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SHORT STORIES OF TO-DAY

SELECTED BY
J. W. MARRIOTT
EDITOR OF "GREAT MODERN BRITISH PLAYS"
"ONE ACT PLAYS OF TO DAY"
"THE BEST ONE ACT PLAYS
OF 1935" ETC.
AUTHOR OF "THE THEATRE" ETC.

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PREFACE

WHENEVER a collection of short stories is offered to the public, the critic's task is perfectly simple: he expresses surprise that certain of the stories have been included, more surprise that certain other stories have been omitted, and finally speculates as to methods (if any) employed in making the selection.

Probably no two people would agree in their choice of stories, and there is no point in apologizing for the present volume. I have brought together what I consider to be characteristic work of nearly a score of distinguished modern writers, and, like the man who took his clock to pieces, I have still enough material left to make several more.

I believe that these stories will give pleasure in the reading of them. They may even stimulate the desire to write new stories. Until a few years ago there were only two familiar types of exercise in the English lesson: (1) the reproduction of an anecdote from memory, and (2) the writing of an essay on a prescribed theme. The composition of original stories is excellent practice not only in expression, but in imaginative and logical thinking and in the general technique of style. After all, few people understand the nature of an essay, but nearly everybody knows something of the structure of a story. Moreover, the writing of a story is exciting and popular, and (if one may say anything so unscientific) generates its own

power as it moves along. The difficulty with many beginners is to bring them to a standstill.

I would take this opportunity of expressing my indebtedness to the authors (or their representatives) and to the publishers of the various stories which I have been permitted to include in the collection. Sincere thanks are hereby tendered to the author for "Little White Frock," from *The Love-a-duck and Other Stories* (Hutchinson and Co.); the author for "False Colours," from *Light Freights* (Methuen and Co., Ltd.); the author for "The Man who was Blind"; the author for "The Truth about Pyecraft," from *The Country of the Blind* (Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd.); Mr Clement K. Shorter and Messrs Ward, Lock and Co., Ltd., for "Priscilla," by Dora Sigerson Shorter, from *The Father Confessor*; the author and Messrs Chatto and Windus for "A Propos des Bottes," from *Fiery Particles*; the author and Mr John Murray for "The Red-headed League," from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*; the author for "The Face on the Wall," from *London Lavender* (Methuen and Co., Ltd.); the author and Messrs Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., for "The Celestial Omnibus," from *The Celestial Omnibus and Other Stories*; the author for "The Happy Hangman"; the author for "A Model Man," from *Stories without Tears* (Mills and Boon, Ltd.); the author and Messrs John Lane, The Bodley Head, Ltd., for "The Adventure of the Kind Mr Smith," from *The Joyous Adventures of Aristide Pujol*; the author and Messrs Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., for "First Impressions," from *Next Door Neighbours*; the author and Messrs Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., for "At Home, Beloved, at Home," from *While Paris Laughed*; the author for "Sheep Sleep," from *Breadandbutterflies*.

(Mills and Boon, Ltd.); the author and Messrs John Lane, The Bodley Head, Ltd., for "The Burglars," from *The Golden Age*; the author and Messrs Cassell and Co., Ltd., for "The Three Tools of Death," from *The Innocence of Father Brown.*

J. W. M.

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INTRODUCTION

MOST children begin to invent stories before they are five. The instinct seems so natural that it must have been acquired early in the history of the race. A lonely child creates an imaginary playmate—brother, sister, fairy, rabbit, or, in one case that I knew, a "lickle speckle hen"—and the two have adventures that go on day after day like a newspaper serial or an old ballad. The literal-minded adult who is usually alarmed by this juvenile amusement fails to perceive that the child is merely exercising his imagination and making his first experiments with form.

These apparently interminable narratives do not satisfy for long. They work up to no climax: they have no finality. A series of incidents, such as those that make up our daily life, do not of themselves produce a satisfying story. It comes to pass that the child, growing older and wiser, almost unconsciously 'touches up' an incident in the telling. The thing that happened contained a mass of irrelevant matter which could be omitted with advantage; it was obviously rather plain and needed to be embroidered with fancy; it lacked unity—certain things did not seem to be quite 'right' and had to be modified; the contrasts needed intensifying; the dialogue lacked point and sparkle; the climax might have been more humorous or moving if only . . . well, why not assume that it happened otherwise? The narrator takes a

lump of clay and moulds it 'nearer to his heart's desire.' A story should always be too good to be true.

This process of blending fact and fiction is not mendacity: it is a creative effort to satisfy a craving for something artistic and 'finished.' Rumours which have been shaped and coloured by a hundred minds are more exciting than their subsequent explanations. All art aims at capturing the spirit rather than the detail (unless the spirit happen to be in the detail), and there is often more art in rejecting than in inventing. A story must give the reader or the listener a sense of completeness, as does a triumphant sonnet or a stirring speech.

It is generally assumed that short stories are capable of being divided into two classes, namely, those which attempt to present phases of actual life and those which are written to divert or distract the casual reader. The former class of story is intended for the small group of people who crave for reality; the latter professes to provide a way and escape from 'the life which now is' into a world of melodramatic excitement and romance. The one is for critical persons with a sense of humour (or proportion), while the other is for the omnivorous and undiscriminating general public. It should be added that scores of good stories are both amusing and 'true,' while hundreds of mediocre stories are neither.

Again, it is our habit to divide short stories into two further distinct classes: (1) those which are primarily concerned with character, incident being of subordinate importance; (2) those which aim deliberately at plot, the actors being little more than puppets or pieces in the game. And for some reason or other stories which depict character are assumed to be 'highbrow,' while the stories in which dummies play

their predestined parts (as purveyors of a plot) are regarded as popular entertainment or relaxation.

This twofold classification is not satisfactory, although there is a certain justification for it. The only permanent interests in a story are human thought and emotion, for speech and action are nothing more than easy methods of representing these vital qualities. One deduces what a character thinks or feels by his language and conduct. The 'action' story is merely a particular mode of expression. All stories are essentially studies in character.

If the people about whom we read do not seem real —if they talk unnaturally or absurdly (as they often do in stories), and if their actions hint at imbecility or hysteria—then we cannot feel profoundly interested in their joys and sorrows. Still less can we be thrilled by them.

On the other hand, we do want a story to be a story. We want to share the adventures of other people, because adventures are emotional excursions. To one reader a clever analysis of motives does yield new sensations, and is as exciting as a detective story or a 'mystery'; to another it is a tedious hold-up of sensations. The two classes of stories are not distinct: each owes a large debt to the other.

Darwin found more romance in a garden than Stanley found in Africa. London is as full of comedy and tragedy as a remote town on the fringe of the desert or on the uplands of Tibet. A good story may discover more excitement and humour in a suburban villa than in the cowboy-haunted West. As the French are never weary of asserting, treatment is everything. Maupassant will make a delightful story from the flimsiest materials. Sir James Barrie will make your heart beat faster by a description of a

servant-girl posting a letter. Mr Stacy Aumonier will move you to tears by revealing the pathos that lies hidden in the folds of a little white frock. Mr W. W. Jacobs will find more humour in the talk of ordinary sailors than in the patter of professional comedians.

One need not be a cook to know when the porridge is burning. For every one who can write a good story there must be thousands who can appreciate good craftsmanship when they see it. There is no need to study a book on short-story writing in order to learn that the interest is cumulative; that the story must move consistently upward to a climax, and thence to an effective solution; that the characters must be convincing; that the events must be credible and indeed inevitable; and so forth. Our innate sense of 'rightness' is the only sure guide. We recognize a fine story as we recognize a beautiful statue. If the average reader does not respond to the best there is something seriously wrong which no amount of exposition will set right. The only reason why people devour third-rate plays and stories is that they have never encountered anything better.

A few years ago the short story was regarded with a mild contempt by the novelist of established reputation, but this is so no longer. Publishers have recently been producing volumes of short stories, and have been rather astonished at the demand. There are dozens of excellent writers of short stories alive to-day, and whole battalions of ambitious young men and women are trying their 'prentice hand on fiction for the monthly magazines. The careful reading of a volume of first-class stories will teach them infinitely more than a cycle of lectures on the subject.

The demand for short stories is, after all, precisely what we might have expected. We live in an age

which does not encourage garrulity and is impatient of digression. The preacher has to deliver his message in twenty minutes; the newspaper article is less than half the length of its predecessor of ten years ago; the novel must be cut until there is no superfluous padding. It is easy to denounce the restlessness of the times, but it has one altogether admirable result in literature: it compels us to seize upon essentials. The writer may say what he must, but he must not say what he may.

SHORT STORIES OF TO-DAY

LITTLE WHITE FROCK

STACY AUMONIER

STACY AUMONIER'S short stories are delightful because they have the supreme merit of being essentially good 'stories' They have other excellent qualities—humour, pathos, vivid characterization, 'atmosphere,' and so on—but they are always masterpieces of construction or design. In every story there is a theme which is worked out in incident and dialogue rather than in dissertation and analysis. The psychology is concealed, but it is none the less true for all that.

Mr Stacy Aumonier was also a painter, a novelist, and had considerable experience on the stage. He was perfectly equipped for story-telling, and in a remarkably short time he won recognition on both sides of the Atlantic. He died in 1928.]

WHEN their careers are finished, the painter, the author, the architect, the sculptor, may point to this or that, and say, "Lo, this is my handiwork. Future generations shall rejoice in me."

But to the actor and the executive musician there is nothing left but—memories.

Their permanence lies in the memories of the people who loved them. They cannot pass it on. Some one may say to you, "Ah! my boy, you should have heard Jean de Reszke." Or, "You should have seen Macready play that part." And you are bound in all politeness to accept this verdict, but if you have not heard Jean de Reszke, nor seen Macready, it leaves no definite impression on you at all. Indeed the actor is in worse

case than the musician. For at the present time there are ingenious mechanical devices for caging the performance of a musician with varying degrees of success, but no mechanism could ever imprison the electric thrill of Joseph Jefferson or Henry Irving on their great nights of triumph. They are gone for ever, cast away among the limbo of the myths. These melancholy reflections occurred to me on the first occasion when I visited Colin Brancker. I met the old chap first of all in the public library. He had a fine distinguished head with long, snow-white hair. He was slim, and in spite of a pronounced stoop he carried himself with a certain distinction and alertness. I was a fairly regular visitor to the library, and I always found him devouring the magazines and newspapers which I particularly wanted to read myself. A misunderstanding about a copy of *The Saturday Review* led to a few formal expressions of courtesy, on the following day to a casual nod, later on to a few words about the weather, then to a profound bow on his part, and an inquiry after his health from me. Once we happened to be going out at the same time and I walked to the end of the road with him.

He interested me at once. His clear, precise diction, with its warm timbre of restrained emotion, was very arresting. His sympathy about the merest trifles stirred you to the depths. If he said, "What a glorious day it is to-day!" it was not merely a conventional expression, but a kind of pæan of all the joy and ecstasy of spring life, sunshine, and young lambs frisking in the green meadows.

If he said, "Oh! I'm so sorry," in reply to your announcement that you had lost your bus ticket coming along and had had to pay twice, the whole dread incident appeared to you envisaged through a mist of

tears. The grief of Agamemnon weeping over the infidelity of Clytemnestra seemed but a trite affair in comparison.

One day with infinite tact he invited me to "his humble abode." He occupied the upper part of a small house in Talbot Road. He lived alone, but was apparently tended by a gaunt middle-aged woman who glided about the place in felt slippers.

The rooms were, as he expressed it, "humble" but not by any means poverty-stricken. He had several pieces of furniture and *bric-à-brac*, innumerable mementoes and photographs. It was then that I realized the peculiar position of the actor. If he had been a painter I could have looked at some of his work and have 'placed' him, but what could you do with an old actor who lived so much in the past? The position seemed to me pitiable.

Doubtless in his day he had been a fine and distinguished actor, and here was I, who knew nothing about him, and did not like to ask what parts he had played because I felt that I ought to know. Neither was he very informing. Not that he was diffident in speech—he talked well and volubly—but I had to gather what he had done by his various implications. There was a signed photograph of himself in the character of Malvolio and in many other Shakespearean parts. There were also signed photographs of J. L. Toole and Henry Irving, and innumerable actors, some of whom were famous and others whose names were unfamiliar to me. By slow degrees I patched together some of the romantic tissues of his life. Whatever position he may have held in the theatrical world, he certainly still had the faculty of moving one person profoundly—myself. Everything in that little room seemed to vibrate with romance. One of Irving's photographs was inscribed,

"To my dear old friend, Colin Brancker." On the circular table was an enamel snuff-box given him by Nellie Farren.

When he spoke of his mother his voice sounded like some distant organ with the *vox humana* stop pulled out. I gathered that his mother had been a famous French actress. On the piano was a fan given her by the Empress Eugénie. He never spoke of his father. Nearly everything had some intimate association. I formed a habit of calling on old Brancker on Thursday evenings when my wife usually visited an invalid aunt. The experience was always a complete entertainment. He knew nothing of my world and I knew nothing of his. I came completely under the spell of his imagery. I had only to touch some trinket on the mantelpiece to set the whole machinery of rétrospection on the move. He came haltingly to his subject as though he were feeling for it through the lavender-scented contents of some old drawer. But when the subject was discovered, he brought the whole picture vividly before my mind. I could see those people strutting before the footlights, hear them laugh and joke in their stuffy lodgings and their green-rooms, follow their hard life upon the road, their struggles, and adversities, and successes, and above all the moving throb of their passions and romances.

And then the picture would die out. It had no beginning and no end. It was just an impression. The angle of vision would alter. Something else would appear upon the scene.

After a time, touched with pity for this lonely and dérelict old actor, my wife and I occasionally sent him little presents of game and port wine, when such things came our way. I would like to explain at this point that my wife is younger than I. Her outlook is less

critical and introspective. To use her own expression, she is out to have a good time. She enjoys dances and theatres and gay parties. And, after all, why shouldn't she? She is young and beautiful and full of life. Her hair—but I digress! In spite of the pheasants and the port she had never met old Brancker. But one day we all happened to meet at the corner of Talbot Road. I then enjoyed an entirely novel vision of my hero. He was magnificent. The bow he made, the long sweep of the hat would have put D'Artagnan to shame. When I introduced them, he held her hand for a moment and said:

"It is indeed a great pleasure!"

It doesn't sound very much in print, but Alice completely went under. She blushed with pleasure, and told me afterward that she thought he was "a perfect old dear!" The affair lapsed for several weeks. I still continued to call upon him, and we nearly exhausted the whole gamut of his belongings. We even routed through old drawers where faded remnants of ancient fustian would recall some moving episode of the past. I became greedy for these visionary adventures.

One night rather late I found the little white frock. So familiar had I become with my old friend that I was allowed to poke about his rooms on my own and ask him questions. It was a child's frock and it lay neatly folded on the top of a chest in the passage. I brought it into the room, where he was sipping his rum and water, and said:

"What's this, Mr Brancker?"

He fixed his eyes upon the frock, and instantly I was aware that he was strangely moved. At first an expression of surprise and bewilderment crept over his face, then I observed a look of utter dejection and remorse. He did not speak, and rather confusedly I went up to him and touched him on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Doubtless there is some story. . . . I ought not to have——"

Instantly he patted my arm in return and muttered:

"No, no, it's quite all right, old boy. And I will tell you, only not to-night. No, not to-night."

He stood up and took one or two turns up and down the room in silence. I did not dare to intrude into the secret chamber of his memories. Suddenly he turned to me, and putting his arm round my shoulder, he exclaimed:

"Old boy, come in to-morrow. Come to dinner. Bring the wife. Yes, you must both come. Come to dinner at seven-thirty. And then—I will tell you the story of that little white frock."

It happened that a dance my wife had intended going to the following night had fallen through. To my surprise she jumped at Mr Brancker's invitation. She said that she thought it would be extremely interesting. I felt a little nervous of taking her. An invitation to dinner for the first time is always a doubtful number. The social equation varies so alarmingly and unexpectedly. My wife frequently dined at what she called 'smart' houses. How could old Brancker possibly manage a dinner in his poky rooms? I warned her to wear her oldest and shabbiest, and to have a sandwich before we started. Needless to say, my advice was ignored. She appeared in a wonderful gown of pearl-grey. Experience told me it was useless to protest, and I jogged along the street by her side in my tweed suit. And then I had my second surprise. Old Brancker was in immaculate evening-dress. Cunningly modulated lights revealed a table glittering with silver and glass. I mumbled some apology for my negligence, but in his most courtly way he expressed his pleasure that I had treated him with such friendly lack of ceremony.

Nevertheless this question of dress—as so often happens—exercised a very definite effect upon my whole evening. I felt a little out of it. My wife and old Brancker seemed to belong to one world and I to another. Moreover, their conversation flowed easily and naturally. The old actor was in his most brilliant mood, and Alice sparkled and gurgled in response. Although she was younger and Brancker older than I, I felt at times that I was the oldest of the three, and that they were just children playing an absorbing game. And the dinner was the third surprise.

The gaunt woman served it, gliding in and out of the room with a quiet assurance. It was no lodging-house dinner, but the artful succession of little dishes which symbolizes the established creed of superior living creatures. Wine, too, flowed from long-necked bottles, and coffee was served in diminutive cups. At length Mrs Windsor collected the last vestiges of this remarkable feast, but left on the table a silver tray on which were set four liqueur glasses and a decanter of green Chartreuse.

"Let us all sit round the fire," said our host. "But first, let me press you to have a little of this excellent beverage. It was given me by a holy brother, a man who led a varied life, but who, alas! died in disgrace."

He passed his hand across his brow as though the memory were too sacred to be discussed. I sighed involuntarily, and my wife said brightly:

"Not for me, Mr Brancker, but you help yourself. And now you're going to tell us the story of the white frock!"

He raised his fine head and looked at her. Then he stretched out his long arm across the table and gently pressed her hand.

"I beg of you, dear lady," he said gently, "just one drop—in memory of my friend."

The implied sanctity of the appeal could not be denied. Both my wife and I partook of half a glass, and though I am by nature an abstainer, I must acknowledge that it tasted very good. Old Brancker's hand trembled as he poured out the Chartreuse. He drank his at a gulp, and as though the emotion were not yet stilled he had another one. Then he rose, and taking my wife's arm, he led her to the easy chair by the fire. I was rather proud of my intimate knowledge of the old actor's possessions, and I pointed out the snuff-box which Nellie Farren had given him, and the photograph of Irving with its inscription, "To my dear old friend."

