoon. He sat on the ledge of the library window and looked out across his lands. But now his opinion as to which direction gave the most alluring view was changed. It was no longer that to the east, where the woods were thicker and more sugges-

tive of sylvan solitude, or in front, where the smooth turf led up to the cluster of hoary beeches. He looked to the west, where the ground sloped away and red-tiled roofs and an old church tower could be seen peeping above the leafy lanes.

Love had smitten him with the fury it reserves for those who have neglected it. It poured delight upon him—sheer delight in the thought of her—and swept it away with an icy flood of dread. Fortune had already given him so much more than his due share ; how could he hope for more ? But if he could not hope for more, what void and blackness was behind it all ?

He turned at length to the portrait of the dead and gone Carpion over the fireplace, and then got up and walked over to it.

"You are more the kind for ladies' eyes, you poor old ghost," he said. "You with your jaunty face and straight back, and the voice and airs that I'll swear went with it. Not a dull lout of forty without a sound stroke to his credit or enough blood in him to risk something on the other side."

Then he took to the silent pacing up and down that had become his habit of late.

NOT knowing at what hour people were expected to go away after a dinner, Weddon directed that the car be sent for him, trusting to better instructed minds to settle the time. Then he walked across to Netherfield and found himself neither the first guest to arrive nor the last, which suited him very well.

He passed without mishap through the ceremony of introduction—it had dawned on him by now that as nobody in his new world expected any false steps, none were visible. He spoke easily and well about the absence of clouds to Mr. Cust, the man of tombs, and to his wife, a lady with thick-glassed spectacles and hair clipped close for the convenience of entering tombs with her husband. He agreed with Miss Hebberstath, a very modern young woman, who sat with a cigarette and a cocktail, exposing much of the biggest pink legs he ever remembered observing, that we were doing putridly at Wimbledon this year.

He heard a voice that thrilled him, and there was Miss D'Esterre, sweet and cool and radiant,

in a frock of light green to which the word shimmering seemed to apply. The pretty smile she sent across the room to him compensated him slightly for the presence of a tall, personable youth who had come in with her, a youth who exuded health and calm cocksureness, and who was presented as Mr. Tolliver.

Then was heard a voice that resounded through the closed door. Miss Hebberstath remarked that they—meaning some new arrivals—were actually on time for once.

"These things will happen," said Mr. Theynell.

"S'sh!" said Mrs. Theynell, the very perfect gentle hostess, as she went to greet a large man and a very large lady.

"I was determined not to be late this time, Mrs. Theynell," said the large man. "Determined. I said to my wife, 'Let's be punctual for once, so that we can brag about it in our old age.'"

"Joseph," said the lady, "don't speak as if you were hailing a barge."

"It's three minutes *to* eight, Sir Joseph," said Mrs. Theynell.

"Then we're actually head of time!" he exclaimed. "Gracious heavens, Emily, think of

that! Yes''—to Mr. Theynell who was indicating a cocktail—"I deserve it.''

Sir Joseph Bansted was the greatest man in that part of the county, and newcomers on whom he called received a patent of respectability. Compared to him the Carpions were upstarts, for they got their send-off during the Wars of the Roses, whereas a Bansted is noted down in Domesday Book as having grazing for a hundred pigs. He told Weddon that he had been intending to look him up but had been prevented for various reasons, but he would do the correct thing next week, and Weddon felt that he was now confirmed as one of the elect. He had rather expected to see somebody like Sir Francis Vivian in *The Princess;* "A pamphleteer on guano and on grain'' (that line of haunting beauty) had occurred to him. But Tennyson's baronet would not have had bushy yellowish-grey eyebrows and a great hooked nose, and would not have talked so loudly about his poverty. "My wife wanted to go to Biarritz this year,'' Weddon (and everybody else) heard him say as he gave his arm to Mrs. Theynell, "but as I very naturally said to her, 'Where's the money to come from?' ''

Weddon took in Miss Hebberstath, and was rejoiced to find that she loved conversation so

long as she could do all the talking. He learned that she had gone that afternoon on her motor-bike to a tennis tournament forty miles away, won everything worth winning, and then biked back, stopping only once on the road for a drink at a pub. Then she had tubbed and changed and here she was. He applauded this record, and with sincerity, for it seemed to him a fair half-day's work for a training pugilist.

When the men came into the drawing-room after dinner, Weddon found an obstacle in the way of his boldly seating himself by Miss D'Esterre's side as he had proposed to do. Mr. Cust already had him tight, like the Ancient Mariner, and he was not skilled in the art of breaking away. Mr. Cust worked him towards a sofa and cut off retreat.

"I saw what Mustapha's game was at once" —the tombs after all were in Sinai, not China or Peru—"he wasn't going to find the way in until he'd settled what *backsheesh* he was to get. But I settled him. *'Fain el bab?'*—'Where's the door?' I asked. *'El bab, effendi?'*—'The door, sir?' *'Mafisch bab.'*—'There is no door.' *'Taib.'*—'Very well,' I rejoined. 'Then, *mafisch bab, mafisch backsheesh!*' I had him crawling in a moment."

"And did he have to crawl far?" asked Weddon absently, glancing over to where he could see a pale green ribbon around bright brown hair.

"You mistake my meaning. I meant that he gave in at once—wilted. They soon know when they've met a man who'll stand no nonsense. Well, he began clearing away some rubbish, chiefly lumps of rock about the size of a coconut or a bit larger—granite, or perhaps diorite—at any rate, one of the granitoid series—and we found behind it some slabs of a hard, compact, fine-grained sandstone——"

A crashing chord on the piano and the voice of Mr. Tolliver declaiming that (as a buccaneer) he swept the seas on the something breeze brought Mr. Cust to a halt.

"I'll tell you the rest later," he promised in a whisper. "When this row stops."

But when it stopped Mrs. Cust beckoned to him, and he went, and Weddon at last got an opportunity of sitting beside Miss D'Esterre. They had only exchanged a few words when she was required to sing, so he had to content himself for the present with a share of her voice. She sang a song of Chaminard's, and Miss Theynell accompanied her on her harp, which she played very well and which is especially suited to Cham-

inard and to voices that are pretty and not too loud.

When she returned to her seat and Weddon was ready to deliver the remark he had prepared, he found Sir Joseph beside him thirsting to know what he proposed doing about that barbed wire they were putting up at Fellowes Bottom Farm. Weddon, looking upon this in the light of one of those games in which one guesses the meaning of things by questions, asked him what he thought would be the best thing to do. Sir Joseph said that if you came to that the best thing, of course, would be to have the brute hung in chains at the cross-roads, but that being impracticable the way things are now, what about Weddon, as the brute's landlord, putting it to him that he was making matters needlessly difficult for hunting, and that it simply wasn't done? Weddon, having found the clue, agreed that it was a good idea, and promised to give it his attention.

When at length the ladies began to drift away for wraps and the men gathered round decanters and soda water bottles, Weddon felt that he should be satisfied with his first dinner-party. He had got on well with everybody in an unambitious way, and they seemed to accept him quite naturally. Lady Bansted had told him of the dreadful

trouble one had with maids, and Mr. Tolliver had asked him if he was any relation to Weddon of the Gunners, sir. No? Dashed good sort, Weddon of the Gunners—usually known as "Sticky" Weddon—perspires fearfully at polo.

How it befell he could not understand, but while cars were jarring and farewells at the front door were being said, he found himself beside Miss D'Esterre, deputed to see her home.

"What a glorious night!" she said, turning her fair face up to the moon.

"It's perfect," he said, taking a roll of songs from her unresisting hand and feeling that he was doing the right thing. "Perhaps you would like to walk?"

"Oh yes, I'd prefer it."

He told his driver to take the car back, and a minute later the incredible had happened and the buckles on her little shoes were twinkling beside him as they went on their way through the chequered black and silver of the lane.

"I have a question to ask you, Mr. Weddon," she said, when they had remarked sufficiently on the delightful character of their hosts. "Do you know anything about cactus?"

He felt a thrill at her first words and great disappointment at the next. When would he get a chance of being of some slight service to her?

"No," he replied, "I'm sorry to say I don't. I know, of course, that it belongs to the vegetable kingdom, but that's about all."

"Then I know more than you about them, because I know that they prick. Dad told me to ask you."

"I'll look up all I can on the subject," he replied eagerly. "And I'll bring all the books I can find."

"I expect dad will be calling on you to-morrow about those books. We're going to have a little cactus-house, with hot-water pipes and all for the winter. So you can expect to see my hands full of spines shortly."

"In that case I shall refuse to let your father have the books. He can have all the others, but no books that will cause damage to your hands."

"Too late, Mr. Weddon; the village blacksmith is already at work making brackets to support shelves full of cactus pots. Now, I want to know if you are fond of tennis. Because there's a tournament coming off very soon and we want as many to enter as possible."

"I have again to confess ignorance. I have never played tennis."

"Oh. Are you one of those who despise tennis?"

"No, it is tennis that despises me."

"The fact is, I suppose, you are too anxious about the shooting to trouble about it."

"I am anxious about the shooting, but not in the usual way. I am not what is called a shot, and the keeper is going to be hurt about it."

"Well, my brother Jim is not a very good shot, but that doesn't stop him shooting."

"Yes, but I am in a different class. I am worse than Mr. Winkle. He did at least shoot Mr. Tupman in the arm, but I have never fired a gun in my life."

Miss D'Esterre very nearly, but not quite, stared at this. "Then do you hunt or—or anything like that?"

"No. I think I had better say that the Badminton Library contains a fairly complete list of the things I can't do."

"I suppose you have been too busy all your life doing serious work," she said after a little interval.

"You are very good to suggest that," he said. "But I feel I must tell you that I haven't even that to my credit. Even at the risk of boring you I confess at once that I do none of the things that most men can do. I have been a clerk all my life until two months ago."

"I don't see what that has to do with your not

doing things. A cousin of mine is a clerk—at the Admiralty—and he hunts like anything when he gets the chance."

"There is some difference between your cousin's position and mine as it was; but I won't trouble you with that. There were fellow-clerks of mine who did things in plenty—one became a captain from a private in a year and got the V.C. But I did nothing in the war."

"Didn't you approve of the war?" There was a distinctly dry tone here.

"I am happy to be able to say that I did try to enlist in the first week of the war; that is my slight solace. But I was not accepted, then or later. I don't know why. But I am not going to trouble you with an analysis of my life and character. I merely wish to say that beyond trying for a rather useless kind of erudition, I have done nothing. I felt that I must tell you this, Miss D'Esterre, though I know it can't be of much interest to you. It's that—that it doesn't suit me to sail under false colours when I speak to you of all people. I—I'm putting it rather lamely."

"I don't see——" She was going to say "I don't see why you should select me," but decided that it wouldn't sound very nice. Besides, she did see very clearly. "It's very good of you to

consider me worthy of your confidence. But, after all, you have some knowledge that other people haven't got; papa said you were quite learned. But don't you think it's rather——" Here she stopped again.

"You were going to say," he hinted.

"Never mind. I'm only a weak maiden, not old enough to vote, and my opinion is not of much value."

"It happens to be of great value to me."

"Indeed?"—this had to be choked off. "I'm afraid I can't convince myself that I am of such importance. Now, Mr. Weddon, there is something else we can talk about. I saw Mrs. Chapman this morning, the poor old woman who sat in the same pew with you on Sunday."

"Mrs. Chapman? Oh yes, I remember her."

"Well, I'm very glad that you are doing something to help her, because she really deserves it."

"I asked her not to say anything about it," said Weddon uncomfortably.

"She didn't. You have just told me yourself. You see, Mr. Weddon, I found her rather jubilant, and as she hasn't much to be jubilant about as a rule, I decided, after a little talk with her, that you had had a hand in it."

"You are very clever," he said humbly.

"Yes, in a way. I know these people very well, and that poor old woman belongs to an older type who struggle to keep their independence and won't take doles. Rather like the French peasants, in a way. Of course, that kind is very rare now. But it's been a hard fight for her for years—she's over seventy, poor lonely old thing! —and she's seen the time coming when she'll have to go on the rates or something. It seems so terribly hard to fight on for years and then lose out at the end, doesn't it?"

"Yes, that is what struck me."

"And since she has to take charity she'd rather take it from Glynning than from anywhere else, because she has associations with the place."

"In future I shall come to you for advice on matters of that sort," he said after a moment.

"You couldn't come to a better authority. Well, Mr. Weddon, thank you for seeing me safely through the dangers of the lane." They had by this time reached the Rectory gate.

"I hope I haven't fallen heavily in your estimation by my confession of incompetence."

"Oh no. Perhaps you'll prove to be less incompetent than you make out."

"I think you are as kind as you are—as you are clever. Good-night, Miss D'Esterre."

She laughed a little laugh and went in.

Weddon walked briskly on until he reached home. He took down a county directory and studied it for a minute or two and selected an address. "I'll try that one to-morrow," he said. "Thank God I've said it all, whether I'm a fool for doing it or not. Now I start from the bottom."

In the meantime Miss D'Esterre was standing in her father's study, looking over a rough sketch he had made.

"It will take a lot of timber, won't it, dad?" she asked.

"No, Milly, because Bullock says he can use the wood of the hare-house. I want him to get at it quickly; I hope to take a prize in the late autumn show. I'll run over to Glynning the first thing to-morrow and borrow those books."

A little later she kissed him on the brow and went to her room. She threw her wrap on the bed and then tipped a long mirror at a good angle for surveying herself frontways and sideways; also for getting a good glimpse of her feet.

"Yes, you rather pretty person," she said at length, "he's in love with you without a doubt. Ah's me!"

ON the following morning Weddon made a collection of all books in the library that treated, however remotely, on cactus, and despatched them to Mr. D'Esterre with his compliments. Then he drove over to Kendalford, which was the nearest town of any importance, and had an interview with Captain Anthony Binns, a well-known character who was generally respected though not always liked.

He took Weddon into his private office, a small, crowded place with one of its two windows giving on to a mighty iron-roofed structure smelling of horses and tan bark, and offered him the only elbow-chair. He himself sat on a high stool. He was a straight, wiry man of fifty, with grizzled hair and a waxed moustache, and a face mottled with exposure to many kinds of weather. His manner was not without a certain grim charm.

"I want to know if you can teach me to ride, Captain Binns," said Weddon. "To give you the worst at once, I have never been on a horse in my life."

"Age, sir?" asked Captain Binns.

"Forty."

"H'm! A bit late, sir. Of course, it depends on how much it's in you to learn. And, of course, whether you've made up your mind to learn."

"I've made up my mind."

"Then that's all to the good. You're the new squire of Glynning, I'm told, sir."

"Er—I am the owner of Glynning. I'm afraid the word 'squire' doesn't apply very well to me yet. A squire who can't ride is rather a contradiction in terms."

"It does *not* sound quite correct, sir," agreed Captain Binns. "It should be altered if possible. Well, we'll get to it and see what kind you are first. I used to tell the rookies in the King's Bays that there's three kinds I have to deal with. 'There's one kind,' I'd say, 'that takes to riding naturally, and they gets off fairly easy. The second kind,' I'd say, 'don't take to it naturally, but they can be taught, and they have what you might call a hard time of it. And the third kind,' I'd say, 'never can be taught, *and them we kill.*'"

"I see," said Weddon. "And if I prove to be of the third kind——?"

"Oh, we'll not kill you, sir. I was just telling you the way we encouraged the rookies. No, sir, if it's in you I'll teach you. I don't mean I'll

make it so that you'll be damned by the master for getting ahead of hounds every time you go out ; that 'd be too much to hope for. You see, you're starting late, and it's the same with almost everything : you've got to start early to get to the top. Take the violin, sir. I'm partial to violin music myself, and I've often thought of trying to learn. But it 'd be hopeless my trying to do real good at it at my age. I might get out something like a tune if I set my mind to it and kept at it, but you couldn't expect me to have the Kubelik touch if I worked till the sweat poured down. And it's the same with riding."

"I agree thoroughly," said Weddon. "So I want to try what I can do at it before I grow any older."

"Very well, sir. If it's in you I'll make you stick on and take a medium fence. If it isn't I'll tell you plain, and we'll part friends. But you'll have to do exactly as I say, and practise the length of time I say, and risk a soft toss or two. Remember it's nothing for nothing in this world, whatever it is in the next."

"I'll do exactly as you tell me, Captain Binns."

"Then that's a good part of the way there, sir ; and I may as well own up here that I'm not

exactly an easy teacher. If I let out a curse or two at you, sir, you must take it as part of my method.''

''I am prepared to be reviled by you, Captain Binns.''

''It won't come to that, sir; just a hasty damn or so. Now, when were you thinking of making a start?''

''Well,'' said Weddon, ''I've got some riding things in the car with me, and if it's suitable to you I'd like to start now.''

''Good for you, sir. I'll just tell your man to bring them in, and you can change here.''

''I'm relieved to hear you say there is a chance for me,'' said Weddon, as he surveyed his legs, clad in the faultlessly cut riding-breeches which his tailor had insisted on making for him, and which he had never expected to wear. ''It has all the comforting quality of an expert opinion.''

''Lord love you, sir!'' exclaimed Captain Binns, with a short laugh, ''if you'd seen some of the organ-grinders' monkeys I've made into riders, you'd be more relieved still.''

By the end of a few weeks Captain Binns expressed to an underling his regret that Mr. Weddon hadn't started to ride when young. A little later he told Weddon himself that he'd seen

worse. And a little later still he told him that he thought he'd make a rider if you weren't too particular about the exact meaning of the word.

As Captain Binns did not attach great importance to praise as a factor of encouragement, this meant a good deal. His methods were of the old shell-jacket and burnishing days, and, though he watched his pupil with the eye of a hawk, he rarely explained. He said, "Sit *down* in your seat, sir!" in tones that varied from grieved disgust to open wrath, and for a good time he said little else. In the good old way he was laying the foundation of a close acquaintance between the back of a horse and the rider's legs. The frills of the art could wait.

Weddon was aching but hopeful. The tan bark was fairly soft, and he had only a few contusions to impress his memory. "Not so much dismounting without leave, sir," said Captain Binns severely on one occasion as he helped to brush him down. "If you was twenty you'd only bounce, but at forty the bones get more set."

The summer passed, and autumn was drawing on, and now the wisdom of Captain Binns was proved. Weddon took him one day to the Rose and Crown, well known to farmers and others for

the excellence of its market dinner, to celebrate the passing of a definite milestone in his course of training. Over a tall after-dinner glass of hot rum the Captain delivered his opinion :

"Yes, I'm correct in saying you've done me some credit, Mr. Weddon," he said. "For one thing, you belong to the kind that learns to ride naturally, though I'd have sworn you weren't when I first put you up. And when I saw it was in you I kept you at the rough part because I saw you were worth breaking in hard. You have what they call the instinct for it."

"I'm very glad to hear you say that," said Weddon.

"*But,*" continued Captain Binns impressively, "don't think you're ever going to catch up with those long years you've wasted. As the parson said at church two Sundays ago, nothing ever really makes up for a misspent youth."

"No," agreed Weddon humbly.

"You've shown pluck, too, sir," went on Captain Binns, "though I don't much believe in telling a man that. But when a man of your age starts learning and takes his first toss, it generally shakes him up body and soul, and as a rule he begins to think of closing the lessons. But you started to mount again at once, even if you were

pretty white, and that's when I had real hopes of you."

Weddon flushed with delight. Was it true, after all, that he was not absolutely deficient in that quality he believed so universal in other men —"that every poor private soldier has to spare of"? He turned away and pretended to look for something he had dropped, as an excuse for hiding his face from the other.

"Very good of you to say that," he said after a moment, "but I must confess to being in the depths of terror many times."

"So I saw, sir; but that doesn't matter so long as you go ahead. Now, you've taken your hurdles in a way that's not too disgusting, and I'm having real hopes that I'll make a moderately good cross-country man out of you."

"I count myself fortunate in meeting you, Captain Binns," said Weddon gratefully.

"Thank you, sir. That's gratifying to hear; especially considering the number of people who've said the opposite. Now, we'll keep ahead with our studies, sir, and you'll ride every day with me as well, rain or shine, until I tell you you're as far as I can get you. You're getting the look of a rider, sir. You look more alert, sir, if you'll allow me to say so. And your eye's ten

times clearer, if you'll allow me to make a personal remark. You stand straight on your hind legs, so to speak."

"All very good news to me," said Weddon. "There's no chance of my getting bow-legged at my age, I suppose?" he added cheerfully.

"No, sir, nor yet at any age. That talk of legs getting bowed from riding comes out of the story-books. Look at my legs. Straight enough, aren't they? And I've ridden steady the whole of my life. In most cases where a man's got bow legs it means he's had rickets when young. Well, sir, I'll be along over at Glynning to-morrow afternoon and try those hunters of yours."

He duly came and passed the four hunters through a critical inspection, having each saddled in turn and trying them in the paddock. He came back from the final trial with sweat upon his brow.

"As I thought, Mr. Weddon. Sir Charles kept these chiefly for his pals and the younger men when they came down. He'd had to give up riding to hounds for the last year or so of his life, and I suppose he didn't like to give up his horses. Result is they've suffered from too much stable-boy exercise. Good enough fun for the boys, of course, but you don't want to start on thrusters like these. There's two of them's got mouths as

tender as a young grindstone; just look at my hands. No good looking for trouble, Mr. Weddon. So the way things are I'd advise you to let me change two of these at least for a couple of suitable horses that I'll find for you. Then you'll have a reasonable chance of happiness from the start."