Brancker sighed and shrugged his shoulders. Perhaps one does not boast of these associations. Perhaps it is vulgar, but I knew how interested Alice would be. When we had done a round of the rooms, whither in his fatherly way he had conducted my wife by the arm, and occasionally rested his hand ever so lightly on her shoulder, we returned to the dining-room, and Alice said:

"Now, show me this little white frock!"

He bowed and without a word went out into the hall and returned with the frock, which he spread reverently over the back of a chair.

"How perfectly sweet!" said my wife.

For a few moments he buried his head in his hands, and Alice and I were silent. I could not but observe the interesting *mise-en-scène* in which I found myself. The dim recesses of the room were heavy with memories. My wife cosily curled up in the high armchair, the firelight playing on her fresh—almost child-like—face, a simple ring sparkling on her finger, and on the pearly

glint of her diaphanous gown. On the other side of the table where the little glasses stood, the clear-cut features and long, snow-white hair of the old actor, silhouetted against a dark cabinet. And then, like some fragile ghost recalled to bear witness to its tragic past, the dim outline of the child's white frock.

"It was before your time, *mes enfants*, long, long before your time," he said suddenly. "You would not remember the famous Charles Carside Company who starred the provinces. We became known as the 'Capacity Company.' The title was doubly earned. We always played to full houses, and in those days——"

He turned to me with a penetrating, almost challenging look and added:

"There were *actors*. Comedy, and tragedy, history, everything worth doing in the legitimate was in our *répertoire*. We changed our bill every night and sometimes twice a day. Ay, and we changed our parts, sir. I remember Terry O'Bane and I reversing the parts of Othello and Iago on alternate nights for two weeks at a stretch. I played Lord Stamford to his Puttick in *The Golden Dawn*. He played Shylock to my Bassanio. I will not bore you with these details. Ah! Poor old Terry! Poor, dear old Terry!"

He stopped and looked down at his hands, and neither of us spoke.

"When I say that Terry O'Bane and I were friends I want to tell you that we were friends as only artists can be friends. We loved each other. For three years we worked together side by side—never a suspicion of envy, never a suspicion of jealousy. I remember one night after Terry's delivery of Jacques's speech on the fool he did not get a hand. I found him weeping in the wings. 'Old fellow!' I said, but he gripped me by the arm. 'Colly boy,' he answered, 'I was thinking of you.

I knew how distressed you would be!' Think of that! His only concern was that *I* should be distressed. Ah! in those days . . ."

He stretched his long white fingers and examined them, then turning suddenly to my wife he said:

"I want to ask you, mademoiselle" (he persisted in calling her mademoiselle all the evening), "to make allowances in what I am about to tell you for the *tempora et mores*. In my young days love had a different significance to what it has now. In this modern world I observe nothing but expedience and opportunism. No one is prepared to sacrifice, to run risks. The love between O'Bane and me was an epic of self-sacrifice, and it ran its full course. It found its acid test on the day when Sophie Wiles joined our company at Leeds."

He stood up and his voice trembled in a low whisper. Looking at Alice he said:

"She was as beautiful, as fragile, as adorable as you are, mademoiselle. Strange how these great secrets are conveyed imperceptibly. O'Bane and I looked at each other, and instinctively we understood. We said nothing. We made no comment about her. We were entirely solicitous of each other's feelings. We referred to her as 'Miss Wiles,' and we addressed her as 'Miss Wiles.' Before we had been three weeks on the road I know that if I had not known O'Bane's feelings I should have gone to her and said, 'Sophie, my darling, my angel, I love you, I adore you. Will you marry me?' But would it have been chivalrous to do this, knowing O'Bane's sentiments? We were two months on the road before the matter reached its climax. And during that time—under an unspoken compact—neither of us made love to Sophie. And then one night I could bear it no longer. I saw the drawn and hungry look in my colleague's eye as he watched her from the wings.

I went up to him and whispered, 'Old fellow, go in and win. She's worthy of you.' He understood me at once and he pressed my hand. 'Colly,' he said, 'you're right. This can't go on. Meet me after the show and come round to my rooms.'"

The old actor's lips were trembling. He drew his chair nearer to my wife's. "I cannot tell you of the heart-burning interview I had with my old friend that night. Each tried to give way to the other. It was very terrible, very moving. At length we decided that the only solution would be to put the matter to a hazard. We could not cut cards or throw dice. It seemed profane. We decided to play a game of chess. We set out the pieces and began. But at the end of a few moments it was apparent that each was trying to let the other win. 'Stay,' I said, 'we must leave the verdict to impartial destiny after all,' and I rose. On the sideboard—as it might be here—was a large bowl of Gloire de Dijon roses. I took the largest bloom, and said, 'Terry, old boy, if there are an odd number of petals in this rose she is yours. If an even number, I will pay her court.' He agreed. Slowly and deliberately, petal by petal, I destroyed the beautiful bloom. There were fifty-eight petals. When Terry saw the last petal fall he turned white and swayed. I helped him to the easy chair and handed him a little grog. It was nearly dawn. Already the birds were twittering on the window-sill."

He turned and gazed at the window as though even now the magic of that early morning was upon him.

"The dawn was clear for me, but for my friend how dark and foreboding! Or so it seemed to both of us at that hour. But as Mahomet said, 'With women, life is a condition of flux.' At eleven o'clock that morning I was on my bended knees to Sophie. I

poured out all my pent-up feelings of the two months. There are some things too sacred to repeat even to those who are—dear to us."

He gasped and, stretching out his arm, poured out another glass of the Chartreuse.

"She refused me, or if she did not actually refuse me —indeed she did not; she was sympathetic, almost loving, but so—indeterminate that I was almost driven to a frenzy of despair. When one is young, one is like that. One must have all and at once, or go crazy with despair. For a week I courted her day and night, and I could not make her decide. She liked me, but she did not love me. At the end of that time I went to O'Bane and said, 'Old man, it is your call. My part is played!' Under great pressure from me he consented to enter the lists, and I withheld my hand as he had done. Even now the memory of that week of anguish when I knew that my greatest friend was making love to my adored is almost unbearable. At the end of the week he came to me and said, 'Old boy, I don't know how I stand. She likes me, but I hardly think she loves me.' I will not burden you with the chronicle of our strange actions which followed. We decided that as the position was identical it should be an open fight in a fair field, otherwise between us we should lose her altogether. We would both pay court to her wherever and whenever the opportunity occurred. And we would do so without animosity or ill-will. The tour lasted three months, and I knew that O'Bane was winning. There was no question about it. He was the favourite. Every minute I expected to hear the dread glad tidings. And then a strange thing happened."

He leant back in his chair and passed his hands through his hair with a graceful gesture.

"An uncle in Australia died and left O'Bane an enormous fortune. He was rich beyond the dreams of avarice. The company all knew of it and were delighted, all—all except one person."

He glanced toward my wife and sighed.

"I have lived a good many years and yet I seem to find the heart of woman as unfathomable, as unexplorable as ever. They are to me the magic casements opening on the night. There is no limit . . . every subtle human experience is capable of endless variation. Sophie refused to marry O'Bane because people would think she married him for his money. The anguish of those last weeks I shall never forget. She definitely refused him, and I was torn between my love for O'Bane and my love for Sophie. I can say with perfect truth —literal truth—that the fortune killed O'Bane. When we arrived in London he began to squander. He drank, gambled, and led a depraved life, all because the woman he loved would not marry him. In the spring he left the company and took a house in town. It became the happy hunting-ground of loose characters. It is needless to say that if Sophie wouldn't marry him there were plenty of other women willing to marry a young millionaire. He became entangled with a fast and pretty creature called Annabel Peacock. He married her, and in the following year they had a child."

The fire crackled on the hearth; my wife did not take her eyes from the old actor's face. A black cat strolled leisurely across the room and stretched itself before the fire. He continued:

"It was then that I experienced an entirely novel vision of woman's character. Sophie, who would not marry O'Bane because he was rich, and who shivered with disgust in the presence of Annabel Peacock,

developed an amazing affection and interest for their child. We were out again in the Capacity Company. I had her all to myself. I laid siege to her heart. I was patient, tactful, importunate, imploring, passionate. But it was all no good, my boy . . . no good at all. Heigho! would you believe it, for ten years of my life from that date I was that woman's slave, and she was the slave of Terry's child. Company after company I joined in order to be with her. I gave up good parts. I sacrificed leads, and in place I even accepted a walk-on—anything to be with Sophie—Sophie, who would not listen to me, who treated me like a little pet, to run hither and thither, and who spent all her money and time on toys and clothes for Terry's child. Would you believe it?"

To my surprise my wife spoke for the first time. She said, "Yes."

Brancker looked at her keenly and nodded.

"Yes. In any affair between a man and a woman, a man finds himself at a disadvantage. Mademoiselle, you see, understands. Women have all kinds of mysterious intuitions and senses which we wot not of. She is armed at every point. She has more resources. She is better equipped than man. Sophie even made a friend of Annabel. She wrote her loving letters and called her 'my dearest.' For you must know that two years after his marriage my old friend Terry O'Bane went under. He awakened one night feeling ill; he groped in a chest where he usually kept a flask of brandy. He took a gulp. The liquid he drew into his throat was pure liquid ammonia which Annabel had been using for photographic work. She was a keen amateur photographer. He rushed out into the street in his pyjamas and died in the arms of a policeman at the corner."

The horror of this episode was written plainly in the old man's face. He delivered it with a kind of dramatic despair, as though he knew it had to be told and he could not control himself. Then he seemed to fall to pieces, and lay huddled at the back of his chair. I looked at Alice furtively, and I could see a tear swimming on the brink of her eye. It was some moments before he could continue.

"These were all the best years of my life, *mes enfants*, when my powers were at their highest. My old friend Toole offered me a good part in London. He said to me, 'Brancker, old man, you're wasting yourself in the provinces. Come to town and take a lead.' I could only press his hand and thank him. In another week or two I was on the road again with Sophie. As the years went by she became more and more absorbed in Terry's unattractive child, and more and more distressed concerning it. For you must know that in spite of his profligate life Terry still had left a considerable fortune, and Annabel continued to live in the same way. And it was the worst possible atmosphere to bring a young child up in. Annabel was kind to the child in a spasmodic way, passionate and unreliable. She would pet it and coax it, and buy it expensive toys and dresses and then suddenly neglect or scold it. Sophie knew this, and all the time she could spare she went to London and tried to help the situation. She humoured and flattered Annabel, who was quite manageable if you treated her like this, and she did what she could to influence the early training of the child for good. But, as you may imagine, the little minx grew up the spit and image of her mother. She was vain, fickle, and spoilt. By the time she was ten she thought of nothing but her looks and her frocks, and she was indeed a very pretty child. She had all

the prettiness of her mother, with something of her father's grace and charm. She was encouraged to amuse the vulgar people who came to the house, and she was allowed to listen to all the loose talk, and to sit up to any hour she liked, unless Annabel happened to be in a contrary mood, when she would slap the child and lock her in her room.

" 'Aunt Sophie,' as she called her, was a favourite with Lucy, but only, I'm afraid, because 'Aunt Sophie' gave her expensive toys, and lavished her love persistently upon the child. She wrote to her nearly every day wherever she happened to be, and sent her little gifts."

The old man mopped his forehead. He was evidently labouring under the severe strain which the invoking of these memories put upon him. He walked to the sideboard and poured himself out a glass of water, into which he poured—as an afterthought—a tiny drop of rum. After taking two long meditative gulps he resumed his seat. He seemed to have forgotten all about our presence. He was living in the past. But suddenly he turned to my wife and said:

"I have many of the beautiful frocks which Sophie made for little Lucy. They have come down to me. If it would not bore you to call one afternoon, mademoiselle, I could show you some that might interest you." There was a strange eager appeal in his voice. It seemed a matter of tremendous moment that Alice should go and inspect the frocks. My heart bled for him. 'Of *course* she will go,' I thought, but to my surprise she said nothing. She just looked at him with that queer watchful expression that women alone are capable of. Perhaps it is part of what the old chap referred to—their equipment. She toyed with the chain on her frock, and his eye meditated upon her

movements. He hesitated, and then rather nervously proceeded, as though talking to himself.

"Frocks! What a part they play in our lives. Carlyle was right. Sophie was extraordinarily clever with her needle. She had a genius for combining materials. Her theatrical experience helped her. She made the most alluring frocks. The child adored 'Aunt Sophie's' frocks. They always looked so striking and so professional. The crisis in my life, and which I am about to tell you of, was indeed occasioned by one of the frocks which Sophie made for Lucy. It came about in this way."

He paused again, and tapped the top of the table with his beautiful white hands.

"That last year—that year when Lucy reached her tenth birthday, the excesses in Annabel's house reached their zenith. The place became notorious. Annabel had taken to herself a drunken lord, Lord Starborough. He was a dissipated young *roué*. He rather took a fancy to Lucy, and he spoilt her in the same way that Annabel did. We heard stories of the goings on. The child was taken to houses to dance. I believe she was even taught to put on rouge. There was a rich family called the Arkwrights who also had children and who had lived a similar life. These children were Lucy's great friends. They vied with each other in their infantile snobbery. The parents gave elaborate parties and tried to outshine each other in the lavishness of their entertainment and the over-dressing of the children. It was very, very painful. Even I, whose life was being wrecked by Sophie's adulation of this child, felt sorry. My heart bled for my old friend's daughter."

"We had a long tour that autumn, Sophie and I. We were out in *The Woman Who Failed*. Sophie had

a lead, but I was only playing the part of a butler. It was a long and trying tour up North. The weather was very bitter. There was a good deal of sickness, and our chief was a hard man. Early in December Sophie caught a cold, which rapidly developed into bronchitis. She had a narrow escape. She was, however, only out of the bill for ten days. She insisted on returning and struggling on. The tour was to end on Christmas Eve. One day she had a letter from Lucy. I remember the exact words to this day. 'Dear Aunt Sophie, do make me a lovely frock for Christmas Eve. The Arkwrights are having a lovely ball and I know Irene is having a gold and green with a sparkling veil. Your loving Lucy.'

"When Sophie got this letter she smiled. She was happy. She was always happy when doing a service. Ah me . . .! For nearly a week she thought and dreamt about the frock she was going to make for Lucy for the Arkwrights' party. She knew what the child wanted—a frock to outshine all the others. Then another story reached us. I have forgotten what it was; some distressing record of these Arkwright people. One night after the show she sent for me. I could tell she was very agitated. She clutched my arm and said: 'Old man, I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to make Lucy a frock which will outshine all the others. And it will be just a plain white frock with no adornment of any sort. Just think of it, amongst all those vulgar, overdressed children, one little girl, as pretty as Lucy—in plain white. And they will be bound to appreciate it. It will tell. And perhaps she will realize—what it means. Good taste and refinement will always tell against vulgarity.' I applauded Sophie's idea, and I went with her to get the material. But she fainted in the shop. During those last few

days I began to realize that Sophie was very ill. She was simply living on her nervous force, keeping herself going in order to complete the tour, and to deliver Lucy's frock in time for the ball.

"Our last journey back was from Nottingham. We arrived in London at five o'clock on Christmas Eve. I was in a fever of dread. I believed that Sophie was dying. She kept swaying in the train as though she was going to drop. Her face was deadly white, her eyes unnaturally bright, and her fingers were still busy on the frock. So absorbed had I been in Sophie's affairs, I had made no arrangements about lodgings in town. Neither had she. But my old friend, Joe Gadgers, seeing my distress, said: 'Old boy, leave it to me. I know a snug little place where they'll take you in. I'm not stopping. I'm going straight through to Hastings.' I thanked my old friend and embraced him. When we got to Euston, we got Sophie into a four-wheeled cab, and Joe Gadgers came with us to arrange the introduction. I hardly noticed where the lodgings were—somewhere in Clapham, I think. We arrived there and a good lady took us in without hesitation. We put Sophie to bed. She was almost delirious, but still the frock was not quite finished. Joe left us, and I sat by her bedside, watching her busy fingers. I knew it was useless to protest. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked, and outside the snow was beginning to fall."

Colin Brancker stood up, and suddenly picked up the little white frock from the back of the chair. He held it in his arms reverently and tenderly. His voice was strong and resonant. He stood there and acted the scene vividly before our eyes.

"At ten minutes to seven I left the house holding the frock in my arms. I rushed out without a hat, without

a coat. I flew along the street, calling out for a cab like a madman. . . . At last I got one. I told the driver to drive like the furies to the address I gave him in Kensington. In the cab I stamped my feet and rocked the dress in my arms as though it were a fevered child. I don't know how we got there. It seemed an eternity. I flung into the house, calling out, 'Lucy! Lucy!' I found her in the drawing-room. She was dressed in a flaming orange and silver dress with a sparkling tiara in her hair. She was looking in a mirror and putting finishing touches to her hair. She cried out when she saw me: 'Hullo, I thought Aunt Sophie had forgotten me. I've hired a frock from Rocos.' 'Child,' I said, 'your Aunt Sophie has been working out her life's blood for you. Here is the frock!' She grabbed it and examined it. 'Frock!' she said. 'It looks more like a nightdress. I don't want the beastly old thing,' and she threw it across the room. I believe at that moment I could have struck the child. I was blind with fury. Fortunately, I remembered in time that she was my old friend Terry O'Bane's daughter. I picked up the frock. 'Ungrateful child!' I exclaimed. 'You don't know what you're doing. You're murdering an ideal. You're killing your aunt.' She tossed her insolent head and actually pressed the bell for the butler to see me out! Just like a grown-up person! Dazed and baffled, I clutched the little white frock and staggered out into the street. The night was dark, and the snow was still falling. Christmas bells were beginning to peal. . . . I plunged on and on, my heart beating against my ribs. People stared at me, but I was too distressed to care. How could I go back to Sophie with the insulting message? Suddenly, at the corner of Hyde Park, a most appalling realization flashed through my mind. *I had made no note of the*

address of the lodgings where Sophie and I were staying! . . . God in Heaven! What was I to do? The only man who could help me, my old friend, Joe Gadgers, had gone to Hastings. What could I do? Could I go to the police and say, 'Will you help me to find the address of some lodgings where an actress is staying. I think it's somewhere round about Clapham. I don't know the name of the landlady, or the name of the street, or the number?' They would have thought I was mad. Perhaps I was mad. Should I go back to Lucy? The child wouldn't know . . . and all this time Sophie was dying. Ah! merciful God! perhaps she would die. If she died before I found her she would die in the happy belief that the frock had been worn. Her last hours would be blessed with dreams, visions of purity and joy . . . whilst I . . . I should have no place in them, perhaps . . . but I, too, after all I'd suffered for her sake . . . Who knows? . . . Who knows? . . ."

His voice broke off in a low sob. I leant forward, watching his face, racked with anguish. The room was extraordinarily still. I dared not look at Alice, but I was conscious of the pearly sheen of her frock under the lamp. Away in the distance one could hear the rumble of the traffic on the high road. The remorseless tick of the clock was the only sound in the room. Once I thought it ticked louder, and then I realized that it was some one tapping gently at the door. The door opened a little way, and against the dim light in the passage the gaunt face of the old serving-woman, phantom-like, unreal . . .

"Excuse me, sir." She peered into the room. The old actor gazed at her with unseeing eyes. He stood with one hand on the back of the chair, and across the other arm lay the white frock, a dignified and pathetic figure.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, sir."

"Yes, Mrs Windsor?"

"My little niece 'as just called. I can't find it anywhere. That little white frock I made for 'er last week. I put it in the chest. I thought perhaps you might 'ave—— Ah! there it is, sir. Do you mind——? Thank you very much, sir. I'm sorry to have disturbed the company."

In the sanctuary of our bedroom that night my wife said:

"Did you really believe that that writing on the photograph was by Henry Irving?"

"My dear," I answered, "when their careers are finished, the painter, the author, the architect, or the sculptor may point to this or that and say, 'Lo, this is my handiwork.' But to the actor nothing remains but —memories. Their permanence lies in the memories of those who loved them. Are we to begrudge them all the riches of imagination? After all, what is the line of demarcation between what we call reality and what we call imagination? Is not the imagery invoked by Shelley when he sings of dubious myths as real a fact as the steel rivets in the Forth Bridge? What is reality? Indeed, what is life?"

"I don't know what life is," answered my wife, switching off the light, "but I know what you are. You're a dear old, perfect old—*boob*!"

"Alice, what do you mean?" I said.

She laughed softly. "Women are 'equipped,' you know," she replied enigmatically, and insisted on going to sleep.

From "The Love-a-duck and Other Stories"

FALSE COLOURS

W. W. JACOBS

[MR W. W. JACOBS has won a great reputation as a writer of humorous stories, but it should be remembered that he has also written tales like "The Monkey's Paw" and "The Well," in which the atmosphere of horror is almost suffocating. All his stories are original in conception, and every detail is made to contribute to the principal effect. There is no waste of material, yet there is a sense of masterful ease in the telling. Mr Jacobs's humorous characters—Peter Russet, Ginger Dick, Sam Small, Henery Walker, Bob Pretty—have established themselves in our minds as have the people of Dickens. It is impossible to say which are the best collections of stories, but *Many Cargoes*, *Light Freights*, *Odd Craft*, and *Captains All* are all worth reading a dozen times or so.]

"OF course, there is a deal of bullying done at sea at times," said the night-watchman, thoughtfully. "The men call it bullying an' the officers call it discipline, but it's the same thing under another name. Still, it's fair in a way. It gets passed on from one to another. Everybody aboard a'most has got somebody to bully, except perhaps the boy; he 'as the worst of it, unless he can manage to get the ship's cat by itself occasionally.

"I don't think sailor-men mind being bullied. I never 'eard of its putting one off 'is feed yet, and that's the main thing, arter all's said and done.

"Fust officers are often worse than skippers. In the fust place, they know they ain't skippers, an' that alone is enough to put 'em in a bad temper, especially if they've 'ad their certifikit a good many years and can't get a vacancy.

"I remember, a good many years ago now, I was

lying at Calcutta one time in the *Peewit*, as fine a barque as you'd wish to see, an' we 'ad a fust mate there as was a disgrace to 'is sects. A nasty, bullying, violent man, who used to call the hands names as they didn't know the meanings of and what was no use looking in the dictionary for.

"There was one chap aboard, Bill Cousins, as he used to make a partickler mark of. Bill 'ad the misfortin to 'ave red 'air, and the way the mate used to throw that in 'is face was disgraceful. Fortunately for us all, the skipper was a very decent sort of man, so that the mate was only at 'is worst when he wasn't by.

"We was sitting in the fo'c's'le at tea one arternoon, when Bill Cousins came down, an' we see at once 'e'd 'ad a turn with the mate. He sat all by hisself for some time simmering, an' then he broke out. 'One o' these days I'll swing for 'im; mark my words.'

"'Don't be a fool, Bill,' ses Joe Smith.

"'If I could on'y mark 'im,' ses Bill, catching his breath. 'Just mark 'im fair an' square. If I could on'y 'ave 'im alone for ten minutes, with nobody standing by to see fair play. But, o' course, if I 'it 'im it's mutiny.'

"'You couldn't do it if it wasn't, Bill,' ses Joe Smith again.

"'He walks about the town as though the place belongs to 'im,' said Ted Hill. 'Most of us is satisfied to shove the niggers out o' the way, but he ups fist and 'its 'em if they comes within a yard of 'im.'

"'Why don't they 'it 'im back?' ses Bill. 'I would if I was them.'

"Joe Smith grunted. 'Well, why don't you?' he asked.

"'Cos I ain't a nigger,' ses Bill.

"'Well, but you might be,' ses Joe, very earnest. 'Black your face an' 'ands an' legs, and dress up in them cotton things, and go ashore and get in 'is way.'

"'If you will, I will, Bill,' ses a chap called Bob Pullin.

"Well, they talked it over and over, and at last Joe, who seemed to take a great interest in it, went ashore and got the duds for 'em. They was a tight fit for Bill, Hindoos not being as wide as they might be, but Joe said if 'e didn't bend about he'd be all right, and Pullin, who was a smaller man, said his was fust class.

"After they were dressed, the next question was wot to use to colour them with; coal was too scratchy, an' ink Bill didn't like. Then Ted Hill burnt a cork and started on Bill's nose with it afore it was cool, an' Bill didn't like that.

"'Look 'ere,' ses the carpenter, 'nothin' seems to please you, Bill—it's my opinion you're backing out of it.'

"'You're a liar,' ses Bill.

"'Well, I've got some stuff in a can as might be boiled-down Hindoo for all you could tell to the difference,' ses the carpenter; 'and if you'll keep that ugly mouth of yours shut, I'll paint you myself.'

"Well, Bill, was a bit flattered, the carpenter being a very superior sort of a man, and quite an artist in 'is way, an' Bill sat down an' let 'im do 'im with some stuff out of a can that made 'im look like an Hindoo what 'ad been polished. Then Bob Pullin was done too, an' when they'd got their turbins on, the change in their appearance was wonderful.

"'Feels a bit stiff,' ses Bill, working 'is mouth.

"'That'll wear off,' ses the carpenter; 'it wouldn't be you if you didn't 'ave a grumble, Bill.'

"'And mind and don't spare 'im, Bill,' ses Joe. 'There's two of you, an' if you only do wot's expected of you, the mate ought to 'ave a easy time abed this v'y'ge.'

"'Let the mate start fust,' ses Ted Hill. 'He's sure to start on you if you only get in 'is way. Lord, I'd like to see his face when you start on *'im*!'

"Well, the two of 'em went ashore arter dark with the best wishes o' all on board, an' the rest of us sat down in the fo'c's'le spekerlating as to what sort o' time the mate was goin' to 'ave. He went ashore all right, because Ted Hill see 'im go, an' he noticed with partickler pleasure as 'ow he was dressed very careful.

"It must ha' been near eleven o'clock. I was sitting with Smith on the port side o' the galley, when we heard a 'ubbub approaching the ship. It was the mate just coming aboard. He was without 'is 'at; 'is necktie was twisted round 'is ear, and 'is shirt and 'is collar was torn all to shreds. The second and third officers ran up to him to see what was the matter, and while he was telling them, up comes the skipper.

"'You don't mean to tell me, Mr Fingall,' ses the skipper, in surprise, 'that you've been knocked about like that by them mild and meek Hindoos?'

"'Hindoos, sir?' roared the mate. 'Cert'nly not, sir. I've been assaulted like this by five German sailor-men. And I licked them all.'

"'I'm glad to hear that,' ses the skipper; and the second and third pats the mate on the back—just like you pat a dog you don't know.

"'Big fellows they was,' ses he, 'an' they give me some trouble. Look at my eye!'

" The second officer struck a match and looked at it, and it cert'n'y was a beauty.

" ' I hope you reported this at the police-station ? ' ses the skipper.

" ' No, sir,' ses the mate, holding up 'is 'ead. ' I don't want no p'lice to protect me. Five's a large number, but I drove 'em off, and I don't think they'll meddle with any British fust officers again.'

" ' You'd better turn in,' ses the second, leading him off by the arm.

" The mate limped off with him, and as soon as the coast was clear we put our 'eads together and tried to make out how it was that Bill Cousins and Bob 'ad changed themselves into five German sailor-men.

" ' It's the mate's pride,' ses the carpenter. ' He didn't like being knocked about by Hindoos.'

" We thought it was that, but we had to wait nearly another hour afore the two came aboard, to make sure. There was a difference in the way they came aboard, too, from that of the mate. *They* didn't make no noise, and the fust thing we knew of their coming aboard was seeing a bare, black foot waving feebly at the top of the fo'c's'le ladder feelin' for the step below.

" That was Bob. He came down without a word, and then we see 'e was holding another black foot and guiding it to where it should go. That was Bill, an' of all the 'orrid, limp-looking blacks that you ever see, Bill was the worst when he got below. He just sat on the locker all of a heap and held 'is 'ead, which was swollen up, in 'is hands. Bob went and sat beside 'im, and there they sat, for all the world like two wax figgers instead o' human beings.

" ' Well, you done it, Bill,' ses Joe, after waiting a long time for them to speak. ' Tell us all about it.'

"'Nothin' to tell,' ses Bill, very surly. 'We knocked 'im about.'

"'And he knocked us about,' ses Bob, with a groan. 'I'm sore all over, and as for my feet——'

"'Wot's the matter with them?' ses Joe.

"'Trod on,' ses Bob, very short. 'If my bare feet was trod on once they was a dozen times. I've never 'ad such a doing in all my life. He fought like a devil. I thought he'd ha' murdered Bill.'

"'I wish 'e 'ad,' ses Bill, with a groan; 'my face is bruised and cut about cruel. I can't bear to touch it.'

"'Do you mean to say the two of you couldn't settle 'im?' ses Joe, staring.

"'I mean to say we got a hiding,' ses Bill. 'We got close to him fust start off and got our feet trod on. Arter that it was like fighting a windmill, with sledge-hammers for sails.'

"He gave a groan and turned over in his bunk, and when we asked him some more about it, he swore at us. They both seemed quite done up, and at last they dropped off to sleep just as they was, without even stopping to wash the black off or to undress themselves.

"I was awoke rather early in the morning by the sounds of somebody talking to themselves, and a little splashing of water. It seemed to go on a long while, and at last I leaned out of my bunk and see Bill bending over a bucket and washing himself and using bad langwidge.

"'Wot's the matter, Bill?' ses Joe, yawning and sitting up in bed.

"'My skin's that tender, I can hardly touch it,' ses Bill, bending down and rinsing 'is face. 'Is it all orf?'

"'Orf?' ses Joe; 'no, o' course it ain't. Why don't you use some soap?'

"'*Soap*,' answers Bill, mad-like; 'why, I've used more soap than I've used for six months in the ordinary way.'

"'That's no good,' ses Joe; 'give yourself a good wash.'

"Bill put down the soap then very careful, and went over to 'im and told him all the dreadful things he'd do to him when he got strong agin, and then Bob Pullin got out of his bunk an' 'ad a try on *his* face. Him and Bill kept washing, and then taking each other to the light and trying to believe it was coming off until they got sick of it, and then Bill, 'e up with his foot and capsized the bucket, and walked up and down the fo'c's'le raving.

"'Well, the carpenter put it on,' ses a voice; 'make 'im take it orf.'

"You wouldn't believe the job we 'ad to wake that man up. He wasn't fairly woke till he was hauled out of 'is bunk an' set down opposite them two pore black fellers an' told to make 'em white again.

"'I don't believe as there's anything will touch it,' he says, at last. 'I forgot all about that.'

"'Do you mean to say,' bawls Bill, 'that we've got to be black all the rest of our life?'

"'Certainly not,' ses the carpenter, indignantly, 'it'll wear off in time; shaving every morning'll 'elp it, I should say.'

"'I'll get my razor now,' ses Bill, in a awful voice; 'don't let 'im go, Bob. I'll 'ack 'is head orf.'

"He actually went off an' got his razor, but, o' course, we jumped out of our bunks and got between 'em and told him plainly that it was not to be, and then we set 'em down and tried everything we could

think of, from butter and linseed oil to cold tea-leaves used as a poultice, and all it did was to make 'em shinier and shinier.

"'It's no good, I tell you,' ses the carpenter, 'it's the most lasting black I know. If I told you how much that stuff is a can, you wouldn't believe me.'

"'Well, you're in it,' ses Bill, his voice all of a tremble; 'you done it so as we could knock the mate about. Whatever's done to us'll be done to you too.'

"'I don't think turps'll touch it,' ses the carpenter, getting up, 'but we'll 'ave a try!'

"He went and fetched the can and poured some out on a bit o' rag and told Bill to dab his face with it. Bill give a dab, and the next moment he rushed over with a scream and buried his head in a shirt wot Simmons was wearing at the time and began to wipe his face with it. Then he left the flustered Simmons an' shoved another chap away from the bucket and buried his face in it and kicked and carried on like a madman. Then 'e jumped into his bunk again and buried 'is face in the clothes and rocked hisself and moaned as if he was dying.

"'Don't you use it, Bob,' he ses, at last.

"''Tain't likely,' ses Bob. 'It's a good thing you tried it fust, Bill.'

"''Ave they tried holy-stone?' ses a voice from a bunk.

"'No, they ain't,' ses Bob, snappishly, 'and, what's more, they ain't goin' to.'

"Both o' their tempers was so bad that we let the subject drop while we was at breakfast. The orkard persition of affairs could no longer be disregarded. Fust one chap threw out a 'int and then another, gradually getting a little stronger and stronger, until Bill turned round in a uncomfortable way and

requested of us to leave off talking with our mouths full and speak up like Englishmen wot we meant.

"'You see, it's this way, Bill,' ses Joe, soft-like. 'As soon as the mate sees you there'll be trouble for all of us.'

"'For all of us,' repeats Bill, nodding.

"'Whereas,' ses Joe, looking round for support, 'if we gets up a little collection for you and you should find it convenient to desart——'

"''Ear, 'ear,' ses a lot o' voices. 'Bravo, Joe.'

"'Oh, desart, is it?' ses Bill; 'an' where are we goin' to desart to?'

"'Well, that we leave to you,' ses Joe; 'there's many a ship short-'anded as would be glad to pick up sich a couple of prime sailor-men as you an' Bob.'

"'Ah, an' wot about our black faces?' ses Bill, still in the same sneering, ungrateful sort o' voice.

"'That can be got over,' ses Joe.

"''Ow?' ses Bill and Bob together.

"'Ship as nigger-cooks,' ses Joe, slapping his knee and looking round triumphant.

"It's no good trying to do some people a kindness. Joe was perfectly sincere, and nobody could say but wot it wasn't a good idea, but o' course Mr Bill Cousins must consider hisself insulted, and I can only suppose that the trouble he'd gone through 'ad affected his brain. Likewise Bob Pullin's. Anyway, that's the only excuse I can make for 'em. To cut a long story short, nobody 'ad any more breakfast, and no time to do anything until them two men was scrouged up in a corner an' 'eld there unable to move.

"'I'd never 'ave done 'em,' ses the carpenter, arter it was all over, 'if I'd known they was goin' to carry on like this. They wanted to be done.'

"'The mate'll half murder 'em,' ses Ted Hill.

"'He'll 'ave 'em sent to gaol, that's wot he'll do,' ses Smith. 'It's a serious matter to go ashore and commit assault and battery on the mate.'

"'You're all in it,' ses the voice o' Bill from the floor. 'I'm going to make a clean breast of it. Joe Smith put us up to it, the carpenter blacked us, and the others encouraged us.'

"'Joe got the clothes for us,' ses Bob. 'I know the place he got 'em from, too.'

"The ingratitude o' these two men was sich that at first we decided to have no more to do with them, but better feelings prevailed, and we held a sort o' meeting to consider what was best to be done. An' everything that was suggested one o' them two voices from the floor found fault with and wouldn't 'ave, and at last we 'ad to go up on deck with nothing decided upon, except to swear 'ard and fast as we knew nothing about it.

"'The only advice we can give you,' ses Joe, looking back at 'em, 'is to stay down 'ere as long as you can.'

"A'most the fust person we see on deck was the mate, an' a pretty sight he was. He'd got a bandage round 'is left eye, and a black ring round the other. His nose was swelled and his lip cut, but the other officers were making sich a fuss over 'im, that I think he rather glorified in it than otherwise.

"'Where's them other two 'ands?' he ses by and by, glaring out of 'is black eye.

"'Down below, sir, I b'lieve,' ses the carpenter, all of a tremble.

"'Go an' send 'em up,' ses the mate to Smith.

"'Yes, sir,' ses Joe, without moving.

"'Well, go on, then,' roars the mate.

"'They ain't over and above well, sir, this morning,' ses Joe.

"'Send 'em up, confound you,' ses the mate, limping towards 'im.

"Well, Joe give 'is shoulders a 'elpless sort o' shrug and walked forward and bawled down the fo'c's'le.

"'They're coming, sir,' he ses, walking back to the mate just as the skipper came out of 'is cabin.

"We all went on with our work as 'ard as we knew 'ow. The skipper was talking to the mate about 'is injuries, and saying unkind things about Germans, when he give a sort of a shout and staggered back staring. We just looked round, and there was them two blackamoors coming slowly towards us.

"'Good heavens, Mr Fingall,' ses the old man. 'What's this?'

"I never see sich a look on any man's face as I saw on the mate's then. Three times 'e opened 'is mouth to speak, and shut it agin without saying anything. The veins on 'is forehead swelled up tremendous and 'is cheeks was all blown out purple.

"'That's Bill Cousins' hair,' ses the skipper to himself. 'It's Bill Cousins' hair. It's Bill Cous——'

"Bob walked up to him, with Bill lagging a little way behind, and then he stops just in front of 'im and fetches up a sort o' little smile.

"'Don't you make those faces at me, sir,' roars the skipper. 'What do you mean by it? What have you been doing to yourselves?'

"'Nothin,' sir,' ses Bill, 'umbly; 'it was done to us.'

"The carpenter, who was just going to cooper up a cask which 'ad started a bit, shook like a leaf, and gave Bill a look that would 'a' melted a stone.

"'Who did it?' ses the skipper.

"'We've been the wictims of a cruel outrage, sir,' ses Bill, doing all 'e could to avoid the mate's eye, which wouldn't be avoided.

"'So I should think,' ses the skipper. 'You've been knocked about, too.'