The exchange was made, to Weddon's complete satisfaction. To say that Captain Binns rather gained than lost by his wise suggestion is not to question his probity. It was a horse deal and therefore above the moral code.

Chapter XII *Phillidia Flouts Me*

IT was a still, raw day in late December. Weddon had ridden home with the Theynells, and they had just dismounted on the drive at Netherfield. His two new hunters had been ridden by Marjory and John, the midshipman now home on leave, and he himself had taken out one of the original thrusters, which he now felt master of. So far had he advanced under the iron discipline of Captain Binns.

"I expect there'll be trouble when I'm married

if my husband doesn't like hunting,'' said Joan, ''because I'm going to hunt all the time.'' She patted her pony's nose and gave him the lump of sugar she had reserved for this moment.

''Thumb out of the way, missy,'' said the weather-beaten old groom, who had been deputed to restrain her ardour and keep her following the hunt by lanes and along the tops of ridges, ''or else he'll think it's another bit of sugar.''

''Ever since you gave me Jorrocks, Mr. Weddon,'' went on Joan, ''I've been thinking how hopeless it would be for me to marry a man who doesn't hunt. I'm going to start always with the first day's cubbing.''

''Got to get up rare early for cubbing, missy,'' said the groom.

''Yes,'' said her father, ''suppose your husband doesn't like being roused up early. Won't it be rather hard on him?''

''If I have one like *that,*'' replied Joan decidedly, ''it'll have to be a case of separate bedrooms. He can stay behind and look after the children.'' This with a sniff of contempt for the worm of a husband that might be.

''Marjory and I will be over in the morning, Mr. Weddon,'' said Mrs. Theynell, who had come out to greet them. ''And Millicent D'Esterre will come too.''

"Many thanks." Weddon hoped that by this time he had learned to conquer a flush at the mention of the name. "I wonder what calamity I should make of a children's party without your help, Mrs. Theynell. Or, for the matter of that, any kind of party."

"Oh, well, it's a woman's job to arrange those things. But it's very annoying that this"—indicating her husband—"is such a helpless person. I thought that at least he would take the part of Father Christmas. I had counted on it, and it makes it so awkward at the last moment."

Mr. Theynell, who had an excellent gift of silence, let it go at that.

"Unless, of course, I can get him to change his mind," she went on.

"It is my ability and not my will that is at fault," said Mr. Theynell, seeing that self-effacement did not serve. "I have no histrionic powers, my dear."

"Just a red flannel gown and a beard! Really, Charles!"

"But I have no sense of humour, and that is an essential."

"Yes, but the least you could do is to *try* and help."

"But I even insist on helping. I shall be head waiter."

"Oh, you know what I mean, Charles. I'd set my mind on your taking the part. It does not need any great sense of humour. All you have to do is to come in with a jolly laugh and—and make a few jokes to set the children laughing and so forth. A little *abandon* is all that you need. And I'll think of some funny things for you to say."

"Perhaps Mr. Weddon would prefer to take the part," said Marjory. She had noted his face as he tried to picture her father in a state of *abandon*.

"I—I'm afraid," said Weddon, stopping his grin in a hurry, "I'd be quite hopeless at it. Can't you suggest somebody else—somebody really suitable?"

"Yes," said Marjory, now lenient. "I've got him. I met Mr. Tolliver yesterday and he said he'd do it like a shot."

"The very man!" exclaimed her father, roused almost to enthusiasm. "Why didn't we think of him before? Tolliver's 'aye a masker bold,' and he has all the brazen self-confidence we lack. Weddon, we are saved."

"I do *not* like a shirker," said Mrs. Theynell with scorn. "I don't mean you of course, Mr. Weddon, I mean this man of mine. And Father

Christmas is such an important part of the affair. We had such a jolly young fellow to take the part out in the East, Mr. Weddon. You remember, Charles—young Snettzer.''

''I remember. Young man who hated work.''

''What has that to do with it, Charles? At least, he never shirked the duty of making himself agreeable. We always have great celebrations of Christmas in the East, Mr. Weddon, so that the children will grow up with a proper appreciation of the season. It is such a time of romance to them. I remember once when John was a little tiny fellow I went to his bedside one Christmas Eve and told him he must go to sleep early because Father Christmas only came when children were asleep. And he looked up at me, Mr. Weddon, with his little face all flushed with eagerness and those great big eyes of his sparkling with intelligence——''

''Oh, I say, mother!'' murmured John distressfully.

''—and he said, 'Mama, does God light the stars so that Father Christmas can find the way to us?' Sweet, wasn't it?''

Weddon agreed that it was, charitably avoiding a look at the unhappy subject of the tale. But John recovered himself quickly: in the first place,

he considered it improbable that he had ever said anything so rank, and in the second place, none of his messmates would ever hear of those great big eyes of his. "Thanks awfully for the mount, sir," he said, and discoursed with fluency on horseflesh.

When Weddon mounted and rode away, Mrs. Theynell followed him with her eyes as he went, splashed to the elbow and sitting erect and at his ease, and then turned to her husband.

"What a change, Charles!" she whispered.

"Yes," he agreed. "I shouldn't have believed it possible. Some hark back on the distaff side, I suppose."

In the meantime John, the sucking admiral, took upon himself to banter Joan on her prowess in the field.

"Horsy little girl I've got for a sister," he said. "But you'll have to get those carroty curls bobbed, to fit your cap."

"John," she pleaded piteously, "don't tease me."

"I wonder what the fellows would say in the mess. Little kid sister of mine wants a hunting man for a husband."

"Oh, please don't, John! When you look at me with those great big eyes of yours——"

"Oh, I was only playing the goat, Joan," he interrupted hastily. "We're great pals, aren't we? Come along, and I'll show you what I've got for you in my kit."

Weddon went home by a circuitous route which led through a stretch of pasture land that bordered on Glynning, now lonely and boggy and half hidden by winter mist. He came in sight of a hedge faced by a sunken fence and bordering a sluggish stream with a foot or two of steep bank, and there he stopped and looked.

"You've tempted me often enough," he said after a moment, "and I've funked you every time. But I won't be happy till I get it, and there's nobody in sight, so come along, Bess! Think you're carrying one of the old squires for once."

He put the mare into a gallop and headed for the hedge. It was a nasty jump for the oldest hand, and any bungling meant a more or less degree of disaster. But the mare lifted beneath him and cleared all with a magnificent leap, and Weddon felt that the wind that rushed by him as he cantered away on the other side was as the breath of freedom. He had passed the test he had set himself and won.

"Splendid, old lady!" he said, patting the

mare's neck as he went. "We'll take it for an omen."

Miss D'Esterre, passing along a lane nearby, had stopped and stared through a gap in the hedge that bordered it.

"Now I wonder," she said as she went on, "if that extraordinary person is just *trying* to break his neck? I shall never quite make him out."

Weddon went that afternoon to the Rectory. He stopped and waited at the gate, for he saw Miss D'Esterre coming along the road. This gave him an instant to control the quick beating of his heart that always assailed him when he met her; and which was not lessened to-day by the sight of her in a trim walking dress, and with her bright eyes and pink cheeks framed in a deep brown fur.

"I am lucky in finding you," he said as he held the gate open.

"If you want tea as badly as I do, you are. I have been on an errand of mercy, and it has been its own reward because I have an appetite."

"Have you been to Mullins Cottages?" (Mullins Cottages was a region famed for cottagers to whom charity applied.)

"No, I have been to take a treatise on winter

fashions to Mrs. Gables. Her copy didn't turn up, so I took her mine."

She took off her gloves and stood holding her slim white hands to the comfortable blaze of the drawing-room fire. The maid who brought in the tea explained that the Rector had left word that he would not be back till six. Weddon prayed inwardly that no one else would call.

"I have done everything you told me to," he said, on the subject of the children's party. "I have unpacked the things and the tree is all ready in a tub. It is a big tree, by the way, and step ladders will be required."

"You haven't started to hang them on yet, I suppose?"

"As if I would dare to without your permission. No, I am waiting for instructions. There is a doll for you."

"Dressed?"

"Yes; but not overdressed. It is an Ethiopian doll."

"I have dreamed for years of getting one, and now I shall. Don't forget that you have to romp with the children."

"I will do anything you tell me to. And if my romping has no touch of grace or lightness, you will pardon me, of course."

"I shall do nothing of the kind; I insist upon lightness. The little ones expect it too. And, speaking about little things, Mr. Weddon, do you know a great deal about microscopes?"

"Not a great deal. I know that they are supposed to magnify to certain diameters. I think that is all. Are you interested in them?"

"I wouldn't go as far as that. But dad is. You see, he was so disappointed about missing the prize for cactus at the autumn show that he has decided to give up competing. It is hard on him, because he really did have some very fine specimens."

"Yes," agreed Weddon, "some of them were beautiful. What I especially liked about them was that they never hurt your hands."

"Yes." She turned over her hands and looked at them. "They escaped serious injury. But if you have any books on microscopes at Glynning, I think dad will be over to see about them early to-morrow."

"I'm inclined to think," he said after consideration, "that he will draw nothing in that covert. I'm sorry, but I can't call to mind any books on that subject."

"Nothing on pond life, for instance?"

"Pond life? No, there are some works that

deal partially on the art of draining ponds, and I have been studying those myself. But they neglect the inhabitants of the ponds in a disgraceful way."

"Your library is defective. By the way, dad wishes to know whether he should buy a cheap microscope to start with or whether he should strike out boldly and buy one of those double-barrelled expensive ones with a chest full of expensive trimmings. Which would you advise?"

"I think I should advise the purchase of a cheap one to start with. You see, he can find out what defects to avoid when he is ready to buy the expensive one."

"That's just what I said to him. So perhaps you would be kind enough to say the same when he asks you. He has a great respect for your opinion."

"I am highly complimented. Yes, I shall certainly advise him as you say. And I will send off to-night for a list of books on the subject."

"That is very good of you," she said gravely. "Dad does take very keen interest in things."

There was silence for a moment or two before she spoke again.

"If you want to smoke, Mr. Weddon, please do. It will give me an excuse for a cigarette too."

He lit one for her and she sat leaning back, looking contentedly into the flames.

"Miss D'Esterre," said Weddon after another pause, nervously dropping his cigarette into the fender, "there is another matter on which I—er—would like to speak to you." He felt his throat dry and hard for the moment.

"I think I know what it is," she replied negligently, reaching out and flicking off an end of ash. "It's that business of the small boys' class, isn't it?"

"Er—yes." Miserable coward he felt himself to be—and yet he had a tinge of relief. "You see I—I'd like to give them some—some inducement to apply themselves—to—er——"

"Of course, Mr. Weddon. But I am an old wise hand with small boys and their ways at Sunday-school and I think you'd better not overdo the inducement. Dad and I will arrange it in a judicious way."

"Oh, of course. It was merely I was thinking—however, I mustn't interfere." He got up to go, feeling the very slightest interest in the infants' class. "You are both very good to me.

And so I can expect you to-morrow to superintend arrangements."

"You can expect me to offer expert advice; but Mrs. Theynell will be in command. Good-afternoon."

When he had gone she continued to sit by the fire in meditation.

"Well, he's easily choked off at any rate," she said. "And that can be considered a comfort for both of us."

The announcement of Mr. Tolliver a few minutes later put an end to her musings. Mr. Tolliver had timed his arrival to coincide with Weddon's departure, for he too wished to see her alone. He had seen from a distance Weddon leaving the front door and had given him a bit of time to clear the course.

"Tea?" said Miss D'Esterre.

"No, thanks awfully. Terrible day. Misty and sloppy."

"*Isn't* it a miserable day?"

"Sloppy and misty. Cold too. I met the padre—I mean I met your father over by Slee's Hill, and he said he wouldn't be home until rather late. I walked over. Can I sit down?"

"I wish you would." He had been towering above her, rather to her annoyance.

Mr. Tolliver sat down and jerked out a silk handkerchief from his cuff. Then he carefully replaced it. "I thought I'd look in on the off chance of finding you at liberty, Miss D'Esterre."

"And here you find me, unchained," she said.

"Yes. The fact is—the fact is. Look here, may I call you Millicent?"

"Well, yes," she replied after a moment of surprised consideration. "If you feel you must call me Millicent, please do."

"Thanks," he said gratefully. "Then, Millicent, I—er—love you. I want you to say that you will be, in fact, mine."

"I am sorry, Mr. Tolliver——" she began.

"Call me Bert," he interrupted, taking her two hands in his.

"I shall certainly not," she replied, removing her two hands from his. "Please don't go on, Mr. Tolliver, because——"

"But I must, Millicent. I've come especially to ask you to marry me. I love you—and all that, and I've come to ask you to marry me. Oh, say you don't hate me!"

"Of course I don't hate you. I like you very much. But I don't——"

"Then if you like me that's pretty near the next thing to——"

"*Will* you let me finish, Mr. Tolliver?"

"Do say Bert," he urged. "All fellows call me Bert."

She gave a little angry laugh. "There! you simply won't let me say what I must tell you."

"Oh, I will. But please let me speak first. I've always admired you as the prettiest and smartest girl I've met. You ride decently and you play a rattling good game of tennis—and all that, and—well, I just love you. I can't help it, you see. I should like to put it all in the proper way, but I'm not too deuced clever in some things, but still I'm not a downright ass, you know, and I think we'd get on toppingly. You see I'd be able to keep you decently of course—though of course I'm not bringing money matters in because it isn't done—but I *could* look after you and give you a topping time, and I *would,* Millicent. And then of course I shall have the title when the Governor goes—not that I want him to go of course, or that it's any inducement to you—but still it's always something, isn't it? I'm afraid I'm not putting it quite so well as I meant to, but you get on to what I mean, don't you, Millicent?"

"Now, Mr. Tolliver, you'll let me speak. I tried to stop you but you wouldn't let me. I like

you very much and I shall always like you, but I can't marry you."

"Oh, I say, Millicent! Do you really mean it?"

"I'm sorry to have to say I do."

"I suppose," he said gloomily, "some other fellow's got ahead of me."

"You have no right to say that. But I'll give you my word there is no other fellow in the case."

"Then it's just that you don't want *me,*" he exclaimed in an access of bitter discovery.

"Yes," she answered sweetly, "it is just that. But I will be like a sister to you." In spite of her many perfections Miss D'Esterre was ready with the claw beneath the velvet.

"A sister!" he exclaimed with anguish. "I've got five already."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Tolliver," she said, repenting her felinity, "I mean I'm sorry I can't say what you want. I take it as a great compliment that you have asked me to marry you, but I can't really. You must forget all about this and we'll be friends always."

"Friends! Oh, God!" Mr. Tolliver's fresh-coloured face and fine young figure formed an image of despair. "And to think," he went on, "that on Wednesday night I must hide all this and pretend I'm a jolly Father Christmas to

amuse those pestiferous kids! You'll hear me laugh, Millicent, and see me kick up, but I shall not be laughing inwardly. And I shall be wanting to kick myself."

"You are a splendid actor," she said soothingly.

"No, not splendid. I'm not bad. But that won't alter the fact that I shall be utterly miserable. I think I'll go now, Millicent; I have no right here. There is no chance of your changing your mind, I suppose?"

"Not the least, Mr. Tolliver, really. But I shall always like you."

"Call me Bert," he said despairingly. "For the last time."

"Very well. Good-bye, Bert." She gave him her hand and he held on to it.

"Then you'll let me kiss you once," he said with a slight drawing action towards him. He believed in small mercies being better than none.

"Certainly not." She disengaged her hand and prepared to retreat.

"No, I suppose not. But you'll let me kiss your hand. Hang it all, Millicent," he exclaimed indignantly, "that isn't much!"

She conceded him a hand and he kissed it rather at his leisure.

"Ah, Millicent!" he began between kisses,

"if you only knew—— Oh, very well. Sorry. Good-bye, dearest."

He was gone and she sat down again by the fire and thought it over. "Oh, damn!" she exclaimed fretfully after thinking it over. "Why was I born so beautiful?"

Chapter XIII *In the Spring*

THE winter passed and springtime came. But it could not be said that Weddon's fancy turned to thoughts of love, for it had never veered from the subject since that evening he first saw her coming across the Rectory lawn. The dread of what her answer might be kept his lips sealed. At least he was sure—for a time—of her friendly greeting when they met and her occasional sweet companionship; if he spoke that might be lost for ever.

But if he did not, it would be certainly lost. How long would it be before he dare risk it? The greater part of a year had gone by since they first met, and fate might cast him into the outer darkness at any time: she had admirers in plenty, men who had youth and daring and all

that that means in the race. But some instinct told him that the propitious time—if there ever would be one—was not yet.

She had stepped into his life and changed it for ever. If he had not met her he would never have thrown off the numbing effects of poverty and loneliness and uncongenial work that had left him dull and a shirker of effort, avoiding and misunderstanding the responsibilities his new life had brought him. But the inspiration he derived from her, though she gave it unknowingly, had made him conquer, and he had taken his place in the world at last. He was accepted by all around as a worthy successor to the race of Carpions. Whatever quality of shyness or reserve there was in his manner or whatever lack of knowledge he showed with regard to the things of his new world did not detract from their liking: it was put down to earlier studious habits. His reputation of a highbrow had followed him here, and he was credited by his neighbours—not themselves on the whole very deeply read—with a fund of learning greatly in excess of actualities.

With the exception of an occasional stay of a few days in London he had spent all the time at Glynning. For one reason he found that the estate kept him sufficiently employed, and for

another (and greater) reason his Gloriana was also nearly all the time in the neighbourhood. He had often been tempted to visit the Continent and at least see some few places, known to the most modest class of tourist; but to go meant to be away from where she was—a penalty he was not prepared to endure.

He had written to his old friend Sampole telling him of the wondrous change in his fortunes, and in due time they met in town and celebrated with a dinner. Sampole, who had the high quality of faithfulness and who had regretted the decay of their ancient friendship, forgave him his silence of two years and rejoiced at the news. He referred to his old belief, first expressed at the school for sons of gentlemen, that Weddon was destined for high places. He also had advanced since they last met. He was in command of a big ship and had no lack of belief in his own importance. He had met passengers of eminence on terms of equality, and he wore a neat beard of the navy fashion and gave attention to his dress. It would have been difficult to see in him the development of the hard youth in dungaree trousers, the stower of skysails; the ancient scar from a belaying pin received during a turn up with one Olsen, a Swede, was hidden by his beard.

He promised to come down and stay a week-end at Glynning as soon as he could manage it and to bring some of the family. He produced photographs and explained that Jack, the elder boy, had just got a scholarship at the City and Guilds and he expected great things of him. It was arranged that both boys should come for a week or so during the summer holidays and get the foundations of a seat on horseback. The meeting eased Weddon's mind greatly, for his conscience smote him for his neglect of the one man who had stuck to him in the past.

With regard to others he had known, he had so little of popularity with his fellow-clerks at the Home Counties and World that he dropped out of their recollection without disquiet on either side. But he had been very glad one day to find Miss Briggs walking down Bond Street with her fiancé, for to her he owed a debt of gratitude. They greeted him with enthusiasm, and he learned that they were to be married next month, Mr. Jevons having received satisfactory promotion.

They readily agreed to his suggestion of tea at a place with a band. He was told that the papers had behaved very stupidly about him; there was only one measly bit headed "A Bank Clerk's Romance," and even then they had put

in the picture of somebody else, a fat man. Weddon was mightily glad to hear this, though he expressed some indignation at the neglect. But he explained that as he had never been photographed since he was a baby it would have been difficult for the paper to supply a true portrait of him, and at any rate they had done their best.

He then said that the most sensible way to select a wedding present was to have the personal opinion of the bride on the subject, and Miss Briggs humouring this quaint idea, though not without confusion, they went forth into Bond Street and investigated. She finally chose an inkstand, *art nouveau,* but Weddon said she must be more elastic in her choice. Noting that she had been keenly, though impersonally, interested in an inlaid table which became at will a writing-desk gorgeously replete with more appliances and means than the most ardent correspondent could use, he suggested that instead. She objected strongly—it was far too expensive, it was absolutely beautiful, it was wickedly expensive, Mr. Weddon don't be silly—but he settled the matter by writing his congratulations on a card and directing that it be forwarded with the table to the proper address. The look on Miss Briggs' pretty face as she turned for a final look at her

present convinced him that there was, all things considered, a substantial amount of happiness in the world.

With the passing of spring an event occurred which forced upon him an opportunity for some slight survey of foreign parts—Miss D'Esterre went away for a couple of months. She was to be in London for a week or two and was then to stay with some aunts in Devonshire. Glynning and its neighbourhood lost its glamour for the time, so he, too, went away.

The Rector having become keenly interested in cameos—he had decided to give up the study of protozoa and other small deer and offer a microscope and accessories for sale at a sacrifice—Weddon promised to select one or two specimens in Italy. This naturally resulted in correspondence, and he learned incidentally that Millicent was expected home by about the middle of July. Shortly after he received the letter (one minute, to be exact) he decided that it was no good overdoing Italy and that perhaps the thirteenth would be a good day on which to start back. He hoped that such people as noticed it would consider the conjunction of dates as one of those coincidences.

HE arrived home on a perfect day of sun and light, fleecy clouds, and was greeted with respectful welcome by the butler, who gave him some news of local happenings. The flower show had been a great success; Macdough (the head gardener) was very proud of the success of the Glynning pelargoniums. The Rector had presided and given an address. Weddon asked, Was the Rector quite well? The Rector, the butler assured him, was quite well. Was—er—everybody quite well? The butler said that, so far as he knew, everybody about seemed quite well.