"'Yessir,' ses Bill, very respectful; 'me and Bob was ashore last night, sir, just for a quiet look round, when we was set on to by five furriners.'

"'*What?*' ses the skipper; and I won't repeat what the mate said.

"'We fought 'em as long as we could, sir,' ses Bill, 'then we was both knocked senseless, and when we came to ourselves we was messed up like this 'ere.'

"'What sort o' men were they?' asked the skipper, getting excited.

"'Sailor-men, sir,' ses Bob, putting in his spoke. 'Dutchies or Germans, or something o' that sort.'

"'Was there one tall man, with a fair beard?' ses the skipper, getting more and more excited.

"'Yessir,' ses Bill, in a surprised sort o' voice.

"'Same gang,' ses the skipper. 'Same gang as knocked Mr Fingall about, you may depend upon it. Mr Fingall, it's a mercy for you you didn't get your face blacked too.'

"I thought the mate would ha' burst. I can't understand how any man could swell as he swelled without bursting.

"'I don't believe a word of it,' he ses, at last.

"'Why not?' ses the skipper, sharply.

"'Well, I don't,' ses the mate, his voice trembling with passion. 'I 'ave my reasons.'

"'I s'pose you don't think these two poor fellows went and blacked themselves for fun, do you?' ses the skipper.

"The mate couldn't answer.

"'And then went and knocked themselves about for more fun?' ses the skipper, very sarcastic.

"The mate didn't answer. He looked round helpless like, and see the third officer swopping glances with the second, and all the men looking sly and amused, and I think if ever a man saw 'e was done 'e did at that moment.

"He turned away and went below, and the skipper, arter reading us all a little lecture on getting into fights without reason, sent the two chaps below agin and told 'em to turn in and rest. He was so good to 'em all the way 'ome, and took sich a interest in seeing 'em change from black to brown and from light brown to spotted lemon, that the mate daren't do nothing to them, but gave us their share of what he owed them as well as an extra dose of our own."

From "Light Freights"

THE MAN WHO WAS BLIND

EDWIN PUGH

[Mr Edwin Pugh is a humorist who is not afraid of healthy sentiment, whose laughter is that of a philosopher rather than that of a comedian. Yet he has too much sympathy in his nature to be a mere dispassionate observer; he knows that humour and pathos are inextricably interwoven—the warp and woof of life itself—and his writings have power to move profoundly. Mr Pugh has written well over thirty volumes, including *The Eyes of a Child*, *The Secret Years*, *The Man of Straw*, and two books about Charles Dickens, with whom he has much in common.]

HE was, as it is said, born blind. From the moment when his sightless eyes, with the wistful pathos of all young, inarticulate creatures mirrored in their inscrutable depths, had seemed to gaze into his mother's face, he had had his lonely being in a world of profound darkness. But it was no hereditary taint that had condemned him to spend all the days of his life, from the cradle to the grave, in impenetrable gloom and rayless solitude. His mother was of a good yeoman stock: fair, blue-eyed, white-skinned, dimpled, and radically robust; whilst his father was of ancient patrician lineage, whose family escutcheon had never been blotted by any such sinister visitation as blindness. Thus his grievous disability seemed to be due to one of those mysterious, wanton mischances which from time to time do recur to flout and deride and set at naught the wire-drawn learning of science.

The cold fact stood: he was blind!

For him, the mellow sunshine had never been more

than a sensation of genial warmth. For him, the flowers had been only sweet perfumes. His loved ones were as so many kindly voices, so many elusive presences, with warm, caressing hands and clinging lips, who sometimes dropped hot tears upon his cheek. His invisible world was full of cruel protuberances and clogging obstacles against which he wounded and bruised his body; full of alarms and disconcerting, harrowing noises; a place of harsh surfaces that set his teeth on edge whenever he touched them with his sensitive finger-tips. Light and shade, night and day, colour and form, distance and proportion, beauty and ugliness: all these were words to the meaning of which he held no clue.

If money implies wealth, then the blind man was rich; but it is likely that he set greater store on the unfailing devotion of his mother and sister, with whom he lived, than on all his possessions. His father had died, half heart-broken—for he had been ambitious for his only son—when that son was but a child. The child grew into a comely, lusty youth; became at last a masterful, strong man, but withal sweet-tempered and gentle, virile in spirit and tender in thought. Music was the crown of his life, its comfort and its solace lightening his blackest moods and bringing balm to his soul in his moments of deepest despondency. He sang very sweetly in a soft flutelike voice, and could play, besides the piano and the organ, the harp and the violin. He delighted in good literature, too, and was made free of the magic world of romance at an early age. Good company, good wine and tasty dishes, the wit that is pointed and polished like a sword, the humour that is full-bodied yet genial, like a generous port, the laugh that ripples out heartily, and the pathos that is simple and not unseemly, all

the tragedy and comedy, in fact, of this old variety show of a world, he rejoiced in exceedingly. He was —in the old phrase—a full man, and save when his affliction set some irksome prohibition upon him, and so brought home anew the deadly, stultifying nature of his infirmity, he was a happy man also.

For the most part, he lived in an old house on the coast. He revelled in the changing music of the sea and in its salt-sweet savour. Towns frightened him, though he never confessed to his fear. Among houses he had a sense of being stifled and overborne; the strident noises of the streets were torture to his shrinking ears, and the musty, rancid odours offended his nostrils.

Sometimes, however, he dwelt among mountains, and at first the abiding calm of these immutable fastnesses of Nature was grateful to his quivering sensibilities; but, after a little while, the unbroken, everlasting silence would oppress him; he grew afraid to be alone, for then he seemed to hear his secret thoughts clanging in his head like bells. So he would bid his women-folk take him back to his seaside home again; and, in the roar of ocean, the screech of the undertow, the cold sprinkling of flying, stinging spray on his face and hands, he found peace once more.

Thus his eventless life continued for twenty-four years, and he had yielded up all expectation of ever beholding the wonders of earth and sky and sea. Many great physicians, specialists in all forms of blindness, had come to examine into the cause of his malady, and each had gone away sorrowfully acknowledging that his case was beyond human skill. He submitted uncomplainingly to these tiresome inquisitions for the sake of his loved ones; but he had soon ceased to cherish hope. Indeed, he felt—being a

strong spirit and no weakling—that to entertain fallacious hope was also to invite despair, whilst in resignation was at least peace.

But in his twenty-fifth year persistent rumours reached his ears of a great Italian doctor who had given sight to many born blind, and a trusted friend, named Wyman, himself an oculist, was despatched to Italy to ascertain, if possible, the truth or falsehood of these reports.

"Not a very nice man, this Pereira," was Wyman's report on his return. "But no charlatan, as jealous rival practitioners would like to make the world believe. I have myself seen——" And he went on to describe the miracles of healing he had witnessed. "He is willing to undertake Ferdinand's cure, but he makes one proviso against failure."

"And that?" breathed the mother.

"He says that he can hold out no hope of Ferdinand's ever recovering his sight if he were really born blind."

The eager faces of the women were blanched in that instant.

"And—he was born blind," the mother faltered.

"Pereira, even though he has never seen Ferdinand, says probably not. He told me what, indeed, I know to be true, that it is the rarest thing in the world—a thing so rare as to be almost unknown—for a human being to be actually born blind. He maintains that Ferdinand was once able to see, if only for a few hours immediately after birth."

"We should not have known, of course. I myself did not suspect the sad truth for two whole days, and I watched his face all that time."

"Pereira holds himself at your disposal," said Wyman. "It is extraordinary in so great a man;

but I am afraid he inclines to be a little mercenary. He has suffered a good deal of misery and privation in the past, I fancy, and now, as you know, he is the laughing-stock of half the foolish, incredulous world, and it seems rather to have embittered him."

"He is welcome to all we have if he can cure Ferdinand," said the mother. "Telegraph to him at once. At the worst he can do no harm."

So the great Italian was sent for, and mother and daughter went to prepare the blind man for his coming.

"What—another!" exclaimed Ferdinand, with a rueful laugh. "I thought I had come to an end of them."

But when, after a fortnight, Pereira arrived, he gave himself into the wonder-worker's hands with imperturbable, meek fortitude.

"I think," said Pereira, after the preliminary examination, "that there is a possibility—a good possibility." Then he plunged into a scientific dissertation, in which such terms as "sclerotic coat," "choroid coat," "canal of Schlemm," "tarsal cartilage," and many other like cryptic sayings figured again and again, with a maddening reiteration. But for all this the Italian bore upon him the stamp of competence. He did not boast or prophesy. He was not too confident of success. "You will pardon me," he wound up, "but I should judge you to be a man who could bear to be told the truth about your case?"

"I think that is so," said Ferdinand.

"You could bear a great disappointment?"

"I have weathered a good many. Yes."

"Then," said the doctor, "I may tell you that, though I believe I can restore your sight, and that I can restore it permanently——"

He hesitated.

"Yes?" prompted Ferdinand.

"There is—I will not disguise the fact from you—a bare likelihood of my cures being only temporary. You see——" and again he plunged headlong into a fresh dissertation. "You will regain your sight: of that I am almost certain," he concluded, "but it may be for only a little while. Could you bear that?"

"It would be hard," replied Ferdinand. "But I think I could bear even that."

"You understand perfectly?" urged the Italian. "You realize what a temporary restoration of sight would mean to you? As you are now, the full meaning of your deprivation is not apparent to you. You have, to all intents and purposes, never had the use of your eyes at all. But if you were suddenly made to see, perhaps only for a few hours, or it might be only a few minutes, and then became blind, incurably blind, again——"

He lapsed into eloquent silence.

"I am willing to take any conceivable risk you can name," Ferdinand declared, "so long as there is a reasonable chance of success."

"There is a very excellent chance," Pereira assured him, "if you will consent to obey me implicitly in all things."

"That you may rely upon."

Thus the matter was settled. The Italian doctor took up his quarters in the house, and forthwith began his treatment.

The processes of the cure were involved and excruciatingly painful as well as tediously slow in their results. For six weeks Ferdinand was condemned to lie on his back in a darkened room, his eyelids covered

with plaster, his brows wrapped in thick layers of wet bandages. He was put upon a rigorous diet and forbidden exercise. But he bore the long suspense, the enervating inaction, the interminable days of empty quiescence, with the ensuing nights of sleeplessness, with high courage and long-suffering equanimity. In all respects he was an exemplary patient. He did not once complain; he did not once try to force the doctor's hand by demanding to know when he might expect this cruel ordeal to end. Never had the fine texture of the man's soul manifested itself so nobly as during that stupefying period of probation.

It was on the last day of the sixth week that Pereira shot his alarming bolt into that riven household. He did not appear as usual at breakfast. A maid, sent up to his room with a cup of tea, came fluttering downstairs, after a brief absence, with devastating tidings. The doctor was gone. He had packed his trunk with his own hands, and must himself have carried it to the station.

Mother and daughter, the blood slowly draining away from their faces, gazed mutely at each other across the table, heart-sick and stunned by the weight of this calamity, too deeply stirred by their emotions to exchange a word. Was this, then, to be the end of their fond dreams?

"I found this letter," said the maid, and laid it down beside the mother's plate.

But the world was rocking and spinning before the poor lady's clouded eyes. At last she controlled herself sufficiently to pick up the letter and open it. Then her eyes were flushed with bitter tears; she could not decipher the hurried scrawl. In silence she handed it to her daughter.

"Read it, dear," she said thickly.

The girl, who suffered scarcely less than her mother, read it aloud.

Doctor Pereira had the grace to be ashamed of himself. His letter of farewell began with florid apologies. He was desolated, he said, by the necessity that confronted him. His duty to himself, however, his best interests, demanded that he should leave them. A South American millionaire had offered him two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, or more, if he stickled for it, to cross the sea and undertake the cure of his son, who was fast becoming blind. But he must come at once, if the young man's reason were to be saved. *At once!* The young man's impending blindness, Pereira went on to explain, was due merely to a superficial injury to the optic nerve, an injury that could be quite easily repaired, as Pereira had been able to deduce from a Brazilian oculist's diagnosis. In the circumstances, therefore, asked the Italian, how could he be blamed if he refused to forgo this golden opportunity of making his fortune at one single stroke? Moreover, there was really nothing left for him to do in Ferdinand's case which could not be done as well and as efficiently by Ferdinand himself. So soon as the last application of plaster had crumbled away the bandages might safely be removed; and if Ferdinand were ever to have his sight restored to him at all, it would be restored to him then. There followed a few general, precise instructions, and finally a solemn repetition of the Italian's insistent warning that after all the cure might be only temporary.

The two women gained heart as they read. Hope, then, was not dead even yet. Ferdinand might still see. Buoyed and fortified by this reassurance, they went together to the blind man's room to break to

him as gently as possible the news of the doctor's flight.

He lay very still, listening.

"Ah, there can be no doubt now, I think, that the man is a charlatan," he remarked placidly. "But I will not utterly condemn him until I know. It means only a few more days of waiting."

They were weary, dreary days, those last days of martyrdom. Slowly, morsel by morsel, the burning plaster flaked away. Pereira had laid stress on one particular: the bandages must on no account be removed until the last infinitesimal grain of plaster had become detached from the eyelids.

Five agonizing days in all spun their slow coil of hours about the hearts of the three protagonists in this piteous drama before the hour of the blind man's emancipation dawned: the hour that was to make him free of humanity's dearest heritage, or to cast him out of the kingdom of light and beauty for ever.

When the supreme moment at last arrived it found him hesitating. In his own despite a panic fear, a craven dread of the unknown future that confronted him, stayed his hand from the bandages. How would he bear the shock of beholding, for the first time, the wondrous world of men, or the worse shock of knowing that he never would behold it?

The women, marvelling at his inexplicable hesitation, waited impatiently beside him.

"No," he gasped. "I dare not. I—I am afraid, Mother. Ah, perhaps it would have been better if I had not engaged in this hazardous experiment. I was happy before, almost happy, I think, at any rate. But, if it is still to be nothing but darkness for me, after all this, I shall never be happy again."

His mother laid her hand soothingly on his head. He caught it and kissed it.

"It is this," he cried, patting her hand, "that undoes me. It is you, Mother, and Emily who sap my manhood." He hung his head and pondered. "How can I tell how this thing will take me now?" he muttered moodily, speaking as if to himself. "Do you faintly realize, either of you, what it means to me? You cannot. How could you? I have heard you talk of the birds and the flowers, of colours, of things moving, of little children, of sun and moon and stars and sky, of the sea. Ah, but I can smell the old familiar sea and hear its voice. I think I should never be afraid of the sea! Oh, but, Mother—think!" He shuddered down into his chair. "I may not be able to bear it. But if I am to bear it, as a man should," he continued in firmer tones, after a pause, "I will choose to bear it alone."

"Alone!" they echoed in concert.

"Why not? One prays best alone. One is nearest God when one is alone. Therefore I elect to be alone," said he. "I prayed awhile ago. And this inspiration is my answer. It is ordained that alone I should undergo this ordeal. Yes—yes," he added softly, "it is best. And I am set on it, Mother, Emily. I can see now that that is the only possible way for me to meet this trial of my mettle."

Though they clung to him and wept and cried out that this could not be, and implored him not to send them away, he was inexorable in his resolve. Neither their tears nor their passionate supplications could move him.

"I will be alone," he repeated doggedly. "I will be alone for so long as it takes me to prepare myself to see your dear faces for the first time. You must

not enter until I bid you. You must not try to open the door. I shall lock it. You must wait—think how I have waited—until I call you!"

"But, Ferdinand——" pleaded his mother.

"Mother," he answered, with a note of sternness in his voice, "would you have me shamed before you in my own eyes? What if I cry, if I whine? Should I desire anyone, least of all those who love me, to be witnesses of my humiliation? No. I will be alone. This interview is trying us all too hardly as it is. Let us end it. We may want all our strength presently."

So accustomed were they to bend to his will that they did leave him at last, even as he bade them. He followed them to the door and closed it upon them, and turned the key.

"Remember! Not till I summon you," were his last words as they passed out.

And when, at length, he was alone, he began at once to pluck at the bandages. But his fingers trembled and his hands were weak, so that he could hardly undo the fastenings at first. He groaned with impatience: he who had been patient for a quarter of a century. He struck his head against a piece of furniture in his struggles and whimpered aloud at the pain like a child, though he had long schooled himself to bear such trivial hurts with stoical indifference.

At last he tore the bandages free.

Then a half-stifled scream broke from him.

He could see!

His eyelids, woefully stiff and sore, seemed to move up and down creakily. But he saw—*he saw!* Of that one glorious bewildering fact there could be no doubt whatever. He saw!

What he saw was but a pale mist, at first, in which

vague grey patches floated slowly, amorphous and large. Then, as his vision cleared, the patches grew more distinct, coalesced, took on form and substance, became sharply outlined, resolved themselves into tangible objects.

He reeled, staggered, stretched out his hands wildly to ward off the manifold perils that seemed to menace him on every side, then fell upon a low settee in the bay of the window. There he huddled, trembling.

His terror was extreme. He was, as he had dreaded, desperately afraid. His impulse was to rush to the door—but of the many wonders that surrounded him which was a door?—and to batter upon it with his hands and shriek aloud for his women-folk to come to him. He might have given way to that impulse, and thus have smirched his self-respect for all time, had not an overpowering numbness in all his limbs and members chained him down to the seat whereon he had fallen. As it was, he could do nothing but sit and gaze and listen to the thrashing of the blood through his veins and the wild, tumultuous hammering of his heart.

It was a still, grey day. Sea and sky alike were grey. Only a triangular segment of beach, and that all grey sand, sullied and trampled, was visible from the window. A ship under full sail passed across his field of vision. He wondered what it could be. Was it a bird? Then he saw a covey of gulls, black specks against the dull, drab sky. No; those were birds, he decided. But that white, floating, pitching thing? What was that? He had all a book-lover's theoretical knowledge of ships, a blind book-lover's knowledge, but he failed to recognize that schooner for a ship at all, though in fancy he had often lain out on the yards in a bucketing squall to shorten sail.

This moment of unique revelation contained within its brief compass the story of the dislocation of a man's whole world.

His fears were fast abating. His numbness had left him. But now he had no desire to summon his women-folk to his side. He was lapped in a warm apathy of sensuous bliss. His brain was sluggish. He had little power of thought. He could not correlate his first impressions; nor could he, ever after, describe them.

A newspaper, caught by a gust of wind, curveted across his view. Was that a man? he wondered. The sound of the wavelets, crisping into creamy foam on the sands as the tide crept in, came plainly to his ears. So he discovered the sea. But did the sea consist of only that breaking line of feathery white spume? Or did the sea include all that vast tumbled expanse which rose up and merged into the purple distance, and then changed colour and arched forward till it filled all the upper reaches of the world with a sullen, opalescent haze?