Had she returned or not? that was the question. Weddon decided that an afternoon walk to the Rectory would not be out of place; he had four cameos to deliver, and he might just as well deliver them now as later. In any case, he would.

On the sun-spotted path of the wood an Aberdeen terrier appeared and barked once at sight of him; then he wagged what tail he had and allowed Weddon to pat him, with the good manners of a dog that suffers the greeting of one who, though

an acquaintance, is not his soul's proprietor. And at a turn of the path Weddon saw Millicent.

He was outwardly at his ease by the time he reached her. She was frankly glad to see him, and she seemed more adorable that afternoon than ever before—though, of course, that was impossible—and as cool and crisp and dainty as a bunch of freshly cut sweet peas.

"I didn't know you were coming back so soon," she said. "Dad told me that you were in Italy."

"Yes, I had to come back suddenly. You have been away, too, for some time, haven't you?"

Her grey eyes looked directly into his for a brief instant. "Oh yes," she said, "I've been away. I was in London for a week, and I saw three theatres, and then I was taken down to a nice quiet part of Devonshire. It was a regular bus-driver's holiday, because my uncle is a parson. We are an awfully churchy family."

"Did you have a good time in Devonshire?"

"Jolly. Lights out at ten-thirty. Still, I got a lot of tennis and that sort of thing. Oh yes, it wasn't too bad, considering. But tell me where you have been."

"I have been wandering. Like Ulysses, I have

seen men and cities. Nobody can reproach me as an untravelled man now."

"How many cities?"

"Quite a number. In the first place, I saw Paris. I got a guide to take me round to all the historical places, so that I wouldn't waste any time."

"Did he take you to the top of the Eiffel Tower?"

"He did. Please don't scorn me. I wanted to see as much as I could of Paris, and you can see such a lot for the price."

"I'm not scorning you. I went to the top myself, and I ate two buns at the top too. You see, I was only sixteen then, which is a hungry age. Where else did you go?"

"Then I went to Carcassonne, right down in the south."

"Is that a racecourse?"

"No, it's a very perfect medieval fortress which I have always longed to see. Then I went to Italy, and I saw other places I've longed to see. I found a very good guide there who also prevented me from wasting time. It was a personally conducted tour of one, and I enjoyed every minute of it. Please pardon my enthusiasm. You see, it's all quite a new experience for me."

"There would have been no good in going if you hadn't enjoyed it, would there? I wish I could see Italy. The farthest I've ever been was to Nice, and there I lost ten francs at the *petits chevaux*. It was horrible. One moment I had more than thirty francs, and the next I was minus ten. I have never really gambled since. Did you do any gambling, Mr. Weddon?"

"Yes. In spite of the warning of my cicerone, I went out alone one day and bought a Tintoretto. A small one, but the colouring was very vivid."

"Did you get a bargain?"

"No, I can't honestly say that I did. My friend the cicerone was too disgusted to value it in Italian money. He said it was worth what you call tuppence."

"And was it?"

"I am inclined to think that an overstatement. At any rate, we left it in my room at the hotel, behind the wardrobe. He said: 'It is better thus.'"

"I love that man," said Miss D'Esterre enthusiastically. "I think it would be quite nice if you told dad about him. You see, he was thinking about going to Venice for his holiday because he is interested in cameos, and it would be useful to have somebody to see that he doesn't get cheated. But he may not go there after all,

because he is rather keen on bees now. It is a pity, because I wanted to go with him."

"Oh, you're not going away, I hope," said Weddon in dismay.

"That's very good of you, I'm sure! Why shouldn't I have some travel too? No, I'm afraid he won't take me now, and I feel a very ill-used young woman."

"But what I meant was—I mean, I've got four cameos for your father here with me. I was just on my way to take them to him."

"Were they expensive?" she asked anxiously.

"No, not at all," he replied in a hurry. "These were a *real* bargain."

"Let's look at them." She took a seat on a fallen tree by the path, and Weddon sat beside her and opened the packet.

"They are lovely, I think," she said. "Not expensive, you say?"

"I've got the bill here." He produced a forged document. "You see, you can't call them expensive."

"No," she replied, glancing at the bill. "There seems to be what they call a slump in cameos. But it's very kind of you to get them, and dad will be delighted. He is greatly interested in bees now, though, and he has decided to

have an apiary. That does not mean a monkey-house, Mr. Weddon, but a place where you keep bees. In fact, he has already got a little hive of special bees, and when I went into the garden yesterday, not knowing they were there, I got stung twice. That was my welcome home."

"Where did they sting you?" he demanded.

"Here." She held up her slim hand for his inspection and indicated a tiny spot on the back and another on the tip of a finger. "You have to look close to see the scars, but they are really wounds of bees."

He did look close. And on the next instant he found that he had taken her hand and kissed it.

Then there was silence for another half second.

Then her hand slipped from his, and she got up and stepped back a step.

"Well?" she said inquiringly. She was not an offended maiden, but a well-bred modern girl (but not too modern) handling a quaint situation. There was a touch of amusement in her voice.

"Now I must tell you that I love you." He stood beside her with his face rather white, but, strange to say, he felt calm enough. He was riding for the fence at last, and it would be clear or smash very soon. "I've loved you from the moment I first saw you in your garden."

There was something about him that changed her inclination to be amused at his strange behaviour, and she looked straight and seriously at him.

"Wouldn't it be better for you to stop now, Mr. Weddon?"

"No. Thank God I've said it at last. You know now that I've always loved you and always shall. You have been the most beautiful thing in the world to me since I first saw you. When I went away that night I stayed out in the moonlight to think about you. It did not seem a long time, but the day came and I was still thinking of you. Time stopped for me that night."

She moved another step away. "I've warned you not to go on, Mr. Weddon," she said quietly.

"Yes, but unless you tell me that I must go and never speak to you again, I shall go on telling you that you are beautiful and that I love you. Am I to go?"

This seemed to be putting her at a disadvantage. With the small sword the adversary who knows something of the art can be handled; the one who knows nothing of it is dangerous. But she did not wish to slay outright—and she hesitated.

"No, I'll not go." He stepped quickly to her. "Tell me you'll be my wife, Millicent. I've lost the power of saying what I feel. I can only ask you to promise."

She walked on slowly, and he walked beside her. They came to a little gate, beyond which the wood thinned so that the hedge of the lane could be seen.

"I can't promise that, Mr. Weddon," she said at length.

"And I can't take that answer, Millicent."

"No?" She smiled a little, but it was a very troubled smile. The matter seemed to have got out of hand in an extraordinary way. She passed gently by him through the gate, and turned to look at him and soften her refusal. And he took one step to her and caught her in his arms, and he found his lips against hers. By some miracle all fear of her had gone.

She gave a little gasp, and for an instant she stayed without movement. Then she sprang from him and patted her hair, which had suffered some slight derangement of a curl. Together they walked slowly on.

"You've promised, Millicent," he said after a few steps.

"I didn't say a word," she replied.

"But that doesn't matter. You belong to me. You, the most beautiful of all!"

There was no answer, but that did not trouble him. He was conscious only of a stunned delight that made speech an interruption. She was his at last, and she was walking quietly beside him; what more could he want? He was almost grateful for the appearance of some people in the lane, who gave them "Good-evening" as they passed by, for it gave him time to collect his thoughts, which were rioting. But by the side gate of the Rectory the lane was deserted, and Millicent went in and closed the gate after her. Then she looked at him at last.

"Can't I come in too?" he asked.

"No."

"Then will you please give these to your father?" he said, giving her the packet of camoes.

"Yes. Thank you for bringing them. And good-night, Mr. Weddon."

"Good-night, Millicent." He lifted her hand to his lips, and she made no particular resistance.

She turned and went along the shaded path. Weddon put one hand on the gate and vaulted over.

"Oh, didn't I say you were not to come in?" she demanded.

"Yes, but tell me if you love me a little. You must say it."

She was looking at him in astonishment at his daring, for his arm was around her again.

"Just a very little bit, perhaps," she conceded gravely after a moment. She held her finger and thumb apart to indicate a minimum quantity. "Now you *must* go. Do you hear?"

"I'll go as soon as I have seen you to the end of the path," he said masterfully.

"This serves me right for trespassing on your grounds."

"Mine! They're yours, Millicent."

"And you used to be so tractable," she commented, ignoring his last statement. "Oh, there's dad! Now run!"

She slipped away down a side path and went into the house and up to her room. She had a good look at herself in the glass and then spoke as if to some person who had failed her in her need.

"Well, you've done it this time, haven't you? Now, what on earth made you give in like that?"

ON the following morning Weddon, who had got to sleep somewhere in the small hours, decided that half-past ten could not be considered an unreasonably early hour at which to pay a visit to the Rector and ask him if the cameos were such as he desired. He saw in imagination a bright picture of the Rector being too busy to give him much of his time. His frame of mind as he walked along was in direct opposition to that school of philosophy which maintains that, though we can be completely miserable, we can never be completely happy.

The Rector was not only at home, but had plenty of time to spare. He met Weddon with expressions of welcome and effusive thanks for the beautiful specimens he had secured for him—and at such a wonderfully cheap price too ! When he was in Venice on his honeymoon—ah ! many years ago now—the price was much higher ; he had bought one then, though he had not at the time such keen interest in them. Weddon explained that he had managed to snap up a bargain.

It soon appeared that Mr. D'Esterre's keen

interest was in a transition stage between cameos and bees, the bees assuming definite shape and the cameos fading. He suggested to Weddon that he should come and look at a little hive he had just behind the lawn, and Weddon rose to go with him, though not with great enthusiasm.

"I have been suggesting to my daughter some slight alteration in our flower arrangements," said the Rector, "with a view to taking up bees seriously. I believe she is out there now."

"I should love to see it," said Weddon heartily.

As they went across the lawn Millicent came in sight down a path, carrying a bunch of lilies she had just cut. There was a momentary flush on her fair face as she drew near, but she greeted Weddon with her usual cool friendliness, in which only an expert could have detected a slight extra touch of demureness.

"I think there are more than enough flowers for those greedy little animals," she said to her father. "And there isn't room for more anywhere."

"Oh, but they need variety, Milly. We must find room for some more phloxes. I have a theory that the best honey is produced by a judicious blending of flowers. The greater variety of food there is for children, the healthier they

are. Why should it not be the same with bees?''

''Well, they're awful little pigs if they want more than they have now,'' she replied, looking about at the riot of colour.

''Have you finished your packing?'' asked her father, when he had enlarged further on his views.

''Yes, dad, all but one or two things.''

''Packing?'' thought Weddon. What packing and why? Mr. D'Esterre explained.

''My daughter has to go to London for a day or two, Mr. Weddon. My sister, Lady Campage, is going suddenly to India with her husband, and she telegraphed this morning that Millicent must come at once and stay with her while she is in town, as it will be the last chance of seeing her for some time and she is unable to come down here.''

''Oh!'' Try as he would Weddon could not control a tinge of dismay in his voice. ''Er—I see. Are you going to-day, Miss D'Esterre?''

''This afternoon. By the five-thirty. Marjory Theynell is coming with me so that we can do some shopping together.''

''Now, this is the variety of bee that has been recommended to me, Mr. Weddon,'' said the Rector, looking with a proud smile at a two-

storied structure from which issued a gentle hum. "*Brownsel's Choice*. No, I should not go too close ; they are not yet quite at home to strangers. Ha, ha ! This is very ingenious. The top takes off, you see, so that the honey—when there is any—can be removed without risk. Thus."

"Look out, dad !" cried Millicent.

"There is no danger. Dear, dear !" he went on, rubbing the palm of his hand, "I had no idea that the sting was so sharp. Quite acute for the moment."

"I'll get the ammonia," said Millicent, placing her lilies in Weddon's arms and turning to go.

"No, don't, dear ; I know where it is." He walked in quickly, still rubbing his hand.

"Vicious little devils," remarked Millicent, as she watched her father.

"This is terrible," said Weddon.

"Oh, that is exaggerating. The sting goes off in a moment."

"This sting won't. *Must* you go, Millicent ?"

"I must," she said, taking the lilies from him and holding them up to her face. "But I'll be back soon."

"But it's awfully hard on me," he said discontentedly.

"Poor thing ! But I shall not be away long."

"I'm coming to town too."

"No, decidedly you mustn't. I shall be all the time with my aunt—or else shopping with Marjory. Besides, I'll be back soon."

"Can I speak to your father, then?"

"No. No. No. I'm a bit shy. When I come back you can. In a few days."

"A few eternities. I have so much to tell you—though it's all the same thing over and over again. Say something to comfort me, Millicent."

"Then I'll say the same thing over and over again: I'll be back soon."

"Say you're sorry you've got to go."

"I am rather."

"How lovely you are! I feel like a beggar-man in unlawful possession of a priceless string of pearls."

"I like that word 'possession.' It sounds so nice and confident."

"But you—well, it's almost incredible to me, but you really do love me a little bit?"

"Just a little," she said, holding out the lilies at arm's length for his inspection. "Aren't these beautiful?"

"Yes, they look better closer to you, though. When did you begin to?"

"I don't know. You mustn't ask too many questions."

"Let us go and see how the pears are ripening," he suggested brilliantly.

"Will you promise to behave?" She turned and went with him towards the shady path.

"I will promise anything in reason. Oh, *look* at this!"

"This" was a group of his dear friends the Theynells. Mr. and Mrs. Theynell and Miss Joan Theynell, all coming to meet him with varying expressions of satisfaction at his return.

"It's jolly to have you back, Mr. Weddon," said Joan in a gush of welcome. "Millicent's been away, too. She went to Devonshire. You went away just after she went and now you've come back just after she came back. Isn't that funny, papa?"

"I should not describe it as funny, Joan," said her father. "It is what is called a coincidence."

"Marjory's going to town, too," said Mrs. Theynell. "She'll stay with a cousin of mine who lives just round the corner by Branter's Hotel, where Lady Campage is staying. Her husband is going to India on that commission to find out the mind of the native. Sir Gabriel is very clever at that sort of thing."

"He need be," observed Mr. Theynell. "It sounds like a job of work."

"So it fits in very nicely," went on Mrs. Theynell, "and they can do their shopping together. It's so much nicer to do it in company—unless you have to do it with a man like this husband of mine. He is a very dispiriting man on those occasions, Mr. Weddon. The last time we were in town together he got so fidgety and disagreeable while I was buying a hat."

"Pops said it took him thirty seconds to buy a hat if he didn't have to wait for change," said Joan, who had a retentive memory for details of interest. "And he said the young women kept turning their noses up at him as if he was a worm."

"Joan! you mustn't repeat those things! Oh, here is Mr. D'Esterre. Is the sting better?" she asked him.

"Yes, it is quite alleviated," replied the Rector cheerfully. "The little fellows will get to know me in time. Ha, ha!"

"Some people bees won't sting," said Joan. "There's an old man I know, Mr. Weddon, who picks them up and they never sting him. He is a bee master. You are not a bee mistress, Millicent, are you? They stung you, didn't they?"

"They did, Joan. Yes, I got into fine trouble over those bees."

The appearance of Marjory took away from Weddon any further chance of a talk with his beloved, for she had come to discuss with Millicent the holding capacity of a hatbox which they were to share. And this leading to concomitant matters the conversation became animated, though unintelligible to males. He talked to Theynell, still hoping; but a movement being made towards the house he could find no excuse for staying, so he took his leave. Millicent dropped one of her lilies, and he stooped to pick it up, thus getting a moment to speak to her.

"I'm coming to the train to see you off," he said.

"I thought you would. But accidentally, please."

"A man I know *may* come up by the five-thirty. No, Mrs. Theynell, I don't think there is any chance of rain."

He got through the day somehow until it was time to go to the station, where he walked up and down and waited for the party. He had hopes that the train would be late; the line had a comforting reputation that way.

The small Rectory car arrived. Mrs. Theynell

had come to see the girls off, together with Joan, who was happily perched on a suitcase or two on the seat by the driver. Weddon would have liked his presence to be accepted as a very ordinary matter, but Joan would have it otherwise.

"There's Mr. Weddon! there's Mr. Weddon! there's Mr. Weddon!" she cried joyously.

"Joan!" said her mother, "you *must* not be so excitable."

"There's just a chance that a man I know is coming by the up train," he explained in an easy way, "so I came to see. Casual sort of man—never thinks of giving definite notice."

"Unbusinesslike," suggested Marjory.

"Oh, frightfully. So as I'm here I can get the tickets for you and so forth."

"Oh, that is so kind of you," said Mrs. Theynell.

The tickets and luggage and other matters having been attended to, Weddon at last found himself beside Millicent; the others being for the moment intent on the bookstall.

"In the first place," he said, "before that beastly train comes to take you away, give me something of yours."

She opened a little bag and produced a penny.

"No, you must do better than that."

"There is a bullying touch about you that is new and disquieting. Will this do?" She showed him a tiny folded handkerchief.

"Yes," he said, taking it and placing it in his breast pocket. "As there are two fat persons approaching I'll not kiss it just now."

"You *dare!*"

"I will write to you this evening."

"No, don't, because I may be back in two days. It depends on when my aunt leaves."

"Oh, that is better; with an effort I can bear two days. And when you come back I'll ask your father."

"Suppose he refuses his consent?"

"Then I'll carry you off. You are the most beautiful thing on earth."

"Even my own opinion of myself doesn't quite run to that. Oh, here's the train. *What* did you say, Mr. Weddon?"

"I merely expressed my opinion of offensive punctuality. And my name is Arthur."

"I'll try and remember it. Now, be very circumspect when you say good-bye, because I don't want Marjory to—to guess anything."

"I will. Why is it that everything you say and do is so utterly adorable?"

She suggested no explanation of the marvel,

but only laughed, for the others were now beside her. He told the guard to see about porters for them at the other end and to do all that was needful. The guard, closing his hand on what even he considered an extravagant tip, assured him that the ladies would be perfectly looked after.

"Thanks awfully, Mr. Weddon," said Marjory, as she shook his hand just as the train began to move. "Now you can look for him in peace."

"Look for——?"

"The man you expected to meet."

"Er—oh yes, of course. I'll look for him now. Good-bye."

He was in a mood for solitude and action. Much as he wanted to talk to Joan and hear all the matters of special interest of which she was full, he wanted more to be alone with his thoughts. So he took his leave of Mrs. Theynell, after explaining that the man hadn't turned up after all, and promised to come to see Joan in the morning. Then he walked home briskly. The steep hill that led up towards Glynning suited his mood better than the level.

He was still bewildered with the success of his good fortune. But great as was the wonder that dainty, fastidious Millicent should be his promised

wife, he was not haunted by the sense of unreality that afflicted him for so long after he had come into possession of Glynning—though that wonder seemed little in comparison with this new one. Supposing that what he had dreaded had come upon him and she had been lost to him, what would be the worth of its beauty to him then, racked with the longing that would never die? But that dread was past and she was his; he had nothing more to ask of Fortune. He slowed down in his walk and took out the handkerchief she had given him for his very own and, looking round to make sure that he was alone, unfolded it carefully. It was a thing to marvel at, as a possession above price. It actually had her initials in the corner—and there was a faint scent of lavender about it. He kissed it—after a second glance round—and replaced it reverently in his pocket. Then he took the rest of the hill with a joyous step. Two days would soon pass, he thought. Then perhaps the next day, by the afternoon, at latest. However, the Rector would let him know the exact time. He would see to it that he did.

He went out of his direct way home in order to approach the house by the old west gate, as he had done a year ago, and when he had no more

thought of his inheriting it than he had of its disappearing into the summer clouds like the work of enchantment it seemed. He wanted to come towards it down the slope from the hoary beeches and picture Millicent in the distance walking by the wide flower-beds ; as she soon would be, the mistress of all there and of himself.

As he drew near he saw a man reclining on the turf, near the footpath and perhaps almost in the same spot where he had lain that afternoon a year ago. And he also was surveying the house at his leisure, as he had done.

The man turned his head lazily as Weddon came up. He appeared to be tall and lean, and carelessly dressed in a shabby tweed suit and a slouch hat. His face was sunburned and lined, and he had a light brown beard shot with grey. He nodded carelessly, apparently not at all troubled by the fact that he was a trespasser.

"Good-afternoon," said Weddon. The park was open to all to use at will so long as moderate care was taken to leave no tarnish to its beauty ; and it would have taken more than a charabanc full of picknickers to cause him any annoyance that day even if they had strewn the turf with sheets of our pictorial press. Still, the man's manner was rather on the indifferent side, so he

halted to see if there was any explanation of his presence.

"Afternoon," returned the man. "Doesn't look bad, does it?"

"Not at all bad."

"Your name's Weddon, I suppose?" said the man after a pause. He got up in a leisurely way and stood leaning back on a tough ash walking-stick. His features must have been good once, though now they were coarsened as if with hard weather or hard living or perhaps both. His eyes were blue and slightly bloodshot. A whitened scar ran across the cheek from the corner of one eye, perhaps accounting for a slight droop to the lid. There was an indefinable quality of hardihood in his bearing; he looked lean and ready and reckless, like a fighting hound. So might have looked a buccaneer or a captain of mercenaries, or a Gascony cadet who had managed to dodge the death and attain to fifty years.

"That is my name," replied Weddon, now finding some amusement in the encounter.

"Ah, I thought so. Been here about a year, haven't you?"

"About a year. Any other questions you'd like to ask?"

"Yes." The man looked about him again.

"Who cut down the big elms by the stables? Did you?"

"No, that must have been done before my time." Decidedly the man was interesting. "So you know the place?"

"Oh yes, I know it."

"And you seem to have a great interest in it."

"Ah, I do." He brought out a paper packet of cigarettes of a foreign appearance. "Don't smoke these coffin tacks, I suppose?"

"No, thank you," said Weddon.

"Thought you wouldn't." He lit one at his ease. "Yes, I take a great interest in the place. You see I've got reason for it."

"Have you?" said Weddon, preparing to go, for he had had enough of the man by now.

"Yes. One of the reasons is it's mine."

Weddon laughed cheerfully and stopped. "Oh, so that's the reason. Well, as you know my name, perhaps you'll tell me yours."

"Carpion's my name. Sir Herbert Carpion if you like that better. Eighth baronet if that'll make it clearer. Say, let's get up to the house. I want a drink."

Weddon felt that the man had ceased to be amusing. A mentally deranged stranger wander-

ing about might prove to be a nuisance, and he considered it time to get rid of him. He saw the head keeper at a distance, and was on the point of signalling to come up and escort the intruder off the grounds when he noticed another figure walking quickly along the wide path that led through the clipped yews before the house. A second glance and he recognized the white beard and formal dress of Mr. Powle.

"There's old Powle coming out to look for us," said the stranger. "He's put on years all right enough."

Weddon strode off and soon met the lawyer at the end of the path.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Powle," he said. "By the way, there's an extraordinary lunatic over there who seems inclined to make himself troublesome. I was just going to call Garnet to have him removed, but he seems to know you. Do you know what he's doing here?"

"Yes. Yes, in a way," replied the lawyer. "Er—just walk back to the house with me, Mr. Weddon. Don't speak to him." He took Weddon's arm and half turned him round. And Weddon noticed with surprise that he had a nervous, jerky manner in striking contrast to his usual calm.

"It's a very strange matter, Mr. Weddon,' he went on. "A very strange matter. I don't know how to—— No, don't look at him, come with me. You see the man came to my office this morning and gave me a bit of a shock. A very great shock in fact. Of course it may prove to be nothing at all, but—— Well, the fact is he announced himself to me as Herbert Carpion. The nephew of Sir Charles."

"The nephew!" Weddon disengaged his arm from the other's grasp and stood looking at him in a bewildered way. "Which nephew? There was one—— But Herbert Carpion! What do you mean? He was killed long ago."

"Yes. Yes, of course. In Mexico, as I told you. But, Mr. Weddon, there are one or two points——" Here he stopped dead and looked at Weddon with a face twisted with perplexity.

"Look here," said Weddon, with an angry laugh, "it's easily settled. I'll just tell Garnet to have him put on the other side of the gates. Just wait here——"

"No," interrupted Mr. Powle, clutching his arm again. "Don't."

Weddon stopped and stared at him.

"Better not. Come in with me, I want to talk to you about it. You see, to put it very

plainly, Mr. Weddon, I have most fearful doubts. Please come in with me."

Weddon went with him in silence. The power of thought had left him, for in his ears seemed the roaring of cataracts and it was as if the world was crumbling about him.

Chapter XVI These are the Gascony Cadets

WEDDON found himself seated at a corner of the large library table, facing Mr. Powle, who sat drumming nervously with his fingers. For a moment he seemed to find a difficulty in going on.

"The case is this, Mr. Weddon," he began. "That man outside came this morning to my office and announced himself as the nephew of Sir Charles who was reported killed some twenty-five years ago and of whom no one has heard any news since. My first idea of course was that he was—as you said—a lunatic. My second—after hearing something of what he had to say—was that he was a man of desperate fortunes who had known Herbert Carpion in the past and had conceived the idea of impersonating him. I was so convinced of this that I was on the

point of warning him that he would be removed by the police if he did not go at once."

"But you didn't," said Weddon, for there was a pause here.

"No, I didn't. The doubts I have just referred to came to me. He put his case fluently and without hesitation—though in a strangely careless way—and, when I at last began to consider it seriously, I was unable to trip him up. He told me that another man was killed by the Indians and that he escaped. He has—this is of course only his statement—been living in various parts of the world waiting for a chance of inheriting the estate. He says that he has kept in touch with news of the family—through some disreputable former acquaintance, I suppose—and, hearing in a belated way of the death of his father and old Sir Charles, he had made his way home from New Guinea, where he had been for the last year or two. He explained that it would have been useless for him to apply at any time for recognition from either his father or uncle, and that if he had announced to them that he was alive it would have probably resulted in the money part of the estate being willed away from him. He would have had the title and Glynning only, and Glynning alone cannot pay its way. That is

his tale, Mr. Weddon. You can judge how very disturbing it has been to me."

"Now, Mr. Powle," said Weddon, his dry throat making speech an effort, "there is one point I should like to know first. You knew Herbert Carpion for years, and until he was a grown man. How is it you do not recognize whether this is the man or not?"

"A quarter of a century has gone by, Mr. Weddon, since I saw him. There is the man as he was"—he pointed to the portrait over the fireplace. "You have seen the man who claims to be him yourself. Twenty-five years would have changed any man out of recognition; much more one who has lived the life this man has undoubtedly led. There *is* some faint resemblance in feature too—the eyes are the same colour—but that is little to go by. What I do go by and what has produced the doubts of which I speak is the man's intimate knowledge of Herbert Carpion's doings in the past and his intimate knowledge of family matters. It was not that he gave me many points to judge by; it was his occasional careless references to things in connection with the family and Herbert Carpion's escapades with which I thought no man but myself was conversant. Of course this may be all part of a carefully laid

scheme of one who was an associate of Carpion in his younger days—possibly one who knew the family and who had stayed at Glynning. Remember how the family has thinned out and disappeared. It occurred to me in thinking it over that all the older servants who might have been useful witnesses have died. The old housekeeper of Carpion's days died last year, you will remember. His regiment too lost every officer and man in the war. The whole case lends itself to a daring impostor. It is my fervent hope that he will prove to be one."

"Your hope only?" said Weddon, almost in a whisper.

"Yes—and my belief. That is to say, I think I am justified in believing he is an impostor. Mr. Weddon," he said with a return to his former nervous manner, "this is by far the most difficult and harassing case I have ever met with. It is perfectly damnable! I think I must ask for some whisky and soda to help me. May I ring?" He got up and touched the bell by the fireplace.

They sat in silence until a footman had come in, provided the whisky and soda, and gone out again. Then Weddon took his glass and drank half the contents, for his throat was parching.

"Now," went on Mr. Powle, "I have given

you the outstanding facts and you are prepared for what I have to give you in the way of advice. In the first place we are dealing with a man who, whatever else he may prove to be, is undoubtedly daring and reckless. Now if he were the heir and had, let us say, the ordinary views of the generality of people, he would not have stated his claim to me, but made it through another firm of solicitors. If his case is as strong as his talk implies he would have no difficulty in carrying it through. But he came to me first and, at my request, gave me time to investigate before he does anything further.''

''Doesn't that look as if he were not sure of his ground?'' asked Weddon, with a faint tinge of relief.

''In one way it does, Mr. Weddon. But it also seems to me to partake of the character of the young Herbert Carpion I knew, whose recklessness in all matters amounted almost to insanity. On the other hand it gives me time to consider the matter from all points and to find out what I can —my son has put all other work aside and is attending entirely to certain investigations in the matter, about which we will talk later. But the man insisted that he must come down here and have a look at Glynning—and at you. So I came

too, of course. Now the important point is this, Can you bear with him as your guest—with me here as well—for a day or two?"

"As Sir Herbert Carpion?" Weddon got up with a face white with emotion. "Hardly, I think. If the place is his he must take it, but I shall not be here when he does."

"Now sit down, Mr. Weddon. Please sit down. He goes by the name of Kennard. He will not make any claim to the title, nor will he talk to anybody about his claim while he is here. That much I made him promise before he came, and he will keep his promise I think. If for no other reason than that he is—or pretends to be—amused with the idea. Remember I am doing my best for you, Mr. Weddon, and you must help me where you can. Impostor or not, he takes the whole matter in a most extraordinary way, and that gives me my chance. He shows no hostility, real or pretended, to you; he even expresses sympathy for you."

"Oh, he does, does he!"

"Now, Mr. Weddon, you *must* be guided by me. That expression of sympathy is a good sign to me: it might easily be the attitude of a blackmailer who hopes to get a sum of money out of you. If I can trip him up in his statements he

can be got rid of without trouble—except to him. And if the worst comes to the worst and he should prove to be the man he says he is—we must look things in the face, Mr. Weddon—why, it will be better to have him for a friend than an enemy.''

''I don't see why.''

''No? Well, let us leave that for the present. I have no very clear idea myself yet. But let us look on the bright side if we can. The matter is too little advanced for me to do more than hope, but still I do hope. A night's rest will enable me to see more clearly. Now, when I characterized the case as damnable just now I was thinking partly of myself. I am a lawyer of forty years' experience, and yet I cannot decide on the best course to take. I could, of course, have told the man to go away and take what steps he pleased, and that might have settled the matter at once. But it *might* mean the beginning of a long course of litigation, with all the attendant publicity and complications. And at the best, with the man behind the prison bars, the cost to you would be enormous. There were enough doubts in my mind to cause me to suppress the inclination to tell him to go to the devil, and I looked about for another course. I have now secured time to in-

vestigate and we may find that the only cause for alarm is on his side."

His tone had grown more confident now that he had told the worst, but Weddon felt no lifting of the dark cloud that had gathered about him.

"My business, as you know," went on Mr. Powle, "is almost wholly with old estates, such as Glynning, and I have strong sentiment for the old places. My duty to my clients is to help them to avoid lawsuits and raking up of old scandals wherever possible. If we can get rid of this man without a disagreeable publicity, let us do so. But we must not lose sight of what is, at least, a possibility, though the very idea is painful to me. Glynning with you has found a capable and respected owner. Should that man unfortunately prove to be Herbert Carpion, it will have a worthless adventurer for an owner and will undoubtedly go to rack and ruin. I pray that no such fate befalls it."

Weddon got up and walked to the window, where he stood looking out on the wide expanse of greenery. Was it, after all, a work of enchantment, now to fade into thin air? And should it fade, was his dear love lost to him—to him who hardly dared hope for her when he had all the wide lands and wealth to offer? He bent his head

against the hand he had laid on the window-frame, and for a time felt the bitterness of death.

"Now, Mr. Weddon," went on the lawyer after an interval, "it is useless for me to say anything in the way of sympathy; you know my feelings in the matter. Let us see what we have to do. This man Kennard—we will call him Kennard for the present, though I expect he has had a few other names in his time—will almost certainly give me a necessary clue from his talk, and especially when dinner is over, if I may judge from what I have already seen of him. *In vino veritas*. I have not yet been able to get him talking about his experiences in the Mexican gaol, where he was on a charge of murder, but if he cannot convince me by his knowledge of the details of that incident—the details are very fresh in my memory—I shall be a most important witness if the case should come to the courts. That he would have to acknowledge himself as having escaped from a capital charge will not be to him more than a matter of amusement, from what I can see. And the Mexican Government would have no interest in it at this date—or at any other: they are not short of murders in that country, I believe. A great deal depends on how much he remembers—or pretends to remember—

of that experience. I have the cutting from the Mexican newspapers which has been taken as proof of the death of Herbert Carpion, and that will be an important piece of evidence. So I think that if he is masquerading as the heir he will find himself on a thorny path; therefore, let us hope for the best. Are you ready for a fight now, Mr. Weddon?''

''Yes, I'm ready,'' replied Weddon, turning round and coming back to the table. His eyes had grown hard and his face was calm. ''Tell me exactly what I have to do.''

''The great thing, Mr. Weddon, is for you to bear with his humour and show no hostility to him. Diplomatic treatment of him will cost you nothing but the trouble of his presence, and at any moment I may find some flaw in his statements.''

''And if you don't?'' said Weddon.

''Don't let us think too much of that; let us think we will. You had better follow my lead; and perhaps it would be best for you to say as little as possible until we see how the land lies. As for his being here, all anybody need know is that a Mr. Kennard is staying with you for a day or so.''

Weddon thought, with a smile that seemed to tear at his heart, of the excuse made that after-

noon about the man who might pay him a visit. Well, here was the man, and he had brought despair with him.

"I'll do exactly as you say," he said after a moment.

"That is right. Now I think we had better ask him in and talk to him a little. It will not be too difficult for you, for he is quite ready to talk. He has been giving me an account of some of his experiences while we travelled down together. Whether they are true or not, he is certainly an interesting blackguard. Oh, here he comes now."

Voices were heard without, and a moment later the man appeared, very much at his ease.

"Hope I don't intrude," he said, "but I got tired of being alone, and perhaps you've had your little pow-wow by now. Aha!" he exclaimed as he looked at the table, "the foaming cup! I don't believe in intoxicants except as a beverage, but this tempts me."

"It *is* a warm afternoon, Mr. Kennard," said the lawyer, while Weddon touched the bell.

Kennard—to use the name he had given—took a very tall glass of whisky and soda and disposed of it quickly. "Good! Very good! There is nothing like good Scotch and soda. No wonder some people prefer it to cocoa. I think I must

have another." He helped himself and lit one of his cigarettes, which gave out a scent hitherto unknown in that library. "Queer business this altogether, Mr. Weddon," he said as he seated himself on the table.

"Very queer," replied Weddon.

"I was telling our mutual friend, Powle, as we were coming along in the train—— Hullo! You *don't* mean it!"

He had caught sight of the portrait over the fireplace and he went towards it.

"Think of that now! Who on earth put that there? Did you?"

"Yes," said Weddon, "I put it there."

"What for?" He leaned his arms on the chimney-piece, still holding on to his glass, and surveyed the portrait. "There's little me. Poor old Bertie as he used to be in the days of his innocence, I don't think. Where did you dig it up from?"

"Mr. Weddon found it behind some books and had it framed and hung there," explained the lawyer.

"Just for fun?" asked Kennard.

"Er—I took some interest in it," said Weddon. "It would be difficult to say why I did."

"Well, anyway, it's damned decent of you.

It's not many that would have cared to hang up old Bertie—except with a rope. There I am, as saucy as a tart! Seems too long ago to be true. That was my first levee, you know. The Prince, you know, before he was King Edward. But he didn't have anything to say to me. It seemed as if he didn't love me at all. Just looked at me, and I bowed and backed until I got behind a column and could do a bunk. I'd got into a little trouble just before and it was in the papers, and perhaps some pal of his told him of it. Anyhow, I was glad to get out of range of his eye. But they were glorious old days. Before your time, I expect?"

"Before my time," said Weddon.

"London was worth coming to in those days," continued Kennard, sitting on the table again, but still with his eyes on the portrait. "That brings it back to me more than anything. Haven't seen London for a lifetime until the other day, and it's all gone to hell. The Pav's gone, the Empire's gone—everything's gone. Even that jolly old statue in Piccadilly Circus has gone. And I suppose all my old pals are gone or reformed or something."

"I suppose you find a great change," said Mr. Powle.

"Change! Why, there's nothing to drink at the time you need it most, unless you go to a night club—and they're a damned tenth-rate lot of places now. You remember the old Corinthian, don't you?" he asked of Weddon.

"No, I have never been there."

"Then it must have gone before your time. It just shows what London's come to. Here I am, back to enjoy myself, and this is what I find!" He nodded musingly over the vanished glory. Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city.

"Well, it cheers me up a bit to find I'm still among the family portraits," he said after an interval, "even if it is only a photo. It's damned decent of you, Mr. Weddon, as I said. Say, I'm going to call you Weddon. And you call me Kennard; then we'll feel at home. Kennard's not my name, but I've had it for years and I rather like it. No good in being anything else but friendly as long as we can, is there?"

"No good at all," said Weddon.

"That's right, Weddon, I'm beginning to like you strongly. But, say, time's getting on and I haven't brought any evening things with me. Matter of fact, I haven't got any at all yet. I suppose you can fit me out?"

Weddon rang for the butler and put the question to him.

"Mr. Kennard's dress clothes were not packed, Miller," he said. "What can you do for him?"

Miller considered after a glance at the guest's tall figure. "I think yours will hardly do, sir. But there are some suits of Sir Charles's stored away, and I'll see what temporary arrangement I can make, sir. I can have them pressed in half an hour, sir, if Mr. Kennard will come with me now."

"Let's go and try on," said Kennard. Then in a whisper behind his hand to Weddon: "Uncle's clothes. *Damned* funny, isn't it?" He laughed heartily and went out, leaving the other two looking at each other in bewilderment.

Chapter XVII *Blood and Sand*

THE unwelcome guest, in snowy linen and a velvet-jacketed suit of the old baronet's, made himself particularly at home and ate a hearty dinner. He kept to his promise, and while the servants were in the room made no remark that might lead anyone even remotely to guess at the reasons connected with his appearance there. But his reminiscences, his comments on past days to the detriment of the present, and the depth and frequency of his potations were a source of wonder to the servants, accustomed as they were to the decorous ways of

Weddon and his former guests. He was at his ease throughout, with the bearing of a man who had been trained in the ways of leisured folk. Strange to say, his voice, as his cups increased, lost the slovenly touch due to cosmopolitan idiom, and became the voice of one who had once been an associate of gentlemen.

To Weddon the dinner was a torment, but he kept an outwardly placid exterior and remained almost entirely a listener. Mr. Powle dexterously steered the visitor from subjects that he deemed inappropriate, and showed interest in his reminiscences. The man was behaving much better than he had expected, and in that he found cause for satisfaction; but he also hoped that as his tongue loosened some valuable evidence might be gained.

The servants had left the room, and Kennard had settled himself comfortably for the after-dinner pleasures of the table. His second cigar was lit. Though he had drunk deep before and during and after dinner, he had not drunk enough to slur his accent, and he seemed well pleased to have an attentive audience.

"Yes," he said, as he put down a really large glass of liqueur brandy, "I was a *torero* for more than three years. About the only English bull-fighter that's ever been; at least, I never heard

of another. Jolly good brandy this. Silky. No, I'll not take a third ; I'll take a little whisky."

"Very dangerous life, I should imagine," Weddon remarked, when the other had supplied himself largely.

"Dangerous? Oh yes. Not many of the people who sit and look on have any idea of what it really is. They see the last bull being hauled out and they see the *espada* walk off and they know he's pocketed anything up to a thousand pounds for the afternoon, but what they don't know is the number of times he's missed being ripped open by the skin of his teeth in the afternoon. Why should they? It looks much easier than it is from the other side of the barrier. Ever seen a bullfight?"

"No," said Mr. Powle. "I have never had the opportunity."

"Nor I," said Weddon. "And I don't think I could stand the horse part of it."

"Two men in the hotel I've been stopping at were talking about that. They'd just come back from Spain—regular tourist type—and they were saying how shocked they were to see the poor horses slaughtered. I took the liberty of speaking to them. I asked them if they'd paid to go to the ring or had free tickets, and they looked a bit surprised and said they'd paid. 'Very well,' I

said, 'then you've done your bit to help get the horses slaughtered, and you can't talk.' I said: 'You can't pretend you didn't know you were going to see them slaughtered. The matter is you want it both ways. You want to have the fun of seeing it and the fun of bragging about your humanity as well.' They got quite annoyed. It ended in my telling them off. I said: 'I'll bet you're neither of you above making a profit selling worn-out plugs to Belgium.' I said more than that, too, because I was becoming annoyed as well. Yes, if the horse business is too rotten for people they can always stay away. And the *picador* pays for it all right. If he's not killed in the ring, he generally goes mad."

"Why?" asked Weddon.

"Getting everlastingly pitched on to his head. And you never can tell how people feel about things. One *picador* I knew used to cry over the horses the night before. But he had his living to get and his family to keep, and no one went out of their way to offer him another way of doing it."

"Were you ever a *picador?*" asked Weddon.

"No, it didn't suit me. I worked up to be *espada,* and I got there almost at once. I took to it somehow, and I was doing quite well before my finish came. *El Huero* they called me,

because of my light hair; most of them have black hair. Most of the time I was in South America, going about. And I toured in Mexico and Cuba two seasons and did very well. Anybody joining me in a whisky and soda? No? Then I will."

"Oh, so you went back—I mean you performed in Mexico?" said Mr. Powle.

"Yes, I performed there, in the bigger towns. They thought a lot of me there, and I was hoping to get taken on in Madrid or Seville next season. But I lost out."

"And they paid you a thousand pounds for a performance?"

"No, not me. They paid me less. A damned sight less. It's only the lucky top men who get that. I got badly hurt one day and had to lay up for a long time, and that gave another man his chance. I had to begin over again in a way; and I was just making good again when I got finished."

"Were you often hurt?" asked Weddon.

"Lots of times. I'll show you the marks some day. This isn't one," he said, touching the white line across his cheek-bone; "that was a knife. Yes, many are called and few are chosen at that game, like every other. At one time the people used to run beside the carriage when I went to the

ring, crowds and crowds of them, all shouting out for *El Huero*. And then the finish came.''

He was staring at the table now and seemed to have forgotten them.

'' The finish came,'' observed Mr. Powle.