A spindling figure, the figure of a half-grown boy, darted across the segment of sand and disappeared. Was *that* a man? He found himself trembling again.

He had no definite conception of a mirror. And even had he desired to consult one he could not have done so; for among Pereira's general instructions to the women was one in particular on which he laid extraordinary stress: they must not let Ferdinand see a mirror for quite a long time, not until he had grown thoroughly well used to his new-found sense of sight, and had learned to measure distances and to understand something of the principles of refraction. He, Pereira, had known men go mad at their first

his breath issued whistling through his teeth, his lungs seemed to rattle in his breast.

Again his mother knocked at the door. And again he called out: "No—presently."

He heard her murmur his name with infinite longing, but he knew that the time was not yet ripe for him to behold her. He dared not yet court the shock of joy that the first sight of his beautiful, beloved mother must provoke.

Once more he gazed out upon sea and sky.

Nearly two hours of self-communion had passed. The first affrighting keenness of his new-born perceptions was a little blunted. He sank back among the cushions in a languorous mood of exaltation that hung his will in fetters. Twice more had his mother knocked at the door, and each time he had sent her away, inexorably, as before. And each time she had obeyed him more reluctantly. On the last occasion she had reproached him with his cruelty.

"Next time," he said to himself, and smiled fondly.

Then the smile was struck from his face as by a blow.

What was this?

He raised his hands to his eyes and rubbed them—gently, for they still ached and burned. He sat up sharply and stared out with a startled fixity of gaze at the scene outspread before him. Was it possible that his blindness was returning? He closed his inflamed eyelids and opened them again. The uniform greyness of sea and sky seemed to have grown duller in hue. The outlines of things were becoming blurred and indistinct. He had no doubt of it now. Awhile ago he had been able clearly to discern the shape of a bunch of green weed on the sands. Now it had lost all colour and form; it was no more than

a vague patch on the darkening expanse. And the tumbling waves! He had been able to follow their monotonous rise and fall, their lolling advance and their sudden collapse into foam upon the beach. But now——

He sank back and lay quite still, his eyes ranging restlessly round the room. The patterns of the wall-paper and the carpet, the tapestry hanging on the door, the pictures, the ceiling, the furniture, all were imperceptibly fading into a misty nebulosity before his eyes.

And then he recalled how the Italian had warned him that his sight might be restored only temporarily. "Perhaps for a few hours; perhaps for only a few minutes." He had forgotten that dire possibility in the first exuberance of his joy. Now the deadly truth encompassed him like a bleak, black cloud, putting all his hopes to death, banishing all his dreams of a radiant future. He must go back into the darkness again! He must return to the valley of impenetrable shadow! This glimpse of a world—and an end for ever! This brief revelation of the wonder and the mystery of earth, and then the pitiless dark once more, to cover him until death!

Even as he lay and writhed and sickened in torment the light of his eyes failed faster and faster.

Then the deeps of this strong man's soul were broken up, and he poured forth curses on the unspeakable malignity of an evil fate that had mocked him with this foretaste of a perfected life, only to snatch it away from him in the very moment of fruition.

He uttered a great cry, and rose, and groped his way—once more moving confidently in familiar, ever-deepening darkness—towards the door. He turned the key and flung the door wide, and the voice of his

agony echoed through the palpitating silence. Then he swooned and fell.

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When he regained consciousness he thought that surely he had passed through the gateless barrier and had attained to a world beyond the grave. For it seemed that he could see once more, but not as he had first learned to see. A soft, golden glow, a new, mellow effulgence filled the air. His mother's face, which he only visualised as an apparition of terrifying aspect, hung over him.

"You can see me, dear?"

"Yes. Now that I am dead I can see clearly again," he answered. She stooped and kissed him.

"Dear Ferdinand!" she murmured. "You are alive. You are still in the dear old world. You are —no, no, you must not question us, but believe what we say—it is only—we should have prepared you—but how could we foresee?"

"I thought I saw," he murmured. "It was a vision, I suppose. And then the blindness returned."

"No," she cried. "You still have your sight."

"And you will always have it in future," broke in the voice of Wyman from behind him.

"Yes," continued the mother. "You will always be able to see now. It was not the blindness that returned. How can I make you understand? It was growing late. The light always fades away, in that way, as night comes on. It was only what we call—getting dark, dear."

But many hours elapsed ere he understood, even imperfectly.

THE TRUTH ABOUT PYECRAFT

H. G. WELLS

[MR H. G. WELLS is one of the most prolific and versatile writers of the present day. He began by writing scientific stories like *The Time Machine*, *The First Men in the Moon*, and *The War of the Worlds*, many of which are in the nature of allegories. Mr Wells is essentially a thinker with great imaginative power, and has an uncanny instinct for analysing contemporary life and for discerning the developments of the future. The list of his books is too long to quote here, but every lover of short stories should possess *The Country of the Blind*, from which collection the following story has been borrowed.]

HE sits not a dozen yards away. If I glance over my shoulder I can see him. And if I catch his eye—and usually I catch his eye—it meets me with an expression——

It is mainly an imploring look—and yet with suspicion in it.

Confound his suspicion! If I wanted to tell on him I should have told long ago. I don't tell and I don't tell, and he ought to feel at his ease. As if anything so gross and fat as he could feel at ease! Who would believe me if I did tell?

Poor old Pyecraft! Great, uneasy jelly of substance! The fattest clubman in London.

He sits at one of the little club tables in the huge bay by the fire, stuffing. What is he stuffing? I glance judiciously, and catch him biting at a round of hot buttered teacake, with his eyes on me. Confound him!—with his eyes on me!

That settles it, Pyecraft! Since you *will* be abject,

since you *will* behave as though I was not a man of honour, here, right under your embedded eyes, I write the thing down—the plain truth about Pyecraft. The man I helped, the man I shielded, and who has requited me by making my club unendurable, absolutely unendurable, with his liquid appeal, with the perpetual "don't tell" of his looks.

And, besides, why does he keep on eternally eating?

Well, here goes for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!

Pyecraft—— I made the acquaintance of Pyecraft in this very smoking-room. I was a young, nervous new member, and he saw it. I was sitting all alone, wishing I knew more of the members, and suddenly he came, a great rolling front of chins and abdomina, towards me, and grunted and sat down in a chair close by me and wheezed for a space, and scraped for a space with a match and lit a cigar, and then addressed me. I forget what he said—something about the matches not lighting properly, and afterwards as he talked he kept stopping the waiters one by one as they went by, and telling them about the matches in that thin, fluty voice he has. But, anyhow, it was in some such way we began our talking.

He talked about various things and came round to games. And thence to my figure and complexion. "*You* ought to be a good cricketer," he said. I suppose I am slender, slender to what some people would call lean, and I suppose I am rather dark, still—— I am not ashamed of having a Hindu great-grandmother, but, for all that, I don't want casual strangers to see through me at a glance to *her*. So that I was set against Pyecraft from the beginning.

But he only talked about me in order to get to himself.

"I expect," he said, "you take no more exercise than I do, and probably you eat no less." (Like all excessively obese people he fancied he ate nothing.) "Yet"—and he smiled an oblique smile—"we differ."

And then he began to talk about his fatness and his fatness; all he did for his fatness and all he was going to do for his fatness; what people had advised him to do for his fatness and what he had heard of people doing for fatness similar to his. "*A priori*," he said, "one would think a question of nutrition could be answered by dietary and a question of assimilation by drugs." It was stifling. It was dumpling talk. It made me feel swelled to hear him.

One stands that sort of thing once in a way at a club, but a time came when I fancied I was standing too much. He took to me altogether too conspicuously. I could never go into the smoking-room but he would come wallowing towards me, and sometimes he came and gormandised round and about me while I had my lunch. He seemed at times almost to be clinging to me. He was a bore, but not so fearful a bore as to be limited to me; and from the first there was something in his manner—almost as though he knew, almost as though he penetrated to the fact that I *might*—that there was a remote, exceptional chance in me that no one else presented.

"I'd give anything to get it down," he would say—"anything," and peer at me over his vast cheeks and pant. Poor old Pyecraft! He has just gonged; no doubt to order another buttered teacake!

He came to the actual thing one day. "Our Pharmacopœia," he said, "our Western Pharmacopœia, is anything but the last word of medical science. In the East, I've been told——"

He stopped and stared at me. It was like being at an aquarium.

I was quite suddenly angry with him. "Look here," I said, "who told you about my great-grandmother's recipes?"

"Well," he fenced.

"Every time we've met for a week," I said, "—and we've met pretty often—you've given me a broad hint or so about that little secret of mine."

"Well," he said, "now the cat's out of the bag, I'll admit, yes, it is so. I had it——"

"From Pattison?"

"Indirectly," he said, which I believe was lying, "yes."

"Pattison," I said, "took that stuff at his own risk."

He pursed his mouth and bowed.

"My great-grandmother's recipes," I said, "are queer things to handle. My father was near making me promise——"

"He didn't?"

"No. But he warned me. He himself used one—once."

"Ah! . . . But do you think——? Suppose—suppose there did happen to be one——?"

"The things are curious documents," I said. "Even the smell of 'em. . . . No!"

But after going so far Pyecraft was resolved I should go farther. I was always a little afraid if I tried his patience too much he would fall on me suddenly and smother me. I own I was weak. But I was also annoyed with Pyecraft. I had got to that state of feeling for him that disposed me to say, "Well, *take* the risk!" The little affair of Pattison to which I have alluded was a different matter altogether. What

it was doesn't concern us now, but I knew, anyhow, that the particular recipe I used then was safe. The rest I didn't know so much about, and, on the whole, I was inclined to doubt their safety pretty completely.

Yet even if Pyecraft got poisoned——

I must confess the poisoning of Pyecraft struck me as an immense undertaking.

That evening I took that queer, odd-scented sandalwood box out of my safe, and turned the rustling skins over. The gentleman who wrote the recipes for my great-grandmother evidently had a weakness for skins of a miscellaneous origin, and his handwriting was cramped to the last degree. Some of the things are quite unreadable to me—though my family, with its Indian Civil Service associations, has kept up a knowledge of Hindustani from generation to generation—and none are absolutely plain sailing. But I found the one that I knew was there soon enough, and sat on the floor by my safe for some time looking at it.

"Look here," said I to Pyecraft next day, and snatched the slip away from his eager grasp.

"So far as I can make it out, this is a recipe for Loss of Weight." ("Ah!" said Pyecraft.) "I'm not absolutely sure, but I think it's that. And if you take my advice you'll leave it alone. Because, you know—I blacken my blood in your interest, Pyecraft—my ancestors on that side were, so far as I can gather, a jolly queer lot. See?"

"Let me try it," said Pyecraft.

I leant back in my chair. My imagination made one mighty effort and fell flat within me. "What in Heaven's name, Pyecraft," I asked, "do you think you'll look like when you get thin?"

He was impervious to reason. I made him promise never to say a word to me about his disgusting fatness

again whatever happened—never, and then I handed him that little piece of skin.

"It's nasty stuff," I said.

"No matter," he said, and took it.

He goggled at it. "But—but——" he said.

He had just discovered that it wasn't English.

"To the best of my ability," I said, "I will do you a translation."

I did my best. After that we didn't speak for a fortnight. Whenever he approached me I frowned and motioned him away, and he respected our compact, but at the end of the fortnight he was as fat as ever. And then he got a word in.

"I must speak," he said. "It isn't fair. There's something wrong. It's done me no good. You're not doing your great-grandmother justice."

"Where's the recipe?"

He produced it gingerly from his pocket-book.

I ran my eye over the items. "Was the egg addled?" I asked.

"No. Ought it to have been?"

"That," I said, "goes without saying in all my poor dear great-grandmother's recipes. When condition or quality is not specified you must get the worst. She was drastic or nothing. . . . And there's one or two possible alternatives to some of these other things. You got *fresh* rattlesnake venom?"

"I got a rattlesnake from Jamrach's. It cost—it cost——"

"That's your affair anyhow. This last item——"

"I know a man who——"

"Yes. H'm. Well, I'll write the alternatives down. So far as I know the language, the spelling of this recipe is particularly atrocious. By-the-by, dog here probably means pariah dog."

For a month after that I saw Pyecraft constantly at the club and as fat and anxious as ever. He kept our treaty, but at times he broke the spirit of it by shaking his head despondently. Then one day in the cloakroom he said, "Your great-grandmother——"

"Not a word against her," I said; and he held his peace.

I could have fancied he had desisted, and I saw him one day talking to three new members about his fatness as though he was in search of other recipes. And then, quite unexpectedly, his telegram came.

"Mr Formalyn!" bawled a page-boy under my nose, and I took the telegram and opened it at once.

"*For Heaven's sake come.—Pyecraft.*"

"H'm," said I, and to tell the truth I was so pleased at the rehabilitation of my great-grandmother's reputation this evidently promised that I made a most excellent lunch.

I got Pyecraft's address from the hall porter. Pyecraft inhabited the upper half of a house in Bloomsbury, and I went there so soon as I had done my coffee and Trappistine. I did not wait to finish my cigar.

"Mr Pyecraft?" said I, at the front door.

They believed he was ill; he hadn't been out for two days.

"He expects me," said I, and they sent me up.

I rang the bell at the lattice-door upon the landing.

"He shouldn't have tried it, anyhow," I said to myself. "A man who eats like a pig ought to look like a pig."

An obviously worthy woman, with an anxious face and a carelessly placed cap, came and surveyed me through the lattice.

I gave my name and she let me in in a dubious fashion.

"Well?" said I, as we stood together inside Pyecraft's piece of the landing.

"'E said you was to come in if you came," she said, and regarded me, making no motion to show me anywhere. And then, confidentially, "'E's locked in, sir."

"Locked in?"

"Locked 'imself in yesterday morning and 'asn't let anyone in since, sir. And ever and again *swearing*. Oh, my!"

I stared at the door she indicated by her glances. "In there?" I said.

"Yes, sir."

"What's up?"

She shook her head sadly. "'E keeps on calling for vittles, sir. '*Eavy* vittles 'e wants. I get 'im what I can. Pork 'e's had, sooit puddin', sossiges, noo bread. Everythink like that. Left outside, if you please, and me go away. 'E's eatin', sir, somethink *awful*."

There came a piping bawl from inside the door: "That Formalyn?"

"That you, Pyecraft?" I shouted, and went and banged the door.

"Tell her to go away."

I did.

Then I could hear a curious pattering upon the door, almost like some one feeling for the handle in the dark, and Pyecraft's familiar grunts.

"It's all right," I said, "she's gone."

But for a long time the door didn't open.

I heard the key turn. Then Pyecraft's voice said, "Come in."

I turned the handle and opened the door. Naturally I expected to see Pyecraft.

Well, you know, he wasn't there!

I never had such a shock in my life. There was his sitting-room in a state of untidy disorder, plates and dishes among the books and writing things, and several chairs overturned, but Pyecraft——

"It's all right, old man; shut the door," he said, and then I discovered him.

There he was, right up close to the cornice in the corner by the door, as though some one had glued him to the ceiling. His face was anxious and angry. He panted and gesticulated. "Shut the door," he said. "If that woman gets hold of it——"

I shut the door, and went and stood away from him and stared.

"If anything gives way and you tumble down," I said, "you'll break your neck, Pyecraft."

"I wish I could," he wheezed.

"A man of your age and weight getting up to kiddish gymnastics——"

"Don't," he said, and looked agonised.

"I'll tell you," he said, and gesticulated.

"How the deuce," said I, "are you holding on up there?"

And then abruptly I realised that he was not holding on at all, that he was floating up there—just as a gas-filled bladder might have floated in the same position. He began a struggle to thrust himself away from the ceiling and to clamber down the wall to me. "It's that prescription," he panted, as he did so. "Your great-gran——"

He took hold of a framed engraving rather carelessly as he spoke and it gave way, and he flew back to the ceiling again, while the picture smashed on to the sofa. Bump he went against the ceiling, and I knew then why he was all over white on the more salient curves

and angles of his person. He tried again more carefully, coming down by way of the mantel.

It was really a most extraordinary spectacle, that great, fat, apoplectic-looking man upside down and trying to get from the ceiling to the floor. "That prescription," he said. "Too successful."

"How?"

"Loss of weight—almost complete."

And then, of course, I understood.

"By Jove, Pyecraft," said I, "what you wanted was a cure for fatness! But you always called it weight. You would call it weight."

Somehow I was extremely delighted. I quite liked Pyecraft for the time. "Let me help you!" I said, and took his hand and pulled him down. He kicked about, trying to get foothold somewhere. It was very like holding a flag on a windy day.

"That table," he said, pointing, "is solid mahogany and very heavy. If you can put me under that——"

I did, and there he wallowed about like a captive balloon, while I stood on his hearthrug and talked to him.

I lit a cigar. "Tell me," I said, "what happened."

"I took it," he said.

"How did it taste?"

"Oh, *beastly*!"

I should fancy they all did. Whether one regards the ingredients or the probable compound or the possible results, almost all my great-grandmother's remedies appear to me at least to be extraordinarily uninviting. For my own part——

"I took a little sip first."

"Yes?"

"And as I felt lighter and better after an hour, I decided to take the draught."

"My dear Pyecraft!"

"I held my nose," he explained. "And then I kept on getting lighter and lighter—and helpless, you know."

He gave way suddenly to a burst of passion. "What the goodness am I to *do*?" he said.

"There's one thing pretty evident," I said, "that you mustn't do. If you go out of doors you'll go up and up." I waved an arm upward. "They'd have to send Santos-Dumont after you to bring you down again."

"I suppose it will wear off?"

I shook my head. "I don't think you can count on that," I said.

And then there was another burst of passion, and he kicked out at adjacent chairs and banged the floor. He behaved just as I should have expected a great, fat, self-indulgent man to behave under trying circumstances—that is to say, very badly. He spoke of me and of my great-grandmother with an utter want of discretion.

"I never asked you to take the stuff," I said.

And generously disregarding the insults he was putting upon me, I sat down in the armchair and began to talk to him in a sober, friendly fashion.

I pointed out to him that this was a trouble he had brought upon himself, and that it had almost an air of poetical justice. He had eaten too much. This he disputed, and for a time we argued the point.

He became noisy and violent, so I desisted from this aspect of his lesson. "And then," said I, "you committed the sin of euphemism. You called it, not Fat, which is just and inglorious, but Weight. You——"

He interrupted to say that he recognised all that. What was he to *do*?

I suggested he should adapt himself to his new conditions. So we came to the really sensible part of the business. I suggested that it would not be difficult for him to learn to walk about on the ceiling with his hands——

"I can't sleep," he said.