'' Came like that.'' He snapped his fingers and then took a long pull at his glass. '' You see, if the *corrida's* only on Sunday, as it usually is, you've got all the week to get straight in. Monday's the best day ; it's all past for the time, and next Sunday seems a long way ahead. And the girls make it up for you, and you can take what drink you want and be happy. But as the time goes on you begin to think ; you can't help it, whatever sort of man you are. And on Saturday you don't drink and you only smoke a little. And when Sunday comes and you're all dressed up and your feet are bandaged tight to give you a grip, and the mob's outside waiting round the carriage, you've got to show you don't care a damn. Laugh and look as if it was all fun for you. Hard sometimes, I can tell you. And if you've got two or three *corridas* in the week instead of one it's harder, if you'll believe me.''

'' I should imagine it to be,'' said Mr. Powle.

'' Look here, if you ever go to Spain, you watch the *espadas* when they drive to the ring. You'd swear they're as comfortable in their minds

as if they were just going to look on. But you'll notice they don't talk to each other. They just smile, and that's all. They're trying not to think. It's not funk; they're as plucky as they make them, or they wouldn't be there. Now, I'm Church of England if I'm anything, but I'd do like the rest when I got to the ring and kneel down before the Virgin in the chapel and say: 'Holy Mother, don't let it be this time.' That shows you.''

''Of course, that feeling goes off once the thing's started,'' he went on after a long pause. ''It's *got* to if you don't want to go out on a stretcher. And when your time comes and you're alone and everybody's gone dead quiet—twenty thousand of them sometimes—you're feeling all right and fine as a rule.''

He looked about for the decanter and filled himself another glass.

''As a rule. But that time I'd been to two *corridas* in the week, and I'd not taken it quietly in between. It was a girl called Lolita Sanchez, I remember, and what with one thing and another I drank too much, and I'd got the hang over of a drunk when I got to the ring. Anyhow, I couldn't do anything right. It was a little black bull, the second one, as quick as a terrier, and he wouldn't shut his eyes at any time. And the

people began to shout and groan at me, and I don't mind telling you I lost my nerve. He caught me in the hip and sent me up like a rocket. Not quite so high, but high enough. One leg and an arm and a collar-bone, besides extras. And then the second man, Barbarosa—*El Guapito*—got his chance and jumped in. They shouted for him, and they yelled at me as I went out. I felt one of the beer-bottles hit the stretcher as I went. I was done for. *El Guapito* was the man then. For two years they thought the world of him. Then he was spiked through the stomach in the Lima ring, and he died in the chapel."

"I was done and damned and delivered over," he went on after another interval. "I soon saw it—about five minutes after I came to from the chloroform. It was the way the doctor tried to cheer me up that showed me. Decent little man he was. Well, I settled it as soon as I could walk. I went to the barber and I slapped my hand on my *coleta*—the little pigtail, you know. 'Cut it off!' I told him. 'I've done with it!'"

He drank again and remained in gloomy meditation. The blurred features were flushed and the drooping eyelid drooped further. Whoever he might prove to be, and on whatever errand he had planted himself in that house, it was evident to both listeners that here he was talking the truth,

and that he was mourning the collapse of a cherished ambition.

"All over long ago now," he went on at length. "I was young and as quick as a cat and as hard as nails in those days. Never once let a man get the better of me; they got to know me pretty soon wherever I went. And as for the girls! Yes, great old days. I made money too—at times. But I hadn't the knack of keeping it. Another man and I made a quarter of a million pesos over a mining deal once. All gone, like baby's milk. Great pity a man can't keep young a bit longer. But look here, it seems to me I'm drinking all alone, and that won't do. Fill up to oblige me."

Weddon and the lawyer each took a diluted glass to accompany him. He filled up again in his own generous way.

"Very adventurous life you've had, Mr. Kennard," said the lawyer. "By the way, you told me that it was another man—a man—er—other than Herbert Carpion who was killed by the Indians. There must have been an interesting adventure connected with that."

Kennard went into a shout of laughter. "You're a queer old blade, Powle. You don't mind me calling you Powle, do you? I remember you so long ago, you see."

"Not in the least, Mr. Kennard," said the other stiffly.

"I don't mean any offence; but you rather tickle me. Yes, poor old Herbert got away clear. The other man was Groome, another bad egg like me. Look here, let's pretend I'm poor old Herbert; it makes it easier. Groome and I forgathered in Sonora soon after I got clear from gaol. I suppose you know I got gaoled for a shooting scrape?"

"Yes," said Mr. Powle, "I heard something about it. Rather unpleasant experience, I should say, to be in prison in that country."

"Yes, bad enough. But about poor old Groome. He was an old Harrow boy, and not a bad sort to chum up with if you're not too Puritanical in your ideas. We both meant to go up to Arizona and try what we could do in the cattle lands. But we were unfortunately broke. I'd had some money given to me by some old sportsman who'd come out from England to save me from being scragged and to save disgrace to the fine old name. I'd like, by the way, to know how much the Mexicans made out of that deal; I'll bet they put a high price on poor old Bertie while they had the chance; but I never saw the old sportsman, so I couldn't ask. Well, anyway, the money didn't last very long. Groome had a

system at roulette, and we worked at it. Fine system ; rather like dropping money down a drain. We lost every bean. And there we were, down to our horses and guns and a little jerked meat and biscuits, and hundreds of miles of tough country to the border, and not a friend anywhere. And one afternoon we were plugging along and wishing we'd been pure and holy in our youth, when we barged right into a dozen red-bellies coming down the trail, each with a Winchester in the crook of his arm. Yaquis they were, and there wasn't time to do more than turn and bolt if we could. They came after us, shooting thick and fast, but we were better mounted than they, and it looked at one time as if we were going to get clear. But two or three of them nipped across some high ground and cut us off where the trail turned. First thing I knew my horse came down and I was rolling over and over—they'd shot him somewhere—and there was Groome slipping over sideways and hanging on to the rein, and that pulled his horse up. I ran up just as he fell, and I saw he was done for. He'd got his shirt open—*my* shirt, by the way—and splinters of rib were sticking out just over the heart : a soft-nosed bullet had hit him in the back. There was just time to jump for his horse. I got clear, but it was a hard run. Poor old Groome ! He wasn't a bad sort,

and we'll drink to him. Do you know, I like this whisky. It's soft, and yet it has body."

"An unfortunate ending to the poor fellow," said Mr. Powle, watching Kennard as he wrenched open a soda water bottle.

"Well, but he died quickly. And sometimes the people the Yaquis got didn't die so quickly. It's all for the best."

"And he was wearing your shirt, you say," remarked Mr. Powle musingly. "Poor fellow!"

"Yes, I remember I'd got two left—the last of my London kit—and his were in rags, so I gave him one. I took his name afterwards, when I got work in a cattle camp in Arizona. Jim Groome, I was. He got my shirt, and I got his name. Fair exchange. Look here, I'll tell you a funny thing that happened when I got across the border."

It was a long anecdote, of no great moral flavour, and the speaker's voice was becoming dulled as he concluded it.

"Very strange experiences you have had," said Mr. Powle after a long pause, during which Kennard sat muttering to himself. "I expect, though, that experience of the Mexican gaol was one of the worst of them, from what I have heard of such places."

"Wish Mexican gaol?"

"The one you were imprisoned in. When you shot that man."

"Wish man?"

"I'm referring to the case which was adjusted by somebody who came out from England for the purpose," said Mr. Powle elaborately. "You were speaking of it yourself just now."

"Oh, *that* man!" Kennard roused himself and laughed. "Yes, I shot him between the eyes. Shot him twice, matter'r fact."

"Exactly. And I suppose the gaol was a very terrible place."

"Yesh. Terrible place." He was very solemn here. "Matter'r fact, they're all terrible places. You keep away from them, then you'll be happy."

"Yes, I've heard they're very bad. Which town was it in, by the way?"

"I forget. Memory's not so good as it was. Some things I remember every bit; some things I don't remember every bit."

"Were you in solitary confinement all the time?"

"Not aller time. Sometimes in solilary confinement. Sometimes *not* in solilary confinement. Appears to me I'm getting tight. Why aren't you tight?"

"You're tired with a long day," said Mr.

Powle. He glanced at the door, and Weddon took the hint.

"Yes, perhaps you'd like to go to bed now, Mr. Kennard."

"Call me Kennard," implored the other. "*I* call you Weddon. You dug out my portrait and stuck it overer chimney er beautify the place. Thasher sort of man appreciate. But thish won't do."

He poured out another large whisky and soda and drank it off without a pause. To the surprise of the other two, he straightened up and became suddenly and wonderfully semi-sober.

"Yes, I think I'll go to bed now if you'll kindly bring a menial to see me safely there. I can undress myself. But I'd better go before the invigorating effect of this last one wears off."

Weddon rang for the butler and directed him to escort Mr. Kennard to his room. Kennard stood very slightly swaying, and surveyed Miller in a leisurely way. Then he placed in his arms a decanter of whisky and two bottles of soda.

"That's in case I experience thirst in the stilly night," he explained. "Gentlemen, we will meet in the morning."

The door closed behind him. Mr. Powle walked up and down, and Weddon watched him.

"I am still nonplussed," he said wearily after a turn or two. "What an abominable situation! There is one point, however, that looks hopeful. You noticed that his memory failed him over a matter in which I could trip him up if he made any wrong statement. The details of my visit to the prison are perfectly fresh in my memory. How is it he can't remember the name of the town?"

"He was getting very drunk at that point," said Weddon. "But he seemed fluent enough over other matters. Certainly his memory went very suddenly."

"Yes, we have cause for hope. A theory I had formed is strengthening. He may be the man Groome—though that is not the name, of course—and he may have known Carpion intimately when they were in England. That and this accidental meeting in the wilds would give him plenty of information up to a certain point. You see, he remembers the incident of the shirt, but he can't remember about his experiences in prison shortly before. Well, my son is hunting for some people who may be valuable witnesses—among them a Mr. Winfield, a mining engineer who employed Carpion for a time just before the murder incident, and whom I met out there. He may be able to help us greatly."

"And have I got to put up with the man until he chooses either to go away or declare open war?"

"I am afraid so. If he would suggest talk of money, I should be greatly relieved; it would be a very hopeful sign. Yes, it is disastrous enough to have him here, Mr. Weddon, but I see no other way just at present. Luckily he is—or pretends to be—friendly to you. It was a very lucky thing that you put that portrait up. Either he *is* the man and is genuinely touched by your action, or else he is an unusually clever adventurer who seizes on that as an excuse to delay doing what he threatens—in the hope of getting a sum of money from you, of course. I don't like his terrific capacity for drink, though. It looks bad to me."

"And to me too," said Weddon. "I don't like a drink-sodden man about the place. But in what way is it a bad sign to you?"

"Because blackmailers and tricksters generally have to keep their wits about them. However, there is no special type for those gentry; like German spies in the war, they never look the part. I think I'll go to bed now, Mr. Weddon, and try to sleep. I'm not a young man, and this is a bit of a strain on me. I recommend you to sleep too."

"I'm afraid it will be a long time before I sleep," said Weddon, with a bitter laugh. "Good-night, Mr. Powle."

Chapter XVIII *A Chance of Release*

WEDDON woke next day to find himself, completely dressed, in an arm-chair in his bedroom; he had dropped into a dead sleep at some hour in the morning when his brain had become dulled with bitter musing. For a few moments he stared about, wondering how he came to be there; and then full knowledge came with a rush. So had knowledge come suddenly to him on the previous day, when he had awaked to happiness that seemed almost unbearable.

He looked at a clock on the table near him and sprang to his feet, for it was nearly ten. He hastily flung off his clothes and got into pyjamas, and disordered the bed to give it the appearance of having been slept in. Then he rang for his bath and was soon hurrying through with his dressing.

When he arrived in the breakfast-room he found Kennard there, eating heartily and chatting to Miller, who waited on him. The butler had conceived something of admiration for him: he had recognized him as of one of an earlier breed

of gentleman, now unhappily becoming extinct. He had been, some years before he took service with old Sir Charles, butler to one Mr. Jarvey-shaw, a country gentleman very much of the old school, and this Mr. Kennard seemed to belong to the type of those who stayed with Mr. Jarvey-shaw on occasions. He particularly admired the skill with which Mr. Kennard had put away a quantity and variety of liquor sufficient to place, say, six other gentlemen under the table, and was still able to walk upstairs to bed with little more assistance than a light touch on the elbow at the turnings. Townson, the footman who had brought Mr. Kennard his early morning tea, reported that he found him sitting up in bed with a tall whisky and soda and a cigarette. He had directed Townson to take the tea away and feed it to the cat. And here he was, as fresh as paint, putting away a solid breakfast. A free-spoken gentleman too; though he knew his position all right enough; there was not so much of this new-fangled "Kindly do this" and "Oblige me by doing that" about him. The gentlemen he, Miller, was accustomed to spoke as they should speak, and people (servants) respected them in consequence.

Kennard looked up and greeted Weddon hilariously.

"Aha! Nice time to be coming down to breakfast, isn't it? I'm ahead of you, though. I'll tell you what, Weddon, this is the first time I've eaten mushrooms for years and years and years." It was noticeable that with the sobriety of the morning his accent and bearing had regained its cosmopolitan touch.

"Can I bring you some more, sir?" asked Miller, bending respectfully to his ear.

"More? Yes, bring me more. Bring me excess of mushrooms. Do you know," he went on to Weddon, "old Powle's a frosty old blade. I found him here having tea and toast and a soft-boiled egg, like a maiden aunt. That's no way to live."

Weddon made an effort to eat and to put in some appearance of interest in the other's talk; and they finished breakfast at the same time. Kennard declined a cigarette from a box offered by Miller.

"No, I'll smoke my own," he said, producing one of his paper packets. "I've got into the habit of these, Weddon, years ago. Difficult to find them sometimes, though. I hunted about in town and found a shop where they have them. *La Doncella,* which means The Little Piece. Twopence for twenty they used to be in the Argentine; eighteenpence for twenty in Picca-

dilly. Wonder who gets the difference. I told them off in the shop about it, but it was wasted eloquence. I bought fifty packets, but do you think I got a rebate? Not on your dreamy eyes."

They went out together to the paved court before the house, and there Kennard stood looking about with an air of satisfied proprietorship. After a little while he announced his intention of strolling round and having a good look at the old place back and front, and, directing a servant to get his hat and stick, went forth.

Mr. Powle came in sight. He had been walking up and down, hidden behind the rows of clipped yews and waiting for Kennard to go.

"Shall we walk across the park?" he suggested. "There will be no chance of interruption then."

Weddon agreed after a glance at the other's face, which was serious enough, and they set out across the turf and then into the shade of the trees.

"One thing is certain," said Weddon after a minute or so had passed in silence. "This state of things must come to a definite end shortly. It will be impossible for me to remain under the same roof as that man for another day. If you can't

come to a decision either way, I must leave here until you do. He can stay if he likes."

"I must earnestly beg you to exercise patience, Mr. Weddon," said the lawyer. "A day or two at the most should give me the information I need. But if at the end of a day or two I am still uncertain, I think the only thing to do is to tell him to take what steps he pleases. But that is what I wanted to avoid, both for the sake of the place and for you personally."

"A night's rest has not helped you to a decision, then?" said Weddon after another pause.

"No. Perhaps because it was not much of a night's rest. I began to think instead of following my usual practice of putting all business matters out of my head when it reaches the pillow. I suppose you did not have a very tranquil night either?"

"Not very."

"The situation is perfectly damnable! But I have been going over all I can remember of Herbert Carpion's youth, and I am preparing a difficult examination for an impostor to pass, when the time comes. Carpion was at Eton and Sandhurst, and it must be that there are people who remember him there; his escapades at both places

made him rather remarkable. But then, of course, this man may have been at both places too. His air of confidence would be a matter for great uneasiness if it were not for the fact that confidence is the chief stock-in-trade of the type we hope he belongs to. There are moments when —to put it plainly—I fear the worst that may happen. And then at other times—from some trick of speech and manner of his—I am convinced that we are dealing with a very clever and reckless adventurer. However, we will soon know, I hope. I must return to town this afternoon, and I will wire you if there is any news. In the meantime, Mr. Weddon, I beg you to assist me by bearing with him until he goes—it will not be long before he does, I judge—or until I have some definite news. And above all, try to disguise your feelings from him and everybody else. It is essential that nobody round about has any hint of the matter."

"I suppose I must," said Weddon, with a harsh laugh. "I think it can be classed among the difficult things, though."

"I agree. But there is no way out just now."

They were by this time close to Netherfield, and Weddon suggested a call on the Theynells. They would be greatly surprised if he did not come to see them at some time that day, and

Joan would be especially aggrieved ; also, with the presence of Mr. Powle, the talk would be more general, and any disquiet in his manner should pass unnoticed.

They found the family in. Joan annexed Weddon and took the difficulties of conversation out of his hands, for she had much work to do to explain the various happenings since his departure, and he felt some temporary loosening of the band that care had fastened about him. He listened gratefully, and answered all her questions as to the dampness of Venice owing to the canals —she had been reading up Italy since his departure—and the probability of the Leaning Tower of Pisa coming over with an awful smash some day, an eventuality which she seemed to consider rather desirable than otherwise, and told her that he had stupidly forgotten to bring a little parcel for her, but that it would be sent later, and she must open it with caution.

When they took their departure Mr. and Mrs. Theynell walked with them to the gate.

"I expect we shall have Marjory back on Thursday afternoon," said Mrs. Theynell to Weddon. "She wanted to stay longer, of course, but I know that Millicent is anxious to get back to help her father—she told me that she had a lot to do—and she won't stay after Lady

Campage leaves. In any case, they have two whole days for shopping, and they can do quite a lot in the time."

"Quite a lot," agreed Mr. Theynell.

"That is, of course, if the steamer goes on Thursday. It does, doesn't it, Charles?"

"I don't know," he answered.

"Not know when it leaves! Really, Charles! My husband is perfectly useless in practical matters, Mr. Powle. One would think that, considering the number of times he has been to the East, he would have all the sailing dates at his finger-ends. But he is so illogical."

"Do you know," she continued to her husband as she watched the two as they walked away, "I have more than a suspicion that Weddon is strongly attracted by Millicent."

"No!" he exclaimed, with the air of one roused to extreme astonishment. "You don't mean it!"

"Yes, Charles. I have been watching him and putting two and two together—things that you wouldn't notice, of course—and now I'm sure of it. You see, Millicent is pretty in a way, and they have seen quite a lot of each other. I'm sure of it."

"Now that is what I should call a definite

instance of woman's intuition. When did it dawn upon you?"

"Not very long ago. But he went abroad exactly at the same time as she went to Devonshire, and he came back at the same time, and that gave me the idea. Now, you would never have noticed that, Charles."

"No," he replied humbly, "those things escape me."

"Of course. And did you notice the flimsy excuse he gave for being at the station?"

"I wasn't there."

"No, more you were. Well, he said that a man he knew *might* be coming by that train. I saw through it in a moment."

"Yes, but I happen to know that a man did turn up yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, well, that is only a coincidence, Charles, and it has nothing to do with the fact that it was a very flimsy excuse. And in any case I am convinced that he is in love with her."

"And what about Millicent?"

"You mean, does she like him? Well, I think she does. Why shouldn't she?"

"Why not, indeed?"

"He is very nice and he has a nice appearance. Of course he is much older than she is,

but that doesn't matter. He has a very nice manner too. He has improved wonderfully."

"And of course he has rather a nice place and a nice income."

"Oh, Charles, you must always destroy the romance. I don't think that has anything to do with it. I know that she refused Tolliver. His sister told me in strict confidence, but as the Purcells know it and the Carterbrigs know it and the Wortles know it, I suppose she told them too—at any rate it's not much of a secret now. And he will have lots of money, and a title as well one of these days."

"Not a fair case, my dear. Tolliver's a good fellow, but an ass. And Millicent has some character."

"But it *is* destroying romance, Charles, to suggest that money has anything to do with it. Did money come into the case when you asked *me?*"

"Our case was unique," he said diplomatically, putting an arm round her.

"Oh, Charles, somebody will see!"

Luncheon at Glynning differed from the dinner of the night before in that the unbidden guest took what for a man of his capacity might be termed a modest quantity of liquor. As before, he led the conversation and Weddon said little.

Mr. Powle, as before, endeavoured to steer the conversation to a subject that might give him a clue.

"Did your adventures ever lead you into the revolution?" he asked, with an idea of bringing the talk back to Mexico.

"Say, Powle, that reminds me of the centipede when he told the doctor he'd broken his leg. The doc said he'd have to be more explicit. It depends on which revolution you mean; I've been mixed up with most of them in the last twenty years. China was the quaintest though. Did I ever tell you about a man Li Hong—man I made a deal for rifles with?"

"No," replied Mr. Powle, "but I should like to hear about him. I was thinking about Mexico when I said the revolution."

"Well, then you ought to say which one. I was in Madero's revolution. *Capitan de Caballeria*. Didn't get much of my pay though—that is, directly. Got it other ways. But Madero had a nasty finish and I cleared off."

"You didn't get into prison over it, I hope."

"No, or I shouldn't be here. When you get into prison in Mexico as a revolutionist you stay there—about six feet underground."

"But you did have an unpleasant prison experience there once."

"Oh yes. Over that shooting scrape we were talking about. But I got away all right, as I told you."

"Very fortunate escape. Where did you say it was?"

"Over in the north-west. But about Li Hong. He can brag that he's the only one that got top-side of me in a gun-running deal. Funny old scoundrel he was. I'll tell you about it."

He told his tale. It appeared that Li Hong still owed him half the money. He expressed a hope that he would meet him again some day—or rather night. Dark night preferred. His talk went from China to dealings in New Guinea and an amusing incident concerning the sanguinary end of seven natives.

"You see it's useless," said Mr. Powle to Weddon some half-hour later. They were alone in the library, Kennard having wandered off somewhere. "Drunk or sober, he'll not talk on the matter of that gaol. It seems to me that he has an idea I am the man who visited it, and it begins to look hopeful again to me. If he is playing a deep game he is playing it extraordinary well: he must know that the man who visited the gaol to get Herbert Carpion off may be available as a witness and therefore he won't risk inventing about it to me. That is the way it appears to me.

Well, Mr. Weddon, I can do nothing more here and I will leave for the train if you will kindly let me have a car. If I should need your presence, or if I should hear of any useful news, I will wire to you. So far there has been no hint from him that he wants money, but of course he may be waiting for me to leave before he broaches the subject. It would be a very good sign if he did."

"I think so too. You say that in any case you will be able to arrive at a decision shortly?"

"Very soon, I think. There may be some news when—— Oh, here he comes!"

In came Kennard, smiling and with his hands in his pockets, with a cigarette dangling as usual from his lip. He sat himself in an arm-chair near them and stretched out his legs.

"This is a funny business," he said cheerfully; "wandering about my ancestral halls like a lost dog. But I feel lonely, so I came to look you up. I knew I'd find you together, figuring out ways to do poor old Bertie out of his birthright. I feel like the bloke in the Bible who got jounced out of his for a plate of porridge."

Weddon got to his feet, his face white with rage. "I think we'll have an end to this now, Mr. Kennard, since that's your latest name——"

"Carpion's my name if you want to know,"

interrupted the other. "You can drop the Kennard at any time you like."

"Then I will," said Weddon. "And as I don't know you by any other name I'll not address you by any other. But I'd like to know when you are ready to leave."

"Now really, Mr. Weddon," began the lawyer, "if you'll be guided by me——"

"Wait a bit," said Kennard, "because I'm going to have a word here. Now, Weddon, don't say any more until you've heard me, then talk all you like. You're getting peevish, and I don't say you haven't reason for it. But I've told you who I am. If it hadn't been for old Powle here asking me to give him time to prove me a fraud I wouldn't have troubled you at all; other people would have done that for me. I didn't even ask him for two clear days to get away in when he proves me a fraud, though that would have been fair enough. It struck me as a damned funny idea and that's why I came. Now then, Weddon, to put it plainly, I've taken a liking to you, partly because you dug up my old picture out of the dust and partly because—well, because I like your style somehow. It's not been so often in my life that I've taken a liking to a man straight off. Women, yes, plenty of them; but they don't count. And I'd like to say that if I was in your fix and a man

had come round to me as I have to you I'd be likely to try and cripple him before he got very far on with it; but then I'm rather a rough hand when I get annoyed. But why not let us take it peacefully since I feel like taking it peacefully?"

"There's a good deal in what Mr. Kennard says," remarked Mr. Powle nervously.

"There's more than a good deal," corrected the other. "Now, Weddon, don't get high and haughty if I say I don't mean to turn you out like an orphan in the snow—for one thing it's midsummer. No, I'd like you to stay on with me and keep me company. I feel really sorry for you, knowing how I'd feel myself. But look here, Powle, say you're going to be reasonable and give me two days' start to get away if you find I'm a wrong 'un. Be a sport!"

"Er—in a contingency such as you suggest," replied Mr. Powle after a moment's consideration, "I shall, for my part, do nothing to—er—incommode your movements."

"Bless you, Powle. And do you say the same, Weddon?"

"Yes," said Weddon stiffly, after a slight pause. "I say the same, Mr. Kennard."

"Call me Kennard!" implored the other, pausing in the act of lighting a cigarette.

Both Weddon and the lawyer stared at him

with an involuntary look of perplexity. He chuckled deeply and finished lighting his cigarette.

Mr. Powle had gone and Weddon, hoping that Kennard would find sufficient to occupy him in strolling about to relieve him of his presence until dinner-time, was walking up and down the library. It was bitter irony that he should be dreading the return of Millicent. If the worst happened, it would be extinction and chaos ; he could not even form thoughts as to what would be his fate then. But even while there was hope he could not dare to meet her, for to see her while he dreaded to lose her would be too great an agony, and he could not hope to hide it. Until he knew he must invent excuses and lie, that he should have no risk of meeting her.

The door opened and Kennard came in as one sure of welcome, bearing a tumbler of whisky and soda.

"Let's talk, Weddon," he said. "I'd just sat down to a quiet drink outside when it occurred to me you'd like to talk over things, especially since that foxy old boy has gone. Do you know I'm awfully keen on having you live here with me —that is, if old Powle doesn't land me in the dock. How does it strike you?"

"I haven't given much thought to it," replied Weddon dryly.

"You'd get used to me. Just think it over. You see I'm hard as nails and I'm likely to live on another forty years or so. But there's one sure thing: I'm not going to get married, so the place may come to you again—in time. You don't mind my putting it that way, do you?"

"Not in the least."

"Funny old bird you are, Weddon. I don't know why I like you, because it's pretty damned evident you don't like me. However, you'll get to it in time. Not thinking of getting married yourself, are you?"

"You can leave that question out."

"That's right," said the other approvingly. "I reckon a man's a fool to get tied up. Get your fun outside is what I say. I was crazy to get a girl to marry me once, but she wouldn't. Long ago it was."

"Was that in England?" asked Weddon, though with no interest in the question.

"Yes, when I was a youngster in the Lancers. She wouldn't take me, though. Probably a good thing for her. I promised I'd reform and be as good as gold, and she was very near it at one time; but her people stepped in and she wouldn't after all. Pretty! Well, when I say she very nearly got me going straight that gives you an idea of how much I wanted her. But she wouldn't

at the last. Married a parson instead. And I expect it was all for the best.''

He had fallen into a momentary brooding fit, half sitting and half leaning on the table. He roused himself and walked over to the bell.

''No good asking you to join me, I suppose?'' he said.

''No, thank you,'' replied Weddon.

With a replenished glass his subject changed. ''Look here, Weddon,'' he said, ''there's one thing we can settle now. It occurs to me I want some money to carry on with.''

Weddon made no reply. The blood drummed suddenly in his ears, and he waited anxiously for the next remark.

''You take it awfully well,'' said Kennard admiringly. ''There've been times when if a man had said that to me I'd shoot first and ask how much he wanted afterwards. But I'm getting down to the point where there'll be nothing between me and total abstinence except what you're going to give me. I'll give old Powle a day or two to dig up my hideous past, but something in advance I must have.''

''I'm getting pretty low,'' he went on, for Weddon still kept silent. ''I've got about a hundred quid in the bank, and this.'' He pulled out a bundle of one pound notes from his breast

pocket, added to it a few crumpled five pound notes from a waistcoat pocket and a handful of loose silver from his trousers' pockets. "There's the lot, whatever it is. I've been in London a week and I've had a good time in a way and I've ordered some clothes—by the way, I've got a brown suit with a saucy stripe I'd like to show you—and they've got to be paid for, I suppose. What with drink the price it is and the rapaciousness of various people the week's cost me quite a lot."

"Er—how much do you want?" asked Weddon.

"I *want* all there is, so to speak. But a thousand quid will do for a start."

Weddon thought, with his brain whirling. Was this the chance of liberation? If the man proved to be Carpion it was all his; it mattered nothing how much he gave him. And if he were not he might take the money and go, his scheme successfully accomplished. At least he would know soon. He felt he must make at least a bid for instant release from this torture of doubt.

"Very well," he said suddenly. "When do you want it?"

"Now," said the other promptly. "I've got an idea I'd like to go to London and have a little time to-night. You won't come with me, I

suppose? No? That's a pity; I'd like to see how you behave when you cut loose. Here, let's ask Miller when the next train goes."

Miller came and explained that the next suitable train would go at six-fifteen. Mr. Kennard would be in town in two hours, not too late for dinner. Should he pack Mr. Kennard's things?

"Yes, pack them," said Kennard over his shoulder. He was watching Weddon as he wrote the cheque. "I'll take your six-fifteen."

"What about making it two?" he asked with an earnest hand on Weddon's shoulder. "Two is better than one—old proverb."

"I think, Mr. Kennard, I——"

"Oh, do say Kennard!"

"I think, Kennard," said Weddon, with a twisted smile, "that one thousand pounds is quite enough for a few quiet evenings."

"Fifteen hundred, then. Don't be inflexible, like a bally Roman in a toga."

"A thousand pounds only, Kennard," said Weddon firmly.

"I see you've just *got* to come and live with me!" exclaimed the other enthusiastically. "You're just the sort to keep expenses down and see that I didn't get too gay with the cash. Thank you," he said, taking the cheque and making as if to wipe away a tear. "I give you

my sacred word of honour that I won't spend any of this on drink—but I will.''

Half an hour later he shook Weddon's hand heartily and stepped into the car. ''I'll let you know how I get on,'' he said. Then, in a whisper behind his hand: ''Two clear days to get away in. *Damned* funny, isn't it?''

Then, chuckling deeply, he was borne away.

Chapter XIX *An Interlude*

WEDDON passed the next day devising schemes for avoiding Millicent on her return, and discarding them when formed. If he gave absence on business as an excuse, it would seem a feeble one from so devout a lover, situated as he was. A financier or a man of public affairs—assuming that such as these have time for love—might plead a call to any convenient capital to save a staggering market or to join a conference on which the fate of Europe depended, and be pardoned; but would it seem reasonable to her that any business connected with tranquil Glynning had sufficient urgency to take him from her at this of all times? No, the lie must be a better one.

To lie properly needs ability and practice in addition to a good memory, and Weddon was

hopelessly truthful by nature. But he finally evolved a tale, complete with details, of a cousin on the point of death and pleading for his presence, in a remote village in Northumberland. He selected that county because it was a good way off, and two or three days could be given to the visit. In that time he would surely know his fate; and in the meantime he would write to her and say again how deeply he loved her, though as he wrote it he would know that it might be the last time he would ever tell her this.

This scheme chosen, he sat down to write to her. And at that moment Mr. D'Esterre was announced.

"I was passing by, Mr. Weddon," he said, "and I thought I would drop in. It is unfortunate, but my daughter has a touch of influenza and will not be back so soon as I hoped."

Weddon stared at him for an instant. Then he murmured something about being very sorry to hear it.

"It is unfortunate. My sister wrote to say that the attack is not at all serious, but just sufficient to keep her in bed for a day or so. It has spoiled her short stay with my sister, who is going off to-morrow. But she will be left in good care of course. If she is not better by to-morrow, I will go up to her."

Weddon recovered himself and expressed sympathy. But, though shortly before he would have been aghast at the thought of any ailment attacking his beloved, the news came now almost as a relief. Influenza in a mild form meant no danger, and now he need not invent an excuse for avoiding her, and the letter that would wring his soul to write need not be written. Moreover, he could go to London and call on Lady Campage and ask after Millicent without any risk of seeing her; and he would be within quick reach of Mr. Powle, and learn at once if he had made any new discovery. If he was doomed he would know earlier than if he stayed at Glynning.

While he thought this out the Rector was discoursing on influenza as a national scourge, now happily getting milder. Undoubtedly it was carried by a germ. It had puzzled doctors for years, but they seemed to have it in hand now, and there was not the slightest cause for alarm. He himself had suffered from it in the winter before last. He had had a temperature of 103 for three days. Then it had gone to 105. Then down to normal; but, strange to say, up again suddenly to 104. It had left him very weak.

It was the usual talk about influenza, and Weddon agreed and made consolatory remarks the while he arranged plans in his mind. He told

the Rector that business took him to town on the following morning and he would make a point of calling and asking after Miss D'Esterre. He agreed that there was not the slightest cause for anxiety and that there was no reason for the Rector to leave his duties, and he expressed regret that her visit had been spoiled.

Mr. D'Esterre thanked him and asked him if he had any books on old prints. He had collected prints when at Oxford, but had rather neglected the subject of recent years, and now an article in *The Times Supplement* had reawakened his enthusiasm. Weddon found two books, and the Rector departed with them, after asking him to notify if he heard of any old prints going at a reasonable price.

On arriving in London, Weddon drove to the lawyer's office and was admitted at once into the room of Mr. Powle, who rose as he came in and looked anxiously at him.

"Anything new?" he asked abruptly.

"Only that he left for London shortly after you," Weddon replied. "For a night or two out, he says."

"I thought he would. Well, I have nothing to tell you except that I expect to meet the man I mentioned shortly—Winfield. He is coming back from somewhere abroad about to-morrow or

the day after, and I have left word that I must see him at once on an urgent matter. So Kennard has gone for a few nights out, eh? They will be rather expensive ones, I should say."

"Oh, that reminds me!" exclaimed Weddon. "He asked me for money. I should have written to you about it yesterday but I expected to see you shortly."

"He asked for money! How much?"

"I gave him a cheque for a thousand. I thought it best to——"

"You gave him a cheque for a thousand pounds, Mr. Weddon!" The lawyer was on his feet again.

"Yes. He said that he was getting short, and it seemed to me that if he really was Carpion it mattered little what I gave him. And if he wasn't, I thought——"

"Wait a bit, Mr. Weddon," interrupted the other. "Did he—did he seem content with that sum, or did he ask for more?"

"He suggested I should make it two thousand after I had agreed to one. But I said that one thousand was enough, and he took it without much argument."

"But did he—no, just tell me exactly how it was from the start."

Weddon recounted all that had passed between

him and Kennard. Mr. Powle, in a state of obvious excitement, rang for a clerk.

"Telephone to Mr. Brock at once," he said to him. "Tell him to come here at the earliest possible moment. A detective," he explained to Weddon when the clerk had gone. "Very clever man. We've got something to follow up now."

"Do you think that it may mean—he has gone?"

"Too early to say. But it looks better. His asking for cash so soon after my departure is a good sign—a very good sign. I didn't hope for that. I mustn't be led astray by theorizing, but it looks much better again."

"Again? Then your doubts have been getting stronger since you left."

"Yes; in a way. You see, having so little definite information to go on my opinion fluctuates. Just before you came I was in a doubtful mood. Now I am hopeful again. The amount is not a big haul for a crook, but the question is, would it have been policy for him to risk trying for a larger sum in the circumstances. If he is a crook he is walking on thin ice, and a delay would be dangerous for him. Look at it this way, Mr. Weddon. Assuming that he is playing a deep game, a thousand pounds is a large, but not absolutely absurd sum for a man to ask who is in

the position he pretends to be in—that is, wanting cash for immediate expenses of an orgy. But to insist on more would be to deviate from the reckless character he has assumed, and arouse suspicion and perhaps cause the delay that is dangerous. Do you see?"

"Yes. But would—would a man be likely to accumulate such a lot of evidence and so forth and carry out such a risky part for a thousand pounds?"

"Doubtless he would prefer more. But if it was all that he could hope to get by a sudden demand, he would have to be content with that. After all, it merely means using some knowledge that has come his way and playing a difficult part for a few days. When the part got too difficult, his lack of memory could come in very conveniently. And, after all, a thousand pounds is not such a bad haul for so short a period of effort. As I said before, there is no rule by which that class of gentry can be judged——" He broke off and looked up at the clerk who had just come in.

"Mr. Brock is out, sir," said the clerk, "but he will be back in an hour and they'll tell him to come at once."

"Very well, send him in the instant he comes. Now, Mr. Weddon," he went on, "shall we leave

conjecture until I have spoken with the detective? If you will be within reach of me—say at your hotel?"

"I must make a call at about three," replied Weddon; "possibly for an hour. But the rest of the time I shall be waiting to hear from you."

"That will suit perfectly; I hope to have some news before three, and I will come round to you."

Weddon made a pretence of eating luncheon, and spent the succeeding hour turning over the pages of magazines, but without acquiring any knowledge of their contents. Then a small page announced Mr. Powle, and he sprang to his feet.

The lawyer came in, and Weddon's heart leapt at the sight of his face.

"Gone!" whispered Mr. Powle, gripping him by the arm and walking with him towards a secluded corner. "Cashed your cheque the instant the bank opened and went off bag and baggage!"

"Where to?" asked Weddon. Then, realizing that this was a futile question: "I mean—er—he's really gone?"

"Gone, I hope, for good—so far as we are concerned. My man couldn't find any trace of his destination, and if he can't I should say nobody else can. He had his things put in a taxi

and just told the driver to go to the bank, and that's the last news of him. He's gone!''

''Then—do you think—that it is all safe?'' Weddon got the words out with difficulty.

''I do,'' said Mr. Powle, smiting the table with his open hand. ''In fact, it occurs to me I have to say to you, as Falstaff said to Master Shallow, that I owe you a thousand pounds. You've lost it through my stupidity.''

It seemed to Weddon that the band that had held his heart snapped at the moment and left him free. But he could only stare at the lawyer and wonder.

''Yes, Mr. Weddon, I can see plainly now. And, of course, I am marvelling at my gullibility: one is usually wise after the event. I have been fooled utterly in my old age by a clever rascal—and, what is worse, I have led you to throw away a large sum. I don't know yet how I ought to look on that part of it. I feel——''

''No,'' interrupted Weddon decidedly. ''The relief to me is so far beyond anything I can express that if it were twenty times the sum I should laugh at it. And you did not tell me to pay the man anything; the most you said on that point was that if he asked for money it would be a good sign. It was your care for my interests that prompted you to bring him to me.''

"It is very good of you to say so, Mr. Weddon; but if I were less relieved at the results it would be a feeble consolation to my conscience. You must think me a poor adviser. I have some slight comfort in the thought that he was the cleverest rascal I have ever met—but then my experience has not been with professional rogues" He sat with a rueful smile drumming on the table.

"Then you are quite sure now?" said Weddon after a pause.

"I should say that if anything is sure, this is. But a few days will clinch it beyond possibility of doubt. If you hear nothing from him within the next few days you can be sure that you never will. If he were really Carpion, would he have left like that when a day of two, at most, would have forced me to a decision? And then, again, his asking for two days in which to get away! Although that would have been—the whole attitude of the man would have been—in accord with the character of the Herbert Carpion I knew, the instant cashing of your cheque and the instant disappearance to Heaven knows where, puts the matter beyond a doubt. No, my firm opinion is that I have been utterly fooled, and I think you had better go to my son for legal advice in future, Mr. Weddon. I'm past my powers, evidently."

"I beg to disagree with you," said Weddon,

with a happy laugh, laying his hand on the old man's arm. "So please don't say that again."

"You are more generous than some people would be, Mr. Weddon. I have noticed that characteristic of yours before. But I will not say any more about that part. Now, each day that passes without your hearing from that man—and you will *not* hear from him, I am convinced—is added proof that it takes a clever man to outwit a professional crook."

"As I said, I can't describe the relief," said Weddon. "You see, there is another matter which—— However, I will tell you later."

He saw Mr. Powle to the door and into a taxi, and shook hands with him in grateful silence. Then he walked as if on air to make his call. In a quarter of an hour he would be under the same roof as his adored one. Though he would not be able to see her, he would at least be near her, and she was not lost to him. "Surely the bitterness of death is past," he quoted joyously as he went on his way.

Lady Campage was a tall, handsome lady with snow-white hair, rather like the Rector in the face, but completely different from him in manner.

"Nice business this, Mr. Weddon," she said as she came in. "My brother sent me a wire to say you were coming. Sit down, please. Here

am I leaving for the other side of the world to-morrow and that girl must go and get herself laid up at the wrong time.''

''How is Miss D'Esterre?'' asked Weddon anxiously.

''Oh, she's all right. She'll be up in a day or two. But it's a nuisance, because I wanted her to go about with me and so on, and I'm jiggered if I know why my brother didn't come up to look after her.''

''He tells me that his duties just now——''

''Stuff and nonsense! His duty is to his family. Here's poor Milly in bed and I'm off! Lucky some friends of mine are in the hotel—and she's got Marjory Theynell almost next door—but it's very unsatisfactory. Tell my brother that with my compliments, if you please.''

Weddon murmured that he would, meaning, of course, that he would do nothing of the kind. At that moment Miss Theynell came into the room and greeted him, looking at him rather curiously. He gathered that the elder lady was in the throes of packing, so, after a little more talk about the invalid, he rose to go.

''Kindly tell Miss D'Esterre that I'm awfully glad to hear she is better,'' he said to Marjory.

''Oh, *I'll* tell her,'' she replied.

He looked at her with faint suspicion; but her

face might have served for a picture of innocent girlhood.

"So that's Weddon," said Lady Campage when the door had closed behind him.

"That's Weddon," replied Marjory.

"And he's come into Glynning. Lucky bargee. What are the points in his favour?"

"Well, we all like him. He's a quiet sort in a way, but quite clever, I think. And he's a very plucky rider, and the Hunt thinks a lot of him."

"Is he? Well, that's all to the good. I ask because—well, do you think there is anything between him and Millicent?"

"I don't know," said Marjory. "I'm afraid I'm not a good judge of the symptoms. It may be that their present intimacy will in time ripen into warmer feelings and——"

"You can drop that swank, my girl, and answer the question."

"Oh, if you put it that way, Lady Campage, I should say there is quite a lot between them. That is to say, he goes a little pink whenever he hears her name, and so on. And he accidentally came to see her off on the train, and I saw one of her hankies sticking out of his pocket. And now he's gone hollow-eyed over her. He's changed in one day. Looks rather like it, doesn't it?"