But that was no great difficulty. It was quite possible, I pointed out, to make a shake-up under a wire mattress, fasten the under things on with tapes, and have a blanket, sheet, and coverlet to button at the side. He would have to confide in his housekeeper, I said; and after some squabbling he agreed to that. (Afterwards it was quite delightful to see the beautifully matter-of-fact way with which the good lady took all these amazing inversions.) He could have a library ladder in his room, and all his meals could be laid on the top of his bookcase. We also hit on an ingenious device by which he could get to the floor whenever he wanted, which was simply to put the *British Encyclopædia* (tenth edition) on the top of his open shelves. He just pulled out a couple of volumes and held on, and down he came. And we agreed there must be iron staples along the skirting, so that he could cling to those whenever he wanted to get about the room on the lower level.

As we got on with the thing I found myself almost keenly interested. It was I who called in the housekeeper and broke matters to her, and it was I chiefly who fixed up the inverted bed. In fact, I spent two whole days at his flat. I am a handy, interfering sort of man with a screw-driver, and I made all sorts of ingenious adaptations for him—ran a wire to bring his bells within reach, turned all his electric lights up instead of down, and so on. The whole affair was extremely curious and interesting to me, and it was

delightful to think of Pyecraft like some great, fat blow-fly, crawling about on his ceiling and clambering round the lintel of his doors from one room to another, and never, never, never coming to the club any more. . . .

Then, you know, my fatal ingenuity got the better of me. I was sitting by his fire drinking his whisky, and he was up in his favourite corner by the cornice, tacking a Turkey carpet to the ceiling, when the idea struck me. "By Jove, Pyecraft!" I said, "all this is totally unnecessary."

And before I could calculate the complete consequences of my notion I blurted it out. "Lead underclothing," said I, and the mischief was done.

Pyecraft received the thing almost in tears. "To be right ways up again——" he said.

I gave him the whole secret before I saw where it would take me. "Buy sheet lead," I said; "stamp it into discs. Sew 'em all over your underclothes until you have enough. Have lead-soled boots, carry a bag of solid lead, and the thing is done! Instead of being a prisoner here you may go abroad again, Pyecraft; you may travel——"

A still happier idea came to me. "You need never fear a shipwreck. All you need do is just slip off some or all of your clothes, take the necessary amount of luggage in your hand, and float up in the air——"

In his emotion he dropped the tack-hammer within an ace of my head. "By Jove!" he said, "I shall be able to come back to the club again."

The thing pulled me up short. "By Jove!" I said, faintly. "Yes. Of course—you will."

He did. He does. There he sits behind me now, stuffing—as I live!—a third go of buttered teacake. And no one in the whole world knows—except his

housekeeper and me—that he weighs practically nothing; that he is a mere boring mass of assimilatory matter, mere clouds in clothing, *niente, nefas*, the most inconsiderable of men. There he sits watching until I have done this writing. Then, if he can, he will waylay me. He will come billowing up to me. . . .

He will tell me over again all about it, how it feels, how it doesn't feel, how he sometimes hopes it is passing off a little. And always somewhere in that fat, abundant discourse he will say, "The secret's keeping, eh? If anyone knew of it—I should be so ashamed. . . . Makes a fellow look such a fool, you know. Crawling about on a ceiling and all that. . . ."

And now to elude Pyecraft, occupying, as he does, an admirable strategic position between me and the door.

From "The Country of the Blind"

PRISCILLA

DORA SIGERSON SHORTER

[Dora Sigerson Shorter (or "Dora Sigerson," as she often called herself) was an Irish poet, who was born in 1866 and died in 1918. Her father was a famous Celtic scholar, who also wrote a number of scientific treatises. She married Mr Clement Shorter, the well-known man of letters. She wrote one novel, a number of short stories and sketches, and a great number of lyrical poems and ballads. The story entitled "Priscilla" illustrates the tenderness and sympathy of her nature—a quality which is so apparent in her poems.]

PRISCILLA was dead, and all the women of the village had come to her waking. They moved about the big house where she had lived so long and so quietly as though they had never seen it before; and they never had, without Priscilla.

They moved silently, or came together in little groups to talk about her. They seemed as much amazed as sorry. Who could imagine Priscilla dead? Surely she was the oldest woman in the village; and yet she seemed not so very old; but no one remembered the village without her, and no one remembered her young. Perhaps she had entered into their lives unnoticed, and only when she came to her womanhood had taken her place in their sight, as a little unknown seedling will one day become a tree and a landmark.

Perhaps in the great house she had passed her shadowy girlhood, and only became a personage when her uncle died, leaving her his sole and only heir. Then she crept forth, and her fading hands drew the hearts of the people towards her.

Was she rich? Who can say? The black, barrack-

like house, with its neglected garden, had no air of wealth about it; but never a child or woman came to Priscilla for help and went away empty-handed. Some said that for this latter reason the house grew more desolate as it grew old,—that pictures and silver and ornaments vanished one by one.

But others would have it that Priscilla had a box of money in her room, corded, sealed and locked. For true it was that such a box, to all appearance, was there, as Ann O'Ruark, who nursed her once in an illness, could tell.

Now she lay dead, and it seemed to the women of the little village as though something marvellous had happened,—as though the old round tower they looked upon every morning when they opened their doors had crumbled in the night, or as though the church bell they depended upon to awaken them at six had forgotten to ring, leaving them late and bewildered. True, she might have been ill or gone away on a visit, or vanished for a time. But to die! No one ever thought that of Priscilla after all those years. Why, even now the children from the cottages were running down the street on the stroke of five, to meet her coming from her Saturday's marketing with something hidden for them in her pocket. Yet they had been told she would come up the narrow street no more. Yes, even now poor cripple Janie Doyle was turning her face to the window to be ready for the smile and cheery word that always met her. Yet she too knew Priscilla would never pass again.

All the women there sitting at her wake felt that to-morrow they would put on their shawls and run to tell Priscilla their joys and sorrows, or to ask her advice, as they had done all the time since they became aware she *was*. And Priscilla would be lying

with that strange smile upon her face, so far removed from them.

Was she so very old—Priscilla? Hers was a face you could not imagine had ever been young. Wrinkled and fallen away, you could not fix and fill it with youth.

Once she had said to a child, "I was light as a bird when I was young as you"; and the little one had gone away troubled at the lie. She knew, as all the children did, that Priscilla had never, never been young.

Though Priscilla knew everything of everybody, nobody knew anything of Priscilla, except, of course, that she was an old maid—as anyone of the name of Priscilla must be. Why, the very sound of it was enough to tell how prim, how neat, how old-maidish she was. No one could have imagined her with a lover. Many a time the village women had sat and talked of Priscilla, what she must have been like as a girl—if she ever had been a girl: the primmest of little girls, who always had her hair smooth and lessons learnt; a girl with large feet and high, buttoned boots, with every button fastened in its place; thin legs, of course; a waist that had never known tight-lacing; straight hair, first in a plait, and later a tight coil at the back of her smooth head; a high white forehead, intelligent grey eyes, a rather large and rather pink nose, a pleasant mouth, thin neck and breast, long arms, large nervous hands. Yes, that must have been Priscilla, if ever she had been a girl. But there was no lover in the setting of Priscilla's girlhood. No, she hated men, and rough boys the natty Priscilla must have always shunned, nor could she, with her cleverness, ever have admired the developing youth.

Yes, she hated men and all their sex; she was hardly kind to little boys—they were cruel to her cats, she would say. But the girl babies, how she loved them! There was never a birth in the village where she was not first visitor to the new arrival. And if it was a boy, she would look close into the little red face till he raised his voice and howled. Then she would laugh. "Shout for it and you will get it, my lad; only shout long enough and you will get it." Then she would press a golden pound into his little fist and leave him. But if it was a girl, she would take it in her arms, and if it was crying it would stop that minute. She would drop a tear upon it, perhaps, and whisper things into its little unconscious ears. When she was leaving she would put a guinea into its hands, with the words, "For your sad heart, my girl, for your sad heart." So the baby would be added to her list of loves.

But she liked best the lovelorn maidens who would come to her with their stories. They were indeed for her heart of hearts. Many a sorrowful soul that had forgotten how to be proud would after consulting with her become strong again, and win the lover back by flaunting who had grown weary of too patient a love.

The house was built like one that had never been intended to hold the young: dark, gloomy, rambling. Priscilla was the only one to whom it seemed a fitted background.

The little children who braved its awfulness would hasten, afraid of its silence, from passage to passage till they reached Priscilla, every minute expecting a horrible something belonging to the mould and age to spring upon them from each dark place. Only the mysterious cupboards with hidden sweets and jams,

found nowhere else, could tempt them to come. And it took three of them to do it, clinging together, and stopping often with shrieks that were not all laughter, but served to fill the dusty silence.

When Priscilla died there turned up from somewhere a far-removed cousin—a stern, middle-aged woman, who looked at the world through smoked glasses; and no doubt the world looked grey to her. She had no tears, no smiles, no sentiments, only the hardness of middle life, which has left the softness of youth behind and not yet reached the softness of age. She was a businesslike person, and ordered everything and everybody as if she had lived all her life in Priscilla's house. The people wondered if she would get Priscilla's box of treasure; but, of course, there was no one else. The cousin was making herself busy, pretending to be concerned for Priscilla. Why had she not come before to take care of her? She wanted to blame somebody for not calling in a doctor. But she ought to know Priscilla would not have the doctor. She had a perfect horror of the doctor, and would never see him, or speak of him. There was only one doctor in the village—an old man, as old as Priscilla, it might be—a married man with grown-up sons and daughters, now married themselves and doing well. Once a neighbour had spoken of the doctor to Priscilla. It was to repeat a story of his past, a story of a lonely girl he had jilted almost on their wedding day; and how the girl had vanished and been heard of no more; but that had not happened in the village, and so the village was not interested in the particulars. When Priscilla heard the story she rose from her seat and went to the window without a word. So the neighbour thought she was weary, and changed the subject from men and their misdeeds, but she did make a

parting remark to the effect that the doctor and his wife never got on together. She was surprised when Priscilla said, in a voice so sweet and far-away she hardly heard it, " Poor lad ! poor lad ! "

Priscilla would not have the doctor come near her when she lived, but when she died he had to be called in. People who watched him coming were surprised to see him falter, he ought to have been so used to death. And yet he came like one most cruelly afraid. He stood at the door of the room where she lay for a few moments, as though unable to enter. Then he pushed the door open and went as if with an effort. When he reached her bedside he stood silent, looking upon her face. And there were those there who thought they had heard him whisper, " Priscilla ! " and then louder, as though she must hear, " Priscilla ! "

But Priscilla was dead, and all the village had come to her wake ; two nights they had sat up, and this was the third. The will had been read—such as it was. For there was little to leave to anybody. Yet every one had had a trifle, the house had gone to the cousin, but there was no money to speak of—nothing more except the little wooden box, corded, locked, and sealed—the box that must contain the body of the fortune. The cousin's fingers had been on the cords, the eyes of the village women had been turned to it, waiting for it to open, when they were told it was to be buried with her. What an idea ! Whoever heard of a box being buried in a tomb ? Who would ever have thought she would have carried away what she could no longer want ? Who would have imagined Priscilla a miser ?

The crowd had all gone to the dining-room at the end of the long passage in the west wing, and the cousin was sitting alone in the room with the box ;

upstairs Priscilla was lying, and she would never know —never know the seals were broken and the knots undone. Surely, it was no harm to open and look in —no, not to touch a single penny, since she was such a screw—only to open. No box was ever yet buried by a woman unopened. The lid lay loose.

The cousin sat back a moment, then went upon her knees and raised the cover. She saw the contents were wrapped in white paper. She pulled it off and drew forth what came to her hand. Astonishment was upon her face, for first there came a dress,—a white satin dress,—then a long veil, then a wreath of orange blossoms. Shoes, gloves, and underwear, all lace and ribbons, all sewn by hand in tiny stitches, surely Priscilla's own. What was this the cousin had stumbled on unawares? A wedding outfit, Priscilla's wedding outfit, breathing the breath of years, lavender and age. How time had ruined all, as it had destroyed Priscilla's love-story! How was it the cousin never knew of this prepared wedding? Where or who was the man? She had known little of Priscilla when she was young, only that she was fatherless and motherless, and that an uncle had taken charge of her; that she had grown up between the grey walls of her uncle's quiet, lonely house and a convent school, where she had spent half her time. Always unnoticed, silent, and companionless, was it because there was no one who cared enough about her to draw her from her solitude? There was something, the cousin fancied she half remembered, something of a scandal of Priscilla and a young doctor, something about love-letters and stolen meetings discovered at the convent. Was it possible Priscilla had returned home to work her wedding outfit, while the young doctor had forgotten his promises and married money while she still

was awaiting him? But it was a vague memory, and might not have been she.

The cousin bent above the box. Nothing else; no money—not a penny. Ah! here was a key to the story, a bundle of old letters—love-letters, for were they not tied by a silken bow? Poor Priscilla!

As she took them into her hands she fancied she heard the sound of a woman sobbing far away; it might be upstairs with the dead. Some friend of Priscilla's, no doubt. She turned the letters over in her hands. She wished that wild crying would stop. It disturbed her. She laid her fingers upon the beknotted strings, then hesitated. Should she dare spy into the secrets of the helpless dead? But curiosity was strong; she loosed the ribbons. At the same time a wild cry resounded through the room. She sprang to her feet, the letters in her hands, and looked fearfully around. There was no one there. It must have been outside. Yes; it came from the floor above—from Priscilla's room—long, sad, and awful: the sound of a woman's wild grief.

The cousin thrust the letters into her pocket, and ran down the hall, calling to the people to hurry to the room above. She called to them to bring hot blankets and restoratives, that Priscilla was not dead, that she had waked in terror, finding herself decked out for death. And all the time she was shouting to them she was running up the long staircase and down the corridors to the room where the crying came from. Then she called, "Priscilla, I am coming; don't be afraid; Priscilla, I am coming." She imagined Priscilla sitting up in her grave-clothes, half mad with terror at her position. When she touched the handle of the door the crying ceased. She opened it, and stood half-fainting upon the threshold. In her coffin

lay Priscilla stiff and dead, her hands clasped as they had been when she was laid there, her face unchanged, the great room empty—death everywhere.

The cousin stood dumb at the door, the women crowding about her with hot blankets and restoratives. " It was a mistake," she said ; and pushing them back, closed the door.

She went downstairs to the room where the trunk lay, and drawing the letters from her pocket placed them back unopened where she had found them. With reverent hands she laid the wedding things one by one in their place, and when she had finished she sealed and corded the box.

When Priscilla went to her sleeping-place the next day, there was borne by her side a little trunk, and it was laid at her feet in the cold vault that held so many dead.

From " The Father Confessor "

À PROPOS DES BOTTES

C. E. MONTAGUE

[Mr C. E. Montague joined the staff of the *Manchester Guardian* shortly after leaving Oxford, and became a director and leader-writer of that famous paper. He wrote novels, such as *A Hind Let Loose*, and dramatic criticism which has never been surpassed; but the general public think of him as the author of *Disenchantment*, *Fiery Particles*, and *The Right Place*. These collections of short stories, many of them dealing with experiences in the Great War, are magnificently written—with humour, penetrating observation, and ironical wit. Mr Montague died in 1928.]

WAR is not what it was in the good time of Falstaff, when armies would not take the field without trains of picturesque sutlers hanging about them—sages and thieves and humorous potboys and sinister crones and debonair goddesses not inexorable to men—an auxiliary host of "character parts" who may have got in the way of the war, but did good beyond price to people writing historical novels and plays. And yet the semi-official, and even the demi-semi-official, campaigner is not quite extinct. He has turned army chaplain, or works for the Y.M.C.A., or she keeps a refreshment hut or a hospital at the base.

Of such was my friend John Macleary. He came to France and the northern bank of the Somme in 1916 as a more or less uniformed instrument of Australian kindness, bringing gift coffee, biscuits, and tea to serve to Australian troops in their very few hours of ease. He also brought, on his feet and two-thirds of his legs, a pair of top boots that stirred the imagination in man.

Leriche, our French interpreter, noticed them first. He had a nose for antiques. After saying "*Quel*

type!" as the French always did after meeting Macleary, he added, "His boots, too! Something of storied, of ancient. In them I find a bloom, a fragrance of—no, I cannot tell of what age, of what dynasty."

I could not either. Fantastic in cut, fantastically unfitted for use in this of all wars, they looked even quainter than the quaint Burgundy fortifications where he and I sat and dangled our legs out idly over the castle wall of Péronne. How was it? Had we not known? Was Australia not young, after all? Or why should her boots come trailing these clouds of an uncharted glory of ancientry?

I asked Macleary.

"Me boots?" He flicked them sombrely with his cane. "They're nothin' to write home about. I'd as lief have your own. But, puttin' me boots to wan side for the momint, I'll tell ye a story. A poor story was it for me, an' yet it had elemints in it——"

John paused again, looking down at the mud in the moat, as a prospector might stare at a few golden gleams in a river's drift dirt. He went on:

"I had been a sheep-shearer then for eight years. Mind you, shearers make gran' money out in Australy. Ev'ry penny I saved that I could, havin' it still in me mind to go back one day an' buy th' old holdin' in Connaught, an' half the boreen, an' live on me land.

"Ev'ry year, soon as shearin' was done, an' all the boys lightin' out for the centres of civ'lization, possest with desire to shout all mankind till their cap'tal was entirely consumed, where would I be but up an' away with a start on them all, an' sneakin' guiltily into a great bank at Sydney to hoard the year's takin's, an' then out again an' away to th' ends of th' earth seekin' means of support, an' holdin' off from me the gnawing temptation to blue me whole forchune.

"Risin' a hundred an' forty pounds was it, the time I met with the Divvil. He was an Irishman too, an' a man of talent an' information. A Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, he'd been in his time, it was said, an' the greatest whisky drinker in Leinster. It was for that he was put out of Trinity, so ye may guess what he'd drink when he gave his mind to it. Other times, when he'd a mod'rate amount of drink taken, he'd talk with the tongues of men an' of angels. Write, too, he could that. He'd written wan book, an' nobody'd buy it. He must have written it either dead drunk or dead sober. If he'd have had the stren'th to put on his hat and off home, just before the third glass, an' plump down to the writin', begob, he'd have had Shakespeare beat. As it was, he was just a derelic' timber-ship loose in th' Atlantic—a ruin himsilf an' a peril to all mar'ners.