"Yes. And a good thing for Millicent, I

should say, if he's that way over her. Before you get married, Marjory, see that the man is absolutely crazy for you first. Then there's a chance of things going well."

"I'll make a point of it," said Marjory.

"Good girl. Don't pay any attention to this rot about good pals and comradeship and equality between the sexes. When there's equality between the sexes all the fun's gone out of the world."

"I see."

"Write it down. But there's all that packing to do, and I'm wasting my time chattering!"

Weddon returned home in the evening. He had telegraphed to have any letters brought to the train, and when three or four were handed to him he had a moment of sickening fear that one might be from Kennard. But, with the exception of an invitation to dinner, they were all bills, presented with the expression of respect appropriate to a man of wealth and position. A wave of ecstatic relief passed over him: there never would be a letter from Kennard and he was free.

But the confirmed sense of relief did not prevent him from opening his morning letters in haste. Again he experienced conviction. With a very few days more he felt that to have even a momentary doubt would be to confess lack of reasoning power. The whole ugly affair could be

dismissed as a nightmare, and in time he would be able to laugh at his folly in being gulled so easily.

Three more days passed. He went to London each day and called on Mr. Powle, but that gentleman was beginning to be disinclined for discussion of the subject, which had a very sore side to him now. He called each day on Miss Theynell and an elderly, amiable couple staying in the hotel whom Lady Campage had deputed to watch over the invalid, and he learned that she would very shortly be able to return home. But she was not allowed to see visitors, and Marjory told him he must be patient. She had assumed an air of sisterly understanding that suited his mood well. The time was passing and his love was returning to health, and the black cloud that had come over his life had faded into a thin wisp of grey on the edge of a bright sky.

The Rector came up to take his daughter home. He took advantage of his stay to go to an auction and bid for some prints of Rowlandson. He explained to Weddon his regret that the variety of bee he had selected for a start had proved a great disappointment; they seemed to have almost a personal rancour for him, and he had been badly stung on several occasions. In fact, he was selling the hive at a sacrifice. Weddon, with a thought for his lady's hands,

applauded this, and told him of a junk shop he had passed in a side street which displayed prints that might possibly be of value. The Rector thanked him and made his way to the shop at once.

Chapter XX With Never a Penny of Monie

NEARLY a week had passed since Kennard took his departure, and peace was in Weddon's heart. Millicent had had rather a worse time than was expected, and when he called at the Rectory on the evening of her return he found that she was not allowed to be up. It would be better for her to rest after the short journey, her father said, and she would be able to go about on the following morning.

Weddon recommended patience to his soul. He received a letter from Mr. Powle stating that such information as he had acquired since they met had been very satisfactory—if further satisfaction could be considered necessary—and that he would be down by the late morning train and explain. Then, he added, this unpleasant matter could be called closed for good. Weddon joyously tore the letter into minute pieces, and some time later made his way to the Rectory. Mr. D'Esterre had sent a note to the effect that he would be glad of his opinion of some prints he had secured, and

that it would be advisable to come well before eleven because he had to go at that hour on business of the vestry fund.

Weddon timed himself to arrive at ten minutes to eleven, and found the Rector in the garden, bristling with impatience. He made apologies for being so late.

"It is a pity," said Mr. D'Esterre, "because I must go now. But you will wait for me here? Do! Millicent is in the drawing-room and will talk to you till I come back. I shall be back in an hour, and then we can have a nice long chat. To let you into a secret beforehand, I have achieved a wonderful bargain. It is almost unbelievable that a dealer would be so obtuse—and in Wardour Street, too. I feel rather guilty at taking advantage of him."

He hurried away and Weddon went into the drawing-room. Millicent was sitting on a sofa by the window, knitting. She was counting stitches and she did not look up.

"Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen rows. And all to be done over again," she said to herself.

He sat beside her and gently took the knitting away from her and laid it on a table. Then he took both her hands and kissed them, and she looked up at him.

"Am I very pale?" she asked.

"You are more lovely. And I thought that could never be."

They sat for a few moments and looked at each other in silence. She smiled a little, but he was very serious as he looked into her grey eyes, which seemed larger and with new depths in them.

"Has the time seemed long to you?" she asked at length.

"Yes, it has been a very long time. I may think of the proper words to express how long it has been, but just now I can't."

"And you came to ask about me so often, didn't you?"

"Yes, sweetheart, as often as I was allowed."

"You should have built a willow cabin at my gate. That is, outside the door of the hotel. But I suppose the police would have interfered."

"I walked there instead. I think the police know me by now as a possible burglar."

"You look very tired, poor thing. Did you really worry about me as much as that?"

"Yes, as much as that."

"But I wasn't ill really. I felt more lazy than ill. You shouldn't have worried."

"But I had a dream about you. I dreamed that I had lost you, Millicent. I may be able to tell you later what that meant to me, but I'll not try now. I want to forget it."

"Yes, don't talk about it," she said uneasily. "You should laugh at dreams. I dreamed once that my hair fell out in chunks, and I woke up sobbing and ran to the glass. But it was all right, as you see."

"As I see." He touched the light brown waves softly. "Yes, darling, I'll dream no more that I've lost you."

"You seem in a rather tragic mood this morning. And I want to be cheered up. First you take my knitting away and then you tell me of idle dreams."

"I've finished with them. Now, Millicent, as soon as your father comes back I'll tell him that you are going to marry me. It has been postponed once, but it shan't be again."

"Then let me have my knitting, please. I'll be making my jumper while you tell him."

"You shall have it. But first let us attend to business." He produced a little box and took from it a ring which he put on her finger.

She flushed deeply for a moment and examined the ring closely. "It's a darling," she said softly. "You know, you are very nice in some ways."

She kept her eyes on the ring she held out, but his arm was drawing her up to him, and the ring was eclipsed.

"I think that is enough for the present," she said, gently holding him away. "I want to examine it, if you don't mind. I think it's by far the prettiest you could have found."

"It took some fever of the brow to select one at all suitable to you," he explained. "You see, I didn't know anybody who could give me advice in the matter. I thought of asking Marjory to help, but I didn't like to tell her until you allowed me to."

"Marjory has been trying to be witty at our expense. Veiled congratulations and so forth."

"There will be no scope for her wit after to-day. Everybody will be expressing wonder at my undeserved good fortune. Do you know, Millicent, my old fear of you is coming back. You look so very beautiful."

"I'm glad of that—I mean about the fear. I was thinking you were getting much too confident for safety when you saw me off on the train."

"Let us talk of important matters. If you don't mind leaning your head on my shoulder it will rest you nicely. Thanks. Now, do you love me quite a lot more than the small bit you indicated last week by the gate? It had increased slightly by the next morning, you will remember."

"A little more. Say about fifteen per cent. more. It must be the effect of this ring."

"It's easy to see why I love you, but what makes you—— No, I won't ask. I'll just believe you."

"That's right; don't ask questions. Let us talk of frivolous things. But, first of all, I'm going to take my ring off until you've seen dad, because——"

"Oh, don't!" he exclaimed. "It's bad luck."

"Well, I've done it now. And don't talk of bad luck. You are in a creepy mood, I can see. I don't want dad to find me flaunting diamond rings without proper reason. Now, let me have its little box and I'll put it away. See." She kissed it and put it in the box. "Will that satisfy you?"

"It must. I wish you were strong enough to go out in the garden."

"But I am. Let us go out and take our farewell of the bees. They are to be sent away for displaying ungovernable temper."

"No, we'll go to the gate, where you said good-bye to me on that wonderful night when I first saw you and you thought what a dull stick I was, though you were too polite to say so."

"I didn't think that. I liked you a little bit then. You see I didn't understand you."

"Do you now?"

"Every little bit of you. Did you really think so much of me that first night?"

"I thought of you until the morning. The hunt was up in Elfland, and I had wandered into it. All the beauty of the world is in you, Millicent."

"Not quite all. The word beauty applies to a majestic woman with regular features and Paris gowns, not to a country girl with three freckles she can't get rid of."

"It applies to a girl with gold-brown hair and grey eyes that are dangerous to look into, and two dimples that come suddenly and disconcert nervous men."

"Beauty applies to statuesque queens on cinema advertisements."

"Beauty applies to a girl who is like a straight sweet flower, and so much above other girls that men go in fear of her."

"You overcome your fear at times," she remarked, for he had drawn her face up to his.

"It comes and goes. Just now it has gone."

When they returned to the house they learned that her father had sent word that he would not be back until lunch-time, and would Mr. Weddon please call in the evening without fail. Weddon agreed, after some protests, to Millicent's order that he must not come again until after dinner,

and took his departure and walked home, but without feeling the ground beneath his feet.

Mr. Powle arrived late in the afternoon. He had got over his relief at the disappearance of Kennard, and his manner was rather that of irritation at his own lack of judgment.

"I don't know why I should trouble you, Mr. Weddon," he said as they sat down in the library, "because the whole objectionable affair can be considered closed. But I met Winfield and had a talk with him—we have been acquaintances since I met him in Mexico, and we occasionally dine together and so forth—and I told him just enough for my purpose. He was greatly surprised to find out after nearly twenty-five years that I had gone to Mexico on that business of Herbert Carpion. However, he gave me all details that he could remember of the man. It wasn't very much that he could remember, but he was very decided in his opinion that the poor devil was dead and gone long ago. Not from any particular knowledge of the case as we know it, but from the common-sense view that no man would wait for a quarter of a century before revealing himself—a view that I ought to have taken from the beginning instead of being so confoundedly ready to listen to that rascal."

"I was as ready as you," said Weddon. "By

the way, the matter is secret enough, I suppose, with your friend Winfield? Not that it matters very much."

"Quite secret. He's a very sensible and reliable man. And even if he were not, no one would believe the tale. And, as you say, it doesn't matter very much. Now I think of it, he gave me a bit of information that would have saved us some bad nights if I had known it earlier. Casting back his memory to the time when Carpion was at his mine, it occurred to him that he had had some tattooing done on his arm. He remembered it because a wandering practitioner in the art had stopped at the place, and all the staff had been bitten with the idea of personal decoration. Carpion, it appears, had had an elaborate snake tattooed on his arm, and the incident had stuck in Winfield's memory for some reason or other. At any rate, he said he could swear to it if necessary. Luckily it is not."

"Luckily," echoed Weddon, with a laugh.

"Yes, that excellent rogue is probably chuckling at this moment at the ease with which he gulled a man of forty years' experience of the law."

"Let's agree to forget it," said Weddon cheerfully. "I have to go out immediately after

dinner, so you must pardon me if I leave you alone to-night.''

''I shall sit outside and read quite contentedly,'' replied Mr. Powle.

During dinner they talked on subjects that bore no relation to the recent unpleasantness. When Weddon, after the tenth glance at the clock, rose to go, Mr. Powle said that he would retire soon, as he wished to take an early train to town.

''Mr. Powle will take the nine-fifteen to-morrow, Miller,'' said Weddon to the butler, who had just come back into the room.

''Yes, sir,'' said Miller. ''I'll have everything ready, sir. And Mr. Kennard has arrived, sir.''

Weddon's cigarette-case dropped to the ground with a crash, and Mr. Powle staggered and sat down heavily in his chair. Kennard stood in the doorway, beaming upon them. He pointed first to Mr. Powle and then to Weddon, and he sang joyously :

> ''' There was old Potts, and young Potts,
> And middle-aged Potts as well.
> They were all Potts, jolly big Potts,
> Each Potts was quite a swell.' ''

''Say, you chaps, that's just come back to me suddenly. I remember I used to sing it to the greasers when I was jugged in Mexico, and they

quite took to it. Well, tell me you're glad to see old Bertie back."

They stood looking at him. But while the lawyer's face showed utter dismay, Weddon's showed no emotion whatever. For the moment all thought had been struck from him.

Kennard was evidently well ahead with his day's allowance. His face was flushed and he swayed slightly. From his trousers pockets he took two handfuls of crumpled notes and silver, and then turned the pockets inside out and left them dangling.

"All gone," he said. "All gone but this. I've been among the mammon of unrighteousness, and this is what they've done to me. Paris two days. Monte Carlo three days—or perhaps it was four—I forget which. At any rate, they've gone through me. But look here, what's troubling you? Didn't you get my wire, Weddon?"

"No," said Weddon, "I didn't get your wire."

"That's funny. But perhaps I forgot to send it. Yes, that's what it was; I was so terribly busy. But I mustn't play these games, you know. A thousand quid gone in a week! That's fifty-two thousand a year. Work it out for yourselves.

"Look here, Weddon," he went on, for there

was no reply, "you've just got to watch over me and see that I don't play the goat."

Weddon drew a long breath and turned to Mr. Powle.

"It seems we've both been wrong," he said quietly. "So I must accept the situation and prepare accordingly."

Mr. Powle only made a smothered exclamation and sat on, staring at the table.

"I suppose you made sure I was off," said Kennard. "My silly fault for not wiring. But buck up, Weddon; I want you to feel at home here. You're going to stay with me, old sport, and we'll have some blazing good times together. Now, don't look like that, because it's not my fault you both made so cocksure I was a crook. I told you who I was all along, and if you thought I was lying, it's your fault."

"Yes," replied Weddon, "you are cleared. I see now that you have told the truth, and I apologize for doubting you. And I think that's all," he added after a momentary pause, making for the door.

"Stop a moment, Mr. Weddon," called the lawyer, getting to his feet. "Please wait. Now, Mr. Kennard, there is one small matter in which I ask you to oblige me. Show me your arm. Turn up your sleeve and show it to me."

"What in thunder do you want to see a man's arm for?" asked the other in extreme wonder.

"I want to see it. Oblige me by baring your arm."

"Can't make you out, Powle." He stared suspiciously at him, and then threw off his coat and rolled up his sleeve. "But I'm not bashful. Fine arm, isn't it?"

It was the arm of a gladiator, long and lean and corded with muscle that rippled as he moved it, and white in strong contrast to the sunburned hand. But the only mark on it was that of an ancient scar.

"Got this in the Havana ring," he said, touching it. "Well, seen enough? Or do you want to see the other?" He slipped out the link of the other cuff and pulled up the sleeve. And they saw a snake tattooed in three gaudy colours, coiled round the forearm and with the head poised as if about to strike.

"Perhaps that's what you want to see," said Kennard, struck with a sudden idea and knitting his forehead in a frown of perplexity. "Now, who the hell could have told you of it?"

"Thank you," said Mr. Powle. "Very well, Sir Herbert, I suppose I must apologize also for doubting you."

He hesitated a moment as he watched Weddon

walk out. Then, with a little stiff bow, he went out too.

"Nice way to treat me," said the other, in an aggrieved tone. "Poor old Bertie doesn't seem popular. But thank the Lord," he added in a brighter tone, as he walked over to the bell, "he can still drink!"

Mr. Powle inquired where Weddon had gone. The butler told him that he had walked straight across the park in front. After a few minutes of doubtful consideration, Mr. Powle walked in the same direction and looked about him, but there was no sign of Weddon. He reached the line of woods and walked a little way into the shade and then raised a quavering shout. But there was no answer.

He returned to the house and sat in his own room, where he would be safe from interruption, thinking deeply. Miller came to tell him that dinner was ready and that Mr. Kennard was waiting, but he said that he would not eat now. The dusk came, and he went out again on to the front court and looked about him anxiously. And the dusk turned to dark, and Weddon did not come back.

A second time Weddon stayed out through a summer night. But this time he had strayed to the tangled wilderness by the west gate, and there

he lay clutching the rank grass, as a man would lie who is broken on the wheel.

Chapter XXI *Into the Dark*

TWO days later Mr. Powle, seated in his office, was surprised to find Weddon announced. He came in and greeted the lawyer calmly and with a momentary smile. But his eyes were sunken and his cheeks were white and hollow. So might have looked a prisoner who had been obdurate on the rack and forced his questioners to severity.

"Where have you been, Mr. Weddon?" asked the lawyer. "I'm more relieved than I can say to find you here."

"I've been in London," replied Weddon, "making some arrangements."

"I am greatly relieved. I stayed at Glynning all yesterday, in the hope that you would return. I was, of course, greatly distressed at the turn things have taken and——"

Weddon held up his hand. "Let us not talk of that," he said. "It's past argument now."

"Yes, I suppose so," said the other gloomily. "Well, in any case, I'm glad to see you here. I have been almost afraid——" Here he stopped abruptly. "I mean I almost thought that——"

"Oh, I've thought of it too," said Weddon,

with a laugh. "But there are reasons that prevented me. You see, if I shoot myself it would make it so unpleasant for the neighbourhood, among other and bigger reasons. I'm caught every way, and I have to go on living."

"I'm glad you take it so bravely. It is a terrible blow. But now that you are here we can perhaps talk over the matter calmly, and we'll find that no misfortune is so bad that it might not be worse. Now, I've been thinking of very little else for the past two days, and I've considered one or two schemes. Let me tell you one. This man Kennard—I mean Carpion—is well disposed towards you, as you know, and I've had a long talk with him. He is very anxious that you stay with him. It is a matter of surprise to me, I must confess, for it would be difficult to find two people with a greater difference in character. But there it is, and I think you should take advantage of it and agree. You could look after the accounts and the business generally, and keep him company and so forth; and it would certainly be a good thing for him, for he needs a guiding hand badly. That is one scheme. Another is, I think I can induce him to give you a substantial sum down. He understands the hardship of your case and the fact that—that—well, that having given up your former business position it would possibly be very

difficult for you to find another. For your sake, Mr. Weddon, I stayed with him—thinking, of course, that you would return at any moment—and I bore with his excesses. And on the whole he seems inclined to behave with generosity."

"Thank you," said Weddon. "I recognize that you have acted, as you always have acted, with the intention of helping me. But to prevent any misconception I will now say that I do not intend to live with him at Glynning or to take any money from him."

The other stared at him for a moment.

"Then, Mr. Weddon, may I ask what you intend to do?"

"I am going away."

"I wish you would allow me to reason with you, Mr. Weddon. I know I am right in saying that you have no private means. Where will you go—and what will you do?"

"I have no money, of course. All I had two days ago belongs to Carpion. I will take none of it."

"You are quixotic, Mr. Weddon," said the other half angrily.

"I don't think so. Perhaps I had better say that my temporary ownership of Glynning has taught me something that I had missed in my former life. And I will follow out what I have

learned. I know it is difficult for anyone to understand what I mean on such meagre explanation. But let us leave it. Nothing is more certain than that I have made up my mind."

"Glynning may be your own again some day."

"If Carpion dies—or does not marry. But I will not count on his death. He has a hard constitution, and he comes of a long-lived race. You see, I have thought it all out. I am going away, and I shall not be seen in England again."

"Going away. Yes, but where?"

"I shall not say. I have met an old friend—my only friend of the past—and he has promised to arrange that I have a free passage to—to where I am going. He offered me money when he had heard what I told him of my tale. And though he is comparatively speaking a poor man, I took it—or part of it—without hesitation as a gift. From no one else would I accept money. And I shall leave England for ever."

"Are you aware, Mr. Weddon, that life in a distant land—let us say for example one of the colonies—is far harder than life in England for an untrained man?"

"I understand that it is."

"And that there is risk of great hardship to the untrained and friendless man—possibly starvation."

"I have contemplated that also," replied Weddon, with a hard smile.

"But—but—— No, I *can't* understand your attitude."

"Then let me put it this way. You will not repeat what I say, Mr. Powle, I'm sure. I have lost far more than I can explain, but what else I have lost can be left unexplained: it is difficult for any man to appreciate the attitude of another. But I have lost so much that consolation of whatever sort is worthless to me. I shall go away and be lost to all who have known me."

Mr. Powle sat in gloomy silence for a time. At length he gave a deep sigh and spoke.

"It is a very bitter thing. To say I am deeply grieved at this happening is to say nothing. I am proved to have no blame in the matter——"

"No, how could you have any blame?"

"But that is of no use to you. Will you—er—promise to remember me if you should—well, if you should unfortunately come to want? I must put it very plainly."

"Thank you. But I will only promise that you shall never hear from me again." He rose to go. "So, good-bye, Mr. Powle. And a long farewell to all my greatness," he added with another laugh.

"Good-bye, Mr. Weddon." He shook his

hand mournfully and watched him go out of the door. Then he sat and looked broodingly at the table.

"There's finer stuff in him than I guessed," he said. "Right or wrong, he can stick to his decision. What waste there is in the world! And how long will Glynning last under that soldier of fortune?"

Chapter XXII *The Last Look*

ON a warm afternoon some few days later Weddon was tramping a dusty lane that led by a circuitous route to Glynning. He had got out of a station several miles distant and made his way through fields and byways to avoid risk of recognition as much as possible, and he had been ready to turn from his path or hide on the approach of anyone who might know him.

A week hence the cargo steamer on which Sampole had secured him a passage to Sydney—nominally as a steward—would take him away, never to return. But the enforced idle waiting in a cheap London lodging with only his despair for company had dragged him back to Glynning, to look once more at what he had lost there, and to sit down in the woods and think over every detail of his incomparably greater loss. Since the wound

could not kill him like a kindly wound to the body and bring him oblivion, he would himself devise an added torment and so give defiance to the strumpet Fortune, who had made it so that he could not take the quick and easy path away from pain; for if he died it must be when he was far removed from any chance of Millicent's hearing of it.

If he had the power to provide for his love by the hardest work he would have gone to her and told her he was ruined and ask her to wait; but it was hopeless to think of this. Whatever the past year had taught him it had made him of little added value in the market. He was again one of the great unwanted, one whose quality of use to the world could be duplicated by thousands of men picked at random. He who could never hope to keep himself far above poverty in the past must never dare to think of her again except as something radiant that had gladdened his life for a brief time and then gone away from him for ever. But to face her and tell her this was beyond his courage. She would know soon enough, but not from him.

He had no friends to leave, for he dared not see them. Doubtless there were many—and especially the Theynells and little Joan—who would be grieved for him when they knew and think of him for a time; but that would pass and

he would be forgotten by them. Even Sampole would forget him as years went by and no news came from him. He had taken part of the money he had offered so generously out of his savings almost without thanking him. His loss had swallowed up all emotion and he had none to spare even for his old friend. Perhaps if he lived on, and want and hardship scourged him sufficiently, he too might forget.

He arrived at the border of Glynning and, making his way through a gap in a hedge, walked cautiously through the undergrowth until he came to a path in the woods that led to a high part of the ground. From there he could see the house through the leaves, looking as it always did in midsummer, swept and garnished and embowered with sweet flowers. And there he lay without moving and took no count of time, for he saw the house as it was when he believed she would soon be the mistress of all and walk with him in its trim gardens.

He was aroused by the sight of Garnet coming across the turf in his direction, so he got up and made his way through the wood until he came to the path where he had met her on his return. He walked slowly along and went over that past happy afternoon—past a thousand years now—and hugged the pain to him.

"This is where I first lost my fear of her," he said quietly, when he came to the little gate. "I wonder at that now, for she seemed more lovely when she turned and looked at me. I felt rather brutal, because it seemed to me that I had crushed her pretty dress. Now why did it happen at all if it was to end like this? It seems very needless and wasteful."

He leaned against the gate and remained without moving, and nobody came by to disturb the quiet woodland.

"Yes," he said at length, "you had not thought of this, Fortune my Foe. Whatever comes now you can't do worse. If I could only find a quick way out!—but I can't till I'm lost on the other side of the world."

The afternoon was drawing on when he roused himself again. By clumps of thicket and fern he went towards a meadow which bordered the park. Beyond the meadow was a lane which would lead him in the direction he had to go to reach the distant station. But first he would have a final look at the Rectory if he could find a securely hidden spot; he might even see the form of his lost one in the distance.

He had passed nobody, so emboldened by the deserted look of all about him he went into the open and walked by the flank of a hedge. And

as he turned where the hedge turned he came face to face with her.

For a few moments they looked at one another in silence. She was pale, and her eyes had a look of suffering, but she was intolerably beautiful to him. Fortune had heard his defiance. This was the blow she gave in reply.

"You must tell me about this," she said at length very quietly. "I think I have the right to know."

"I can't," he replied hoarsely. "I am going away."

"Oh, so that is the explanation. But I have a good deal of curiosity—and I should like to know—— No, I'll not ask what you evidently don't wish to tell me. . . . But since we have met I can give you this." She turned away and reached in the sleeve of her frock for a handkerchief. She unfolded it and faced him again with her ring held out, but he only stared stupidly at it.

"Take it, please," she said.

He took the ring and looked blindly before him. Then he turned and had his last look at her face. He lowered his eyes until he saw only her feet. And then he turned again to where a reedy pool showed between the bushes and flung the ring far off. A tiny splash was heard, and

Millicent gave an involuntary cry of pain and turned and went away.

"There is no God," said Weddon to the neighbouring trees.

He stood silently; and he might have stayed there till the night came, for time had stopped again for him. But he was recalled to consciousness by a scream of terror that startled the still air.

Chapter XXIII — *"El Huero"*

WITH the exception perhaps of Mr. D'Esterre's experimental bees, the only thing in the neighbourhood of Glynning with a touch of ferocity to it was Muffin Man, the prize bull of Mr. Symonds, who rented the adjoining farm. Its name had been selected by Mr. Symonds' little daughter, who had considered it appropriate for reasons not easily understood by others. And Muffin Man had found a gap in the hedge of his pasture and wandered through into a meadow, where he had had an adventure.

In the ordinary way Muffin Man gave little trouble. He could be handled easily by the farm hands of his acquaintance who fed and tended him; but it was known that on occasions he could display temper, and two boards at opposite ends

of his pasture warned strangers that he was best avoided. And that afternoon when he had got through into the meadow a small dog of sporting tastes had barked at him and careered about him in the manner of gadflies. He had become seriously annoyed and charged at the small dog with intent to mangle him; but he might as well have tried to spike the sunbeams, and he got himself in a moist and rabid state. The owner of the dog, a stranger who was also of sporting tastes, at length got tired of the game and whistled him off. The little dog came to him and received congratulations and went away satisfied, and lived happily ever after. But Muffin Man, snorting with rage, caught sight of Millicent crossing the meadow, and just at that moment in the middle of it, and as she had on a red sash and red ribbon in her hat, he moved over to see about it.

She became aware of him with a shock; lost in her unhappy thoughts she had not noticed the incident of the little dog. She stopped and then moved slowly backwards, and her face became whiter than before. Muffin Man, with his eyes hot and sombre, followed her slowly. She stopped with her heart quivering, and he stopped. Then she moved back again and he moved on, but this time with a quicker step. Her courage went and she gave a piercing scream and turned to run.

Weddon leapt over the stile and ran to her, waving his stick. "Keep still a moment!" he shouted. "Keep still!"

She turned again in a paroxysm of confusion and terror as she heard his shout. The bull swayed his head round and regarded Weddon as he came up.

"Run now!" cried Weddon. "Run to the stile!"

Hypnotized by terror she could only obey without thinking, and his heart was filled with a flood of joy as he saw her run and the bull paw up the turf and come to meet him. Fortune had relented at the last and here was the way out! He smote the bull across the eyes with his stick and sprang back. In another instant she would be safe beyond the stile.

Muffin Man had it easily his own way. He made a rush and hooked Weddon under the shoulders and threw up his head. Weddon went round once in the air and fell sprawling and lay still.

Millicent gave another agonized scream and sank down on her knees. The bull trotted up to Weddon and she closed her eyes.

"Jump, my girl!" called a loud harsh voice. "Jump, damn it! Don't stay here!" A tall,

bearded man ran past her, tearing off his coat as he came.

Muffin Man was preparing at his leisure to lift and rend the crumpled person at his feet, when he found himself in the dark : a coat was resting over his eyes. The light came again and there, a few feet away, stood another man. Here was something that must be torn and rended and tossed about ! So he proceeded to the doing of it.

Sir Herbert Carpion stood in an attitude provocative to any bull of pedigree. He had his jacket laid across his walking-stick and held it in front of him and gently waved it. He stood erect, with his feet close together, begging to be spiked.

Muffin Man shut his eyes and charged. But he charged into space. And the man, strange to say, had not moved ; he was still apparently in the same spot and in the same saucy attitude. Now he moved away a few steps and waved the coat again.

"*Andale, torito!*" said Carpion caressingly.

Muffin Man appeared to be gauging the distance.

"Don't waste time," said Carpion joyously ; "the crowd's looking at you. Well, I'll help

you, then." He stepped up and thrust his walking-stick into Muffin Man's tender nostril and twisted it savagely. Muffin Man snorted and charged again—and again he charged the air.

Carpion, leisurely arranging the coat to hang on the stick, was filled with happiness. He stepped round to face Muffin Man, whose muzzle was now slobbering with foam. The blanched girl by the stile represented five thousand pretty *poblanas* in white shawls, the crumpled man on the turf was a *torero* who had lost out in the game. Fat Muffin Man was a quick, black Andalusian, red-eyed and bleeding and gaudy with coloured darts and mad with rage. And he was blazing in pink and gold, *El Huero,* for whom Elvira de la Torre had stabbed Cholita Perez in the breast so that she died in ten minutes; and the English sky with its foam of fleecy clouds was the blue sky of Lima.

"*Pronto!* you fat cow!" exclaimed Carpion. "Here, they're coming to spoil the fun!" He glanced over his shoulder at five or six men coming in the distance, running and shouting; and then stepped aside to avoid the hurtling mass of Muffin Man.

Again the stick dug in the bull's nostril with a torturing twist, while Carpion spoke fluent colloquialisms in Spanish to him to rouse his spirit.

"Something fancy this time," he said encouragingly. "It's a long time since I tried it and it's rather a pity to waste it on a poor old mule like you; but let's see what you can do. Just hook me neatly in the stomach, *torito,* while you have a good chance. I won't move, so just risk it. That's it! Now try——"

Between twenty-five and fifty there is a great gulf of time, but Carpion had forgotten this. For an instant he hung on Muffin Man's horn—and then the turf shook to his fall. *El Huero* had fought his last bull.

Then men passed ropes about Muffin Man and passed a stick through his nose-ring and led him away, trumpeting his fury. And others went to get hurdles from the hedge. The little dog who had done it all was at the time trying to dig out a rabbit some mile or so away.

Chapter XXIV "*Fortune My Foe*"

CARPION had been thrust through the middle and his bones were shattered, and he was far past hope of recovery. He was laid in the first bedroom that the stretcher-bearers came to, which happened to be the one in which he was born. And there he was soon to die.

Carpions lay all over the earth. The family

had started too late for the Crusades, but they had since lavishly marked the sites of England's battles with their bones, and not a few had died on voyages of discovery or in desert regions of sand or ice. A Carpion was on the *Golden Hind,* and he died of a calenture just before the taking of Nombre de Dios. Another was among the batch flung overboard after the first broadside at Trafalgar. Great fighters and wanderers and hunters; but soon there would be no more of them.

A dislocated shoulder constituted the chief of Weddon's injuries; Muffin Man's horn had caught him just under the shoulder and jerked it out of place. But he was badly bruised and his head was bandaged, and he was sufficiently the loser in the bout.

"Mr. Kennard's very uneasy in his mind," said the nurse to Weddon. It was the second day after the happening, and he was sitting propped up with pillows. "Miss Walker's had a lot of trouble to keep him quiet. He says he wants to see you; but, of course, that's out of the question."

"Luckily my head's not hurting much to-day," said Weddon. "I'll go and see him."

"You won't," said the nurse. "Perhaps you can be carried to see him to-morrow—that is, if he's not delirious. He may go at any time now."

"If you please, Miss Mellows, will you help me to stand up?"

"Don't be absurd, Mr. Weddon," said the nurse sharply. "The doctor would be furious if I did anything like that. Furious with both of us."

"I think it would be best if you helped me to get straightened up," observed Weddon. "Once I'm on my feet I can manage all right."

"You mustn't, Mr. Weddon! I'm responsible for you and—— Oh, don't be so absurd!"

"Your care for me is beyond praise, my dear lady, but I'm going to visit the other patient. That's right. If I can put my arm round your neck I'll do splendidly."

"The doctor," said Miss Mellows as she moved slowly along with Weddon's arm over her ample shoulders, "will be simply furious."

"Don't tell him, then," suggested Weddon.

Almost tearfully, and with muttered remarks on his obstinacy, Miss Mellows helped him along the corridor and into the room. There he stood looking down at the swathed bundle which represented Sir Herbert Carpion, eighth and last baronet.

There was some angry whispering between the two nurses, and then a chair was brought and Weddon was helped to sit down.

"I'll sit quietly till he knows I'm here," he said.

At last the haggard eyes opened and stared at him. Then, after a moment, the lips writhed into a grin.

"Here I am, Carpion," said Weddon.

"Good old bird . . . knew you'd come. Tell those ministering angels . . . to beat it. I've got . . . something to tell you."

"You see, we must be alone for a bit," said Weddon apologetically to the nurses. "Will you please wait at the other end of the room? I'm deeply sorry to be so mutinous, but there's really no way out."

The two exchanged glances and then, after an inspection of Carpion's gaunt face, they went to the farther end of the big room and stood by the window exchanging opinions on the folly of men.

"Geezer of mine . . . seems to think it's her job . . . keep me alive . . . ever so long. If she can wring extra day out of me . . . counts so many points."

"Feeling very bad?" asked Weddon, bending his head close to catch the gasping whispers.

"Yes . . . bad's the word. My fault . . . trying to be too clever. You got off light, old sport."

"Yes, Carpion. You've paid everything for me. Why do you still call yourself Kennard?"

"Because I damn well . . . feel like it. Counted on your coming back . . . talk over things first. Now it doesn't matter. But I was going . . . play the game . . . if you'd let me."

"You've played it straight all through, Carpion. But I'm afraid it's too late for me to own it now."

"If that fatted calf hadn't hooked me . . . we'd have got on well together. Think of it! Me! My God, Weddon, it's that . . . it's that hurts me! I feel like praying . . . none of the old-timers . . . hear about it."

"Don't think about it," said Weddon. "It'll only hurt you to raise your voice."

"Hurts pretty damn bad . . . whether I raise it or don't. Guts are ripped out . . . and I've broken about everything. Good old Weddon . . . came along to see me . . . though you're in pretty bad fix yourself."

"Look here," he went on in his pain-ridden whisper after a long interval, "you've got the place. Glad of it . . . since can't have it myself. Now I want you to swear you'll . . . do something I want."

"I swear to do anything you want."

"That's right. Now don't let anybody know I'm Carpion. I'm Kennard . . . man who came to see you . . . reasons that don't concern anybody. Don't let them think last Carpion was killed by . . . tame family pet. If it got out . . . one thing 'd lead to another . . . and some of the old hands 'd hear of it. And I fancy I hear them laughing. *El Huero,* eh! So I'm Kennard, remember. All man cracked . . . on one thing. This is mine. But you've sworn."

"Yes," said Weddon, "I'll do as you tell me. But consider this part of it, Carpion: you're the last of your family, and don't you think you should——"

He stopped abruptly, for a sour grin had appeared on the other's face.

"Stow that, old sport. What do you think . . . man in my fix cares about the family tree? Threw all that sort of thing away . . . long time ago. But there is one thing . . . if I can get it out . . . I'm getting sore."

"Don't say anything more now," said Weddon. "Rest a bit and I'll wait. You'll feel better in a little while."

"No, it's gone," he gasped feebly. "Look here, Weddon, plant me . . . in the old Carpion vault. Label the box . . . 'Bill Kennard.'

That's all. Put me beside my ancestors. Idea of mine. . . . I'd like to see how they look on the Day of Judgment . . . when they find old Bertie's . . . sneaked alongside of them after all. Here, I mustn't laugh."

The two nurses came over quickly and looked at his writhing mouth.

"I'll give him something," whispered Miss Walker to Weddon. "Go now!"

He was helped back to bed by the now thoroughly exasperated nurse, but he was oppressed with a new sense of bitterness, and he paid little heed to her reproaches. To him at least Carpion had shown friendship—a friendship as strange as it was sincere—and he had repaid his offer of help with contemptuous neglect. And Carpion was dying because he had come to save him. And in dying he was giving him all again; and giving it cheerfully, though he was racked with pain. He had felt pity for the young soldier who had lost all so early, but now he felt a far deeper pity, for he had lost again at the point of winning.

The rest was all bewilderment. His head was hot and aching—the nurse was right, from the medical point of view, when she exclaimed against his folly in moving—and he could not think clearly or picture how wonderfully the position was

changed. It seemed to him then, worn and feverish and shaken as he was, that the old happiness could never come back, built on the cracked and leaking body that would soon be cold.

A day passed, and Carpion still lived on, but Weddon could not go to him; his mind was wandering again from the injury to his head, and he was too weak to move. But with another day a change came, and the doctor agreed that, since Weddon must insist on making extra difficulties for himself, he had better be wheeled into the room of the other and so prevent the risk of his attempting to walk there again. So he was brought to the bedside of Carpion; and there he sat, talking to him when he could whisper a reply, and remaining patiently for long intervals when he was unconscious; and the strange friendship made the dying man rest easier.

He had returned to his room after one of these visits, and was sitting by the window, when Mrs. Theynell came with her husband to see him. She was rather inclined to hold up hands of astonishment and horror of the tragedy, which had mystified the whole neighbourhood. She said she hoped it would be a warning to Symonds (the owner of Muffin Man), but without explaining her exact meaning, which had to be taken in a general sense. But she hurried through what she had to

say on these matters and then told her husband to go away.

"Now, Mr. Weddon," she said, "Millicent is coming in. I'll be over at the other window arranging your table. It's in a muddle."

Before he could answer she departed, and returned instantly with Millicent. She placed a chair for her beside Weddon's and went to the farther end of the room, where she was heard moving things about. A really gracious and excellent woman.

Weddon could say nothing; he could only look at his love's downcast face. She raised it and looked pityingly at his bandaged head, and there were tears in her eyes.

"I've come to see you," she said, "because I must know. You saved me. Why are you going away?"

"I'm not going away now, Millicent."

Then there was a silence.

"Will you take me again, Millicent?" he said. "If you don't, there's nothing worth while for me again."

"Yes," she answered.

He laid his hand on hers where it rested on the chair, and there was a longer interval of silence. Speech seemed useless. Mrs. Theynell was busily flicking away dust that did not exist.

"Will you tell me what has happened?" asked Millicent at length.

"My darling, that's just what I can't do. It was something that came to change everything and take you away from me. And it didn't come after all."

"Who is Mr. Kennard?" she demanded suddenly.

"You are my very beautiful sweetheart. Will you be very kind to me and not ask that question?"

She sat thinking for a little while. Then she answered very quietly:

"Very well, I'll not ask you. He is dying, poor thing!"

"Yes, it's only a question of a little time."

"Shall I lay my head on your sound arm a little?"

"Oh, if you will, darling! I'll soon be well if you do."

Mrs. Theynell startled them a quarter of an hour later by announcing that Millicent must go, and she rose obediently.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Theynell," said Weddon. "Some day I'll be able to thank you properly."

"It's your business to get well quickly. Never mind about thanks. Now, I'll bring Milly to-morrow. Her father's coming, too, to see you.

But the doctor said we mustn't stay more than half an hour, and it's long past that. Now don't get your head excited."

"My head's all right," he said gratefully. "You've cured me, and I'm going to walk about the place in a couple of days."

When Millicent came with her father and Mrs. Theynell on the following morning she slipped away from them and, looking for the butler, asked him to take her to Mr. Kennard's nurse.

"I'm afraid it can't be done," said that responsible lady in reply to her suggestion. "The doctor wouldn't allow it. Are you a friend of Mr. Kennard's?"

"Yes," said Millicent promptly. "I must see him if it's possible. Of course, if you tell me it will hurt him to speak, I can't do it. But if it doesn't, please, please let me see him!"

Miss Walker hesitated, and then relented. "Perhaps you could for a little while. He's not in pain now; he's numbed all over. But his brain is clear enough, which is very unusual in a case like this. It's wonderful that he is able to speak at all. He has very little time to live now, poor man, and if it's very important I think I can take you in. Of course, he may be unconscious, but he wakes up every now and then."

"Thank you," said Millicent humbly. "I shall not forget your kindness."

She went in softly and stood looking down at Kennard's face. The nurse placed a chair for her and then went to the window. Millicent sat on in silence, patiently waiting.

At length Kennard groaned slightly and moved his head. Then he was looking at her with a steady stare.

"So you *have* come, Milly." Even in that still room she could barely catch the words.

"My name is Milly," she answered. "How did you know that?"

"How did . . . I know it?" His forehead wrinkled with a perplexed look. Then his stare changed its character, and his lips twisted into a smile.

"Thought at first . . . you were . . . someone I knew. So your name's Milly too? What's your other name?"

"D'Esterre," she replied. "My father is the Rector here."

"D'Esterre, eh? Think of that now!" He stared long and wonderingly at her. "So that's how it is . . . after all!"

"Why did you come?" he asked after another long interval of silence.

"Did you know my mother?" she asked him, bending close to his face.

"I? No, my dear. . . . Never knew your mother."

"Not even a long time ago?"

"No . . . never knew your mother," he said with a grin.

"Is your name Carpion?"

"No, you funny young thing. Name's Kennard."

"So that's why he was going away," she said after a pause. "I can see it all now."

"You've got . . . very pretty eyes, my dear . . . but you see all wrong. Tell you my name's Kennard. Never been near the place . . . all my life. Look here, I'll swear it."

"No, don't!" she exclaimed in horror. "Don't swear it, please."

"All right. But don't you contradict. So you're going . . . to marry Weddon."

She only nodded in reply.

"And I never saw . . . what was wrong. With all my smartness . . . didn't see it. No wonder he acted . . . like drunken sailor. Well, my dear, I'm glad. I like him. . . . Means a lot . . . from me."

"If it's any use," he went on, "I'll give

you both my blessing. Never given blessing before . . . but seems a sporting thing to do. And I'd like to give you . . . nice wedding present . . . but truth is I'm dead broke . . . more ways than one. . . . Kennards are always unlucky. Now, what on earth are you . . . blubbering like that for? Thought you looked . . . sort of girl that could take a joke."

"Nothing to cry for," he whispered after a few moments. "But I suppose your mother . . . was a bit soft-hearted. Runs in families. Didn't run in mine, though. Now you'd . . . better go. Remember the name's Kennard. Don't go mixing me up . . . with those rowdy old Carpions. Good-bye, Milly."

"Good-bye," she said very gently. Then she bent down and kissed his haggard cheek.

"Thanks, Milly. . . . Very nice of you." The hard eyes had softened at last.

She went out and quickly down the stairs and out through the front door, and made her way home alone.

At a little before the dawn the nurse went to look at Carpion and found him dead.

THE END

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