"I was wan of them, God help me. I fouled him in Sydney, an' I just steerin' me ninth golden arg'sy swiftly along a side-street to me bank, tremblin' with terror of sightin' anny friends that I ought be rights to be treatin'! I'd met him wance, or twice only, before.

"'Are ye rich, Macleary?' the pirate says, readin' me soul like a poster.

"'I am not, Brennan,' says I, God forgive me, an' I with the wealth of a Jew in me pocket.

"'D'ye *want* to be rich, then?' says he.

"'I do that,' says I, 'sincerely.'

"'It's yours,' he says, 'for the pickin' it up from the floor. That is,' he says, 'if ye have cap'tal, as I have.'

"I must have forgotten me breedin' an' stared incred'lously at the man. He that had never been known to have a coin in this world, savin' only the wan that he'd just borried off you!

"'Macleary,' he says, 'th' innuendo is just. But

I've won the two-hundred-pound prize in the Wallaby Sweep this day, an' the future lies smilin' before me. All I lack now,' he says, 'is a practical man like yourself, to keep a firm hold on his cash an' me own. The mor'l an' intellectu'l plant of the business I will supply.'

"With that he unfolded his plan. It seemed that some foreign woman in London, wan Madam Tussore, had acquired the wealth of th' Indies—that was Brennan's estimate of the profits—be keepin' a set of graven images, made up of wax—eminent burglars an' emp'rors an' all the great wans of th' earth, each in his habit same as he lived, an' admittin' the people at sixpence a time, or a shillin' itself, until they'd be awed an' entranced the way they'd be comin' next pay-day again to the booth an' bringin' the children.

"'Think,' says Brennan, 'what poverty-stricken old sort of a pitch is London, compared to Australy! Consider th' advantages here! An aurif'rous soil; a simple, impreshnable white population, manny of them with incomes that rush in upon them like vast tidal waves, at intervals, same as your own, cryin' aloud to be spent; the pop'lar taste for th' arts as yet unpolluted be these pestilintial movies that's layin' waste rotten old hem'spheres like Europe; an', as if made to our hand, a creative genius like Thady O'Gorman beyant, that's the greatest warrant in Sydney for forgin' wax figures of sufferin' saints till he has all th' old women south of th' Equator weepin' tears down on to the floor of the church.'

"I'll own I was carried away be the flood of his el'quence. Who wouldn't be? He was gifted. An' yet I took me own part when it came to choosin' the figures that we were to start on in life. Brennan was all for Cupud an' Syky an' Bacchus an' God knows what naked old divvils besides. 'Get thee behin' me,

Brennan,' says I. 'We'll come to them after. It's Kelly the Bushranger first, an' Charles Stuart Parnell and Bridget the Blessed, if I'm to go a step further. Strike well home first, to the hearts of the people.'

"'John,' he says, 'I give in. Ye're a child of this world, an' the moment is yours. But wait,' he says, 'till the show's well afoot. Then there'll be no more holdin' the childhren of light in me person, an' that's a fair warning.'

"He was as bad as his word. But that came on after. We made a magnif'cent start in the Irish quarter of Sydney with saints an' liberators an' Manchester martyrs, an' Kelly an' Jawn L. Sullivan, all sittin' roun' a modest apartment. Brennan was almost decent about them at first. 'They'll be our Committee of Public Safety,' he says. 'To whatever a proper ambish'n may afterwards lead, we'll still keep this crowd of potboilers in perm'nent session. Null an' void are they all,' he says, 'as ingines of culture, an' yet, as strictly fiscal measures, they're good for taxin' the people.'

"Brennan did the patter wherever we opened the show. An', at that job, Envy herself couldn't say but that he was the boy that was in it. Ye know the way all the nations on earth, an' the Parthians an' Medes an' Elamites an' the rest, are assembled in Sydney—Brennan kept them all standin' on wan foot an' rubbin' th' other sof'ly against their shins with excitement the time he'd be blatherin' on from the tribune, portrayin' Kelly's last stan' like a Grattan, an' Sullivan's fight with Gentleman Corbett, an' all th' old glories of Ireland, till I'd be worn to a thread with wantin' to hear him meself, an' I at the pay door, stemmin' the rush of the public we hadn't the room for.

"The end of the month saw us seventy pounds to

the good. I, with me habits of thrift, was for bankin' the whole. But 'Put it all into the business,' says Brennan. 'That's what me poor fawther would always be sayin', that failed for the greatest sum ever known since they built the Four Courts. "Always invest business profits in your own business," he'd say, "an' keep them under your eye an' away from the claws of these railway directors an' anny wild cats of the sort that'd waste all before them." '

"That gold that we made at our first leapin' off was to be the root of all evil. Brennan's rulin' pash'n was loosed. Be this and be that he sejuced me. Before he was done we'd invested every penny we'd made, an' the rest of me savin's to that, an' the leavin's out of his own unblest gains on the Sweep —invested it all in an outfit of wax monnimints to celebrities nobody'd heard of—Hom'r an' Plato an' Cupud an' Syky; Endymion, an' he bein' kissed be the Moon; an' Antony—not the saint, bless him, but th' opposite—some loose divvil just after kissin' a hijjus black strumpet from Egypt; an' wan Diogenysus rolled up in a tub, an' another profligut be the same name sittin' cocked up on a similar tub, but up-ended, an' he with vine-leaves dishivelled about in his hair an' an expensive glass in his hand (for Brennan must have the glass, as he said, of the period), an' God knows what other old trappin's of wicked improv'dence—all in wax, mind ye, an' perfectly done, I'll own that, be Thady, whose forchune we made with th' orders we gave him, an' every man-jack in the whole menag'rie the spit of the livin' orig'nal. Brennan certified that. An' he knew. He knew all, the man Brennan, barrin' the way to keep alive in this world an' not ruin all his acquaintance.

"For a few days the public endured it unblenchin'.

Then the takin's fell off with a run. 'Ye've made th' old show too instructive,' says wan man, and he a good cust'mer. 'Begob, it's a ramp,' says another: 'no better vally for money than losin' your way in London an' fallin' head first into the British Musee'm.' 'Ah, then, f'r shame,' says a third; 'be what I can see, the exhibuts have nothin' to do in this diss'lute Zoo that ye have only kissin' an' drinkin'.'

"Brennan was mad at that man. 'If ye'd got a clean soul in your body,' he says, 'ye'd be hove up right out of your beastly habitchul thoughts be the purity of th' artist's conciption. Be off with ye out of the booth,' he says, givin' the man what he'd paid to come in, 'an' the Divvil take ye and your thruppence.'

"If the Divvil had taken all the thruppences that we lost be these means he could have rinted a good house in Merrion Square. 'It's their fault, not ours,' Brennan would say to me mood'ly, after we'd turned out the lights on another calam'tous performance. 'No, it's not even their fault,' he'd say; 'it's the fate of th' ill-starred, stunted town-dweller to-day. They haven't it in them, poor creatures, to offer themselves, like so manny clean, empty, sinsitized sheets, to the influ'nce of art, the way anny Greek'd have done—at least, down to Per'cles. The poor nerve-worn scuts haven't got the seren'ty, nor yet receptiv'ty. They're knowin', without havin' knowledge, an' that's worst of all. We're before our time, Jawn, with this show—aye, and behind it as well. We'd have made money besides th' Ilyssus, an' we'll make it yet be the waters of Murrumbidgee, as easy as anny dog'd be waggin' his tail.'

"'But when, Brennan? When?' says I, ag'nized.

"'When boys and girls are prop'ly taught,' says he, 'in the schools.'

"'God help us,' says I. 'Not till then! At the thick end, it'll be, of five hundred years!'

"'Mebbe,' Brennan says; 'but wan thing ye'll have noticed. It goes deep. An artist's creation—a pome or wax figure—may seem mere foolishness to the minds of the half-idducated that think they know all before them; an', mark you, the very same artist will find his intintions read off straight an' easy at sight be simple uns'phist'cated folk, sailors an' trappers an' cowboys, that live with the earth an' walk be the fixed stars. It's been noticed repeatedly.'

"'Well, an' what of it?' says I.

"'Jawn,' he says, 'the right course for us is——'

"The man's speech was om'nously quiet. That warned me. I knew I'd be bolted with in a minnut, wance the wild Piggasus of his el'quence had gathered its feet fairly under it. I interrupted.

"'Ah, then,' says I, 'the right course for us is to strangle Plato an' Cic'ro beyant in their beds, an' all this pernocthuous brood of vipers we have at us, eatin' our vitals, an' go back like prod'gal sons as we are to the Ranger, an' Jawn L., an' Turpin, an' anny other honest bread-winners we have in the stock, an' we sinnin' here a long time, before Hivven, an' in their sight.'

"'Don't be too hard on the creatures,' he says, still quiet an' only holdin' me off, but I knew he was surr'ptish'sly gath'rin' his breath for me destruction. 'Aren't they victims of circumstance, same as ourselves?'

"'They're a Trust,' I says, fighting hard for me holdin' in Connaught, 'a Trust of the sinistrest type of par'sites, sittin' in there on their armchairs an' tubs an' devourin' poor people's means of subsistence.'

"'The men you're slightin',' he says, with the same portentous an' horr'ble calm as before, 'made this world the gran' place that it is.'

"'Aye, an' no grander,' says I. 'An old synd'cate of wasters. Upas-trees are they, a whole vin'mous grove, sproutin' above and rootin' below, an' we plantin' an' wat'rin', an' all the divvils in hell givin' th' increase.'

"Brennan waited an' let me anger go spendin' an' wastin' itself. Brennan was like that. He was a sthrategist—none to equal him. Then he commenced fair an' aisy, as though he were right, an' he just unravellin' all the good sense that I'd spun on him.

"'Jawn,' he says, 'ye're practicul, in a sense. But ye should be more practicul. Semi-practicul men are apt not to apprehend the cash value of boldness. Wasn't Columbus considered, be all the Maclearies in Spain, an unpracticul vish'nary—he that begot every hard-headed business man ever crawled on the face of the States? Jawn, we're the Columbuses of our age, an' a bountiful Prov'dence has dealt us, this hour, the strongest hand ever played. In goin' up country to-morra'—he dished the words out to me slowly, like stones ye'd dhrop into a well, holdin' me down with th' or'tor's eye that was in him—'we'll be exploitin' the measureless virgin soil of the soul, tillin' intellectu'l prairies an' puttin' mor'l Niagaras to work. It's not to your love of th' ideel that I'm callin', deep as I know it to be. It's a business prop'sish'n I make when I say, let us cast our bread on the waters without, an' accept the returns. It's as men of the world that we penetrate, from to-morra, the heart of this cont'nent, committin' ourselves, an' the show, to th' auroral freshness of spirrut pervadin' a pastor'l race. They're makin' good wages, their eye is single, an' their bodies full of light.'

"I do him no justice at all, givin' you just a few scattered drops from the man's glowin' torrent of

words. He was possist. He had a divvil. What chance had I in th' encounter—I that had nought but common sense on me side, an' he with a tongue that'd make a hare of Demosthins or Cic'ro or anny old hot-air merchant of all that we'd got in our three covered vans? I was beat—an' we quitted the good things of life the next day, conductin' our drove of white elephants into the desert.

"Why would I weary you with the tale? It's all in the Bible, after the Jews had quit out of Egypt, save that never an issue of manna an' quails was dished out in our wilderness—no, nor anny Christian-able lan' like Palestine lay at th' end of it.

"Wance an' agen in a week of desolate travel we'd find some inhab'tants an' pitch our big tent an' call them up to be taxed. The few that'd pay at the door, in their des'p'rate thirst for an instiant's escape from the depths of the country, were soon discontented, fit to take back their money or wreck all before them. The Cath'lics objected to Henry th' Eighth an' th' Prod'stants to Brian Boru, an' all they'd agree on was hatin' Demosthins an' Plato an' Socrats.

"Wan man would say, 'What old Parliament of piddants is it ye're trying to rob people with? I was hardly in at the door when I thought I was back at the school of the Christian Brothers at Cork, an' me with me lesson not learnt. It was a momint of ag'ny.'

"Another'd come leppin' back out of the tent an' askin' how dare we charge money for forcin' people to feel like the man in Rev'laysh'ns that lifted his head up an' saw only great beasts before him.

"'Weed out th' old fossils,' said one friend we made; 'the nooklus ye have is quite good; it's the stumers an' duds out of books that diloot it past bearin',' the

way ye'd have a millimetre of whisky destroyed with a yard of water.'

" As if we *could* weed them out at that time! We'd have left the big tent so depopylated the people'd have said we were givin' no vally at all, good or bad. An' Brennan, in draftin' our bills, had put th' entire stress, an' all the big lett'rin', on to the blackest sheep in the pasture. Over-cap'talized, over-tented, inflated wrong end first, we were left there between the seventeen divvils we had in our vans an' the deep ragin' sea in the minds of the people. Nothin' for it at all but to struggle on, bearin' our cross.

" We struggled till we must have come up against the Equator itself. Nothin' else'd account for the heat. We were approachin' a town at the time, an' it was of some populaysh'n. I disremember its name, but Brennan called it Sedan, soon as we set eyes upon it.

" ' Question is,' he said, ' are we the French or the Germans this day? '

" Friday night it was then. We entered the place an' put up our bills for a show at two on the morra.

" Be Saturday noon the tent was ericted, the seatin' in order. I was installin' the turnstile. Brennan says, ' I'll run roun' to the vans before dinner an' move the stock into the tent, the way they'll be ready.'

" He wint. He was back in five minutes, greeny-white lookin', an' flopped in a chair. ' Give me a drink,' he says, ' quickly.'

" We'd been on the water-wagon, the two of us, all this long while, for the sake of the business, save an' except that I kep' a little whisky in store an' would always give Brennan wan mod'rate ration before addressin' the people. I gave him wan now, seein' the state he was in.

" ' It's the heat,' he said only.

" ' Whethen,' said I, ' are you queer, or what is it ? '

" ' Roo'ned ! ' he said, ' roo'ned ! ' an' that only.

" I had a terrible thought. Had the people broke in before we'd provoked them, an' massacred all, the just an' th' unjust ?

" ' Roo'ned ! ' was all he kept maunderin' on.

" ' Spit it out, man,' says I ; ' can't ye see I'm in tormint ? '

" ' The creatures are meltin',' he says. ' Jawn L. Sullivan's wholely disinthegrated already.'

" ' An' you sittin' there '—I let a yell at him—' an' not beltin' all roun' the town for a good fire hose, or th' ingine itself, to cool them before they're desthroyed ! '

" I was leppin' out at the door, but he stopped me. ' I've tried,' he says. ' The reservoir's impty. Sorra a sup of water's left in the town. A summer-dried fountain, Jawn, when our need is the sorest.'

" He was collectin' all the force of his soul be this time. He didn't ask for more drink. He was making great efforts to find a way out of the pit we were in.

" ' The ship's settlin' down, Jawn,' he says. ' It's only raft-constructin' is left to us now. Have ye anny plan ready ? '

" ' I have not,' says I, only feelin' the curse never fell upon Irelan' till now.

" ' Then I have,' says he.

" He wint for our tin of red paint an' a brush an' then he turned wan of the old bills face down on a form an' sploshed on the back in big letters : ' Startlin' New Programme. End of the World. The Las' Day. At Enormous Expense.'

" Me rage rose agen at beholdin' that architect of disaster resumin' his life's work of layin' us waste. " ' Is it lynched,' I says, ' that ye'd have us, for fraud on the people, as well as impov'rished ? ' I wished at

the time I was wan of th' ancient poets of Ireland, men that'd raise blisters all over your face be their stren'th of invictive.

" He hands me the bill. ' Put it up outside the tent,' he says. An' I did. Yes, I was beat. I did what he tol' me. ' An' now we'll get busy,' said Brennan.

" Dinner an' all was forgot, in the fev'rish condish'n we were in. We carried the figures into the tent. I hadn't ever loved but a few of them. Some I had hated. But I could have cried to see them that hour. Th' angel of death had breathed hard. They were all busy at it, fadin' away. Thady had played us off a cheap wax, or all wax is perfijjus.

" It was done, an' I takin' me place at the door, when Brennan stepped close. ' I'm Jacob,' he says, ' the time he went into the dark to wrestle with th' angel. A second glass, Jawn, f'r the love of God ! '

" I hesitated.

" ' It's not sensual'ty I'm schemin',' he says, very humble. ' It's this : I was born below par to th' extent of two whiskies, no more an' no less. It's only to have me mind rise to its natur'l statchure an' do its best f'r the cause.'

" I gev it him. He was speakin' the truth. ' An' now—— ' he says after.

" I open'd the flap of the door an' the people streamed in. Streamed ! A spring-tide of them. That bill had told well ; that, or Forchune had changed, we bein' down an' she a good woman.

" I looked for a riot as soon's the people should see the deciption. But all I could hear was the voice of Brennan uplifted. ' Ye look, me sons,' he was sayin', ' in an amazed sort. I don't wonder at it at all. Me partner an' I have given up all to present, in this place, wan crowded hour of glorious death, the great

an' the wise of all time in th' actual pangs of diss'lution, the lustrous eye dimmed and every other external organ of sense, th' ear an' nostril, dwindlin' away—peakin' an' pinin'. Nachure has helped, we'll allow. On'y in this torrid zone could anny gifts or devosh'n achieve on the stage this appallin' but chastenin' spectacle—dust returning to dust an' the pash'nate heart an' d'lighted spirit drownin' into indless night.'

" Brennan had found means to darken th' end of the tent, where th' exhibits were. In the gloom they presinted a frightful appearance. Mebbe th' obscur'ty an' horror was partly th' effect of th' or'tor's power that day, for he had a flow of words to the mouth that beat all. Th' abom'nable fix we were in had inspired the man with a ven'mous jet of heartrendin' rhet'ric. He was like Rachel, th' actress of old, keenin' the children, an' she with her own reely lost on her.

" People's mouths kep' fallin' open. An old woman in the back seats started murmurin' softly : ' I *will* be good.' Wan or two quitted that couldn't put up with the strain anny longer. They must have told others outside the dreadful experience they'd been enjyin', for people kep' throngin' up with their money the way I was almost ashamed of the click of the turnstile in that solemn place. Brawlin' in church it felt like, an' givin' change in the temple, the way of the Jews.

" Now an' then I could catch a whiff of th' intoxicant drug of Brennan's or't'ry wafted across to the door where I stood, an' then it'd seem as if he were takin' the people up into a high place an' showin' them all the wonder an' glory of life, and then droppin' them, soft an' compash'nate, down into the depths of deprission. Broodin', wan instiant, in pity an' sorra over the perishin' hand'work of Thady. ' *Empusa's* crew,' I'd hear him say, ' so naked new, they couldn't stan'

the fire,' an' then agen he'd fasten on to some indivijjal detail of the gall'pin' process of exterminaysh'n. Cupud's nose'd start drippin' itself on to the head of Syky, until you'd be hard set to tell which was head and which nose, the way the two figures were sold'rin' themselves into wan, an' then: 'They were lovely,' he'd say, 'in their lives, an' in death they were not divided. Think of your Shelley, me friends:

> 'All things with others' bein' mingle,
> Why not I with thine?'

Or else he'd skid off an' away into bursts of gran' preachin' an' proph'cy itself. Wan wad of it I remember, because of the mention of wax, was like a spaycies of hymn:

> 'Before thy breath, like blazin' flax,
> Man an' his marvels pass away;
> An' changin' empires wane an' wax,
> Are founded, perish, an' decay.'

And then he'd have them all tremblin' to hear his reports of the Dies Iræ itself, an' th' earth an' all shrivelled right up an' the flamin' hivvins rollin' together in wan tremenjus hol'caust of cremaysh'n. But what am I doin' at all, to attempt to give you the feel of it? It was the fearfullest thing ever auj'ence paid to go through.

"We persisted far into the trop'cal night. When the last of our patrons had quitted out of it, weighed down be thoughts of their end, Brennan flopped down on a form.

"'Unarm me, Jawn,' he says; 'the long day's work is done, an' we mus' rest.'

"I didn't attend to him at the first. 'Siventeen pound,' I said, countin' the takin's, 'all but a shillin'.'

"'Good,' says he. 'We've proved it at last.'

" ' What have we proved,' says I, ' except simpletons only ? '

" ' We've proved,' he says, ' to-night, that intilligent men needn't put their ideels away in their pockets when caterin' for the people.'

" ' We've proved they must put their hands into their pocket,' says I, ' an' take out whatever was in it. We've been like the Jews up to now, only crossin' the wilderness wance in a way. From this out, I'll engage, we'll be more like the goat in the Bible that had the fee-simple of all the Sahara.'

" But I wouldn't argue. What was the use of it ? Brennan had been, all the time, a kind of deminted impostor. Firs' to las' he'd let on it was after the money he was, like a nachur'l human bein'. Under it all he'd furtively been a ravin' ideelist, aye, fit to be tied, with the pash'n he had on him for makin' people enjoy things they detisted. It must have been a kind of instinc' gone wrong. He couldn't control it. 'Twas that made him dang'rous, same as a li'ness with cubs.

" We auctioned the horses an' vans where we fell—an' little they fetched, bein' low in condish'n an' not agriculchur'l. That and the siventeen pound we had cleared on that las' Day of Wrath was enough, an' no more, to pay off the ticks we had run on the journey up country. We re-intered Sydney pinniless."

" Not a thing left ? " I asked, with mechanical sympathy.

" Not a jot or a tittle, save only "—John looked embarrassed—" I've got on me Henry th' Eighth's boots."

He flicked them again, with an air of distaste, dangling them gloomily over the castle moat of Péronne.

From " Fiery Particles "

THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

[SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S principal works may be put into two classes, viz. (1) historical romances, like *The White Company, Micah Clarke*, and *Rodney Stone*; (2) detective stories, like *The Sign of Four, A Study in Scarlet, The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and scores of short stories dealing with the adventures of Sherlock Holmes. All his works are immensely popular both with young people and with adults. His Sherlock Holmes is one of the best-known characters in modern fiction, and has had many imitators (Baker Street is overcrowded with them). There were detectives in fiction before Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created Sherlock Holmes—in *The Moonstone* and *Bleak House*, for example—but Sherlock Holmes is the hero and the central character. English people both love and devour him.]

I HAD called upon my friend, Mr Sherlock Holmes, one day in the autumn of last year, and found him in deep conversation with a very stout, florid-faced, elderly gentleman, with fiery red hair. With an apology for my intrusion, I was about to withdraw, when Holmes pulled me abruptly into the room, and closed the door behind me.

"You could not possibly have come at a better time, my dear Watson," he said, cordially.

"I was afraid that you were engaged."

"So I am. Very much so."

"Then I can wait in the next room."

"Not at all. This gentleman, Mr Wilson, has been my partner and helper in many of my most successful cases, and I have no doubt that he will be of the utmost use to me in yours also."

The stout gentleman half rose from his chair, and gave a bob of greeting, with a quick little questioning glance from his small, fat-encircled eyes.

"Try the settee," said Holmes, relapsing into his armchair, and putting his finger-tips together, as was his custom when in judicial moods. "I know, my dear Watson, that you share my love of all that is bizarre and outside the conventions and humdrum routine of everyday life. You have shown your relish for it by the enthusiasm which has prompted you to chronicle, and, if you will excuse my saying so, somewhat to embellish so many of my own little adventures."

"Your cases have indeed been of the greatest interest to me," I observed.

"You will remember that I remarked the other day, just before we went into the very simple problem presented by Miss Mary Sutherland, that for strange effects and extraordinary combinations we must go to life itself, which is always far more daring than any effort of the imagination."

"A proposition which I took the liberty of doubting."

"You did, Doctor, but none the less you must come round to my view, for otherwise I shall keep piling fact upon fact on you, until your reason breaks down under them and acknowledges me to be right. Now, Mr Jabez Wilson here has been good enough to call upon me this morning, and to begin a narrative which promises to be one of the most singular which I have listened to for some time. You have heard me remark that the strangest and most unique things are very often connected not with the larger but with the smaller crimes, and occasionally, indeed, where there is room for doubt whether any positive crime has been committed. As far as I have heard, it is impossible for me to say whether the present case is an instance of crime or not, but the course of events is certainly among the most singular that I have ever listened to. Perhaps, Mr Wilson, you would have the great

kindness to recommence your narrative. I ask you not merely because my friend Dr Watson has not heard the opening part, but also because the peculiar nature of the story makes me anxious to have every possible detail from your lips. As a rule, when I have heard some slight indication of the course of events I am able to guide myself by the thousands of other similar cases which occur to my memory. In the present instance I am forced to admit that the facts are, to the best of my belief, unique."

The portly client puffed out his chest with an appearance of some little pride, and pulled a dirty and wrinkled newspaper from the inside pocket of his greatcoat. As he glanced down the advertisement column, with his head thrust forward, and the paper flattened out upon his knee, I took a good look at the man, and endeavoured after the fashion of my companion to read the indications which might be presented by his dress or appearance.

I did not gain very much, however, by my inspection. Our visitor bore every mark of being an average commonplace British tradesman, obese, pompous, and slow. He wore rather baggy grey shepherd's check trousers, a not overclean black frockcoat, unbuttoned in the front, and a drab waistcoat with a heavy brassy Albert chain, and a square pierced bit of metal dangling down as an ornament. A frayed top hat and a faded brown overcoat with a wrinkled velvet collar lay upon a chair beside him. Altogether, look as I would, there was nothing remarkable about the man save his blazing red head, and the expression of extreme chagrin and discontent upon his features.

Sherlock Holmes' quick eye took in my occupation, and he shook his head with a smile as he noticed my questioning glance. "Beyond the obvious fact that

he has at some time done manual labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else."

Mr Jabez Wilson started up in his chair, with his forefinger upon the paper, but his eyes upon my companion.

"How, in the name of good fortune, did you know all that, Mr Holmes?" he asked. "How did you know, for example, that I did manual labour? It's as true as gospel, and I began as a ship's carpenter."

"Your hands, my dear sir. Your right hand is quite a size larger than your left. You have worked with it, and the muscles are more developed."

"Well, the snuff, then, and the Freemasonry?"

"I won't insult your intelligence by telling you how I read that, especially as, rather against the strict rules of your order, you use an arc and compass breastpin."

"Ah, of course, I forgot that. But the writing?"

"What else can be indicated by that right cuff so very shiny for five inches, and the left one with the smooth patch near the elbow where you rest it upon the desk?"

"Well, but China?"

"The fish which you have tattooed immediately above your right wrist could only have been done in China. I have made a small study of tattoo marks, and have even contributed to the literature of the subject. That trick of staining the fishes' scales of a delicate pink is quite peculiar to China. When, in addition, I see a Chinese coin hanging from your watch-chain, the matter becomes even more simple."

Mr Jabez Wilson laughed heavily. "Well, I never!" said he. "I thought at first you had done something clever, but I see that there was nothing in it after all."

"I begin to think, Watson," said Holmes, "that I make a mistake in explaining. *Omne ignotum pro*

magnifico, you know, and my poor little reputation, such as it is, will suffer shipwreck if I am so candid. Can you not find the advertisement, Mr Wilson?"

"Yes, I have got it now," he answered, with his thick, red finger planted half-way down the column. "Here it is. That is what began it all. You just read it for yourself, sir."

I took the paper from him and read as follows:

"TO THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE. On account of the bequest of the late Ezekiah Hopkins, of Lebanon, Penn., U.S.A., there is now another vacancy open which entitles a member of the League to a salary of four pounds a week for purely nominal services. All red-headed men who are sound in body and mind, and above the age of twenty-one years, are eligible. Apply in person on Monday, at eleven o'clock, to Duncan Ross, at the offices of the League, 7, Pope's Court, Fleet Street."

"What on earth does this mean?" I ejaculated, after I had twice read over the extraordinary announcement.

Holmes chuckled, and wriggled in his chair, as was his habit when in high spirits. "It is a little off the beaten track, isn't it?" said he. "And now, Mr Wilson, off you go at scratch, and tell us all about yourself, your household, and the effect which this advertisement had upon your fortunes. You will first make a note, Doctor, of the paper and the date."

"It is the *Morning Chronicle*, of April 27, 1890. Just two months ago."

"Very good. Now, Mr Wilson?"

"Well, it is just as I have been telling you, Mr Sherlock Holmes," said Jabez Wilson, mopping his forehead. "I have a small pawnbroker's business at

Coburg Square, near the City. It's not a very large affair, and of late years it has not done more than just give me a living. I used to be able to keep two assistants, but now I only keep one; and I would have a job to pay him, but that he is willing to come for half wages, so as to learn the business."

"What is the name of this obliging youth?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

"His name is Vincent Spaulding, and he's not such a youth either. It's hard to say his age. I should not wish a smarter assistant, Mr Holmes; and I know very well that he could better himself, and earn twice what I am able to give him. But after all, if he is satisfied, why should I put ideas in his head?"

"Why, indeed? You seem most fortunate in having an employee who comes under the full market price. It is not a common experience among employers in this age. I don't know that your assistant is not as remarkable as your advertisement."

"Oh, he has his faults, too," said Mr Wilson. "Never was such a fellow for photography. Snapping away with a camera when he ought to be improving his mind, and then diving down into the cellar like a rabbit into its hole to develop his pictures. That is his main fault; but, on the whole, he's a good worker. There's no vice in him."

"He is still with you, I presume?"

"Yes, sir. He and a girl of fourteen, who does a bit of simple cooking, and keeps the place clean—that's all I have in the house, for I am a widower, and never had any family. We live very quietly, sir, the three of us; and we keep a roof over our heads, and pay our debts, if we do nothing more.

"The first thing that put us out was that advertisement. Spaulding, he came down into the office just

this day eight weeks with this very paper in his hand, and he says:

"'I wish to the Lord, Mr Wilson, that I was a red-headed man.'

"'Why that?' I asks.

"'Why,' says he, 'here's another vacancy on the League of the Red-headed Men. It's worth quite a little fortune to any man who gets it, and I understand that there are more vacancies than there are men, so that the trustees are at their wits' end what to do with the money. If my hair would only change colour, here's a nice little crib all ready for me to step into.'

"'Why, what is it, then?' I asked. You see, Mr Holmes, I am a very stay-at-home man, and, as my business came to me instead of my having to go to it, I was often weeks on end without putting my foot over the doormat. In that way I didn't know much of what was going on outside, and I was always glad of a bit of news.

"'Have you never heard of the League of the Red-headed Men?' he asked, with his eyes open.

"'Never.'

"'Why, I wonder at that, for you are eligible yourself for one of the vacancies.'

"'And what are they worth?' I asked.

"'Oh, merely a couple of hundred a year, but the work is slight, and it need not interfere much with one's other occupations.'

"Well, you can easily think that that made me prick up my ears, for the business had not been over good for some years, and an extra couple of hundred would have been very handy.

"'Tell me all about it,' said I.

"'Well,' said he, showing me the advertisement, 'you can see for yourself that the League has a vacancy,

and there is the address where you should apply for particulars. As far as I can make out, the League was founded by an American millionaire, Ezekiah Hopkins, who was very peculiar in his ways. He was himself red-headed, and he had a great sympathy for all red-headed men; so, when he died, it was found that he had left his enormous fortune in the hands of trustees, with instructions to apply the interest to the providing of easy berths to men whose hair is of that colour. From all I hear it is splendid pay, and very little to do.'

"'But,' said I, 'there would be millions of red-headed men who would apply."

"'Not so many as you might think,' he answered. 'You see, it is really confined to Londoners, and to grown men. This American had started from London when he was young, and he wanted to do the old town a good turn. Then, again, I have heard it is no use your applying if your hair is light red, or dark red, or anything but real, bright, blazing, fiery red. Now, if you cared to apply, Mr Wilson, you would just walk in; but perhaps it would hardly be worth your while to put yourself out of the way for the sake of a few hundred pounds.'

"Now, it is a fact, gentlemen, as you may see for yourselves, that my hair is of a very full and rich tint, so that it seemed to me that, if there was to be any competition in the matter, I stood as good a chance as any man that I had ever met. Vincent Spaulding seemed to know so much about it that I thought he might prove useful, so I just ordered him to put up the shutters for the day, and to come right away with me. He was very willing to have a holiday, so we shut the business up, and started off for the address that was given us in the advertisement.

"I never hope to see such a sight as that again, Mr Holmes. From north, south, east, and west every man who had a shade of red in his hair had tramped into the City to answer the advertisement. Fleet Street was choked with red-headed folk, and Pope's Court looked like a coster's orange barrow. I should not have thought there were so many in the whole country as were brought together by that single advertisement. Every shade of colour they were—straw, lemon, orange, brick, Irish-setter, liver, clay; but, as Spaulding said, there were not many who had the real vivid flame-coloured tint. When I saw how many were waiting, I would have given it up in despair; but Spaulding would not hear of it. How he did it I could not imagine, but he pushed and pulled and butted until he got me through the crowd, and right up to the steps which led to the office. There was a double stream upon the stair, some going up in hope, and some coming back dejected; but we wedged in as well as we could, and soon found ourselves in the office."

"Your experience has been a most entertaining one," remarked Holmes, as his client paused and refreshed his memory with a huge pinch of snuff. "Pray continue your very interesting statement."

"There was nothing in the office but a couple of wooden chairs and a deal table, behind which sat a small man, with a head that was even redder than mine. He said a few words to each candidate as he came up, and then he always managed to find some fault in them which would disqualify them. Getting a vacancy did not seem to be such a very easy matter after all. However, when our turn came, the little man was more favourable to me than to any of the others, and he closed the door as we entered, so that he might have a private word with us.

"'This is Mr Jabez Wilson,' said my assistant, 'and he is willing to fill a vacancy in the League.'

"'And he is admirably suited for it,' the other answered. 'He has every requirement. I cannot recall when I have seen anything so fine.' He took a step backwards, cocked his head on one side, and gazed at my hair until I felt quite bashful. Then suddenly he plunged forward, wrung my hand, and congratulated me warmly on my success.

"'It would be injustice to hesitate,' said he. 'You will, however, I am sure, excuse me for taking an obvious precaution.' With that he seized my hair in both his hands, and tugged until I yelled with the pain. 'There is water in your eyes,' said he, as he released me. 'I perceive that all is as it should be. But we have to be careful, for we have twice been deceived by wigs and once by paint. I could tell you tales of cobbler's wax which would disgust you with human nature.' He stepped over to the window, and shouted through it at the top of his voice that the vacancy was filled. A groan of disappointment came up from below, and the folk all trooped away in different directions, until there was not a red head to be seen except my own and that of the manager.

"'My name,' said he, 'is Mr Duncan Ross, and I am myself one of the pensioners upon the fund left by our noble benefactor. Are you a married man, Mr Wilson? Have you a family?'

"I answered that I had not.

"His face fell immediately.

"'Dear me!' he said, gravely, 'that is very serious indeed! I am sorry to hear you say that. The fund was, of course, for the propagation and spread of the red-heads as well as for their maintenance. It is exceedingly unfortunate that you should be a bachelor.'

"My face lengthened at this, Mr Holmes, for I thought that I was not to have the vacancy after all; but after thinking it over for a few minutes, he said that it would be all right.

"'In the case of another,' said he, 'the objection might be fatal, but we must stretch a point in favour of a man with such a head of hair as yours. When shall you be able to enter upon your new duties?'

"'Well, it is a little awkward, for I have a business already,' said I.

"'Oh, never mind about that, Mr Wilson!' said Vincent Spaulding. 'I shall be able to look after that for you.'

"'What would be the hours?' I asked.

"'Ten to two.'

"Now a pawnbroker's business is mostly done of an evening, Mr Holmes, especially Thursday and Friday evening, which is just before pay-day; so it would suit me very well to earn a little in the mornings. Besides, I knew that my assistant was a good man, and that he would see to anything that turned up.

"'That would suit me very well,' said I. 'And the pay?'

"'Is four pounds a week.'

"'And the work?'

"'Is purely nominal.'

"'What do you call purely nominal?'

"'Well, you have to be in the office, or at least in the building, the whole time. If you leave, you forfeit your whole position for ever. The will is very clear upon that point. You don't comply with the conditions if you budge from the office during that time.'

"'It's only four hours a day, and I should not think of leaving,' said I.

"'No excuse will avail,' said Mr Duncan Ross,

'neither sickness, nor business, nor anything else. There you must stay, or you lose your billet.'

"'And the work?'

"'Is to copy out the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. There is the first volume of it in that press. You must find your own ink, pens, and blotting-paper, but we provide this table and chair. Will you be ready to-morrow?'

"'Certainly,' I answered.

"'Then, good-bye, Mr Jabez Wilson, and let me congratulate you once more on the important position which you have been fortunate enough to gain.' He bowed me out of the room, and I went home with my assistant, hardly knowing what to say or do, I was so pleased at my own good fortune.

"Well, I thought over the matter all day, and by evening I was in low spirits again; for I had quite persuaded myself that the whole affair must be some great hoax or fraud, though what its object might be I could not imagine. It seemed altogether past belief that anyone could make such a will, or that they would pay such a sum for doing anything so simple as copying out the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Vincent Spaulding did what he could to cheer me up, but by bedtime I had reasoned myself out of the whole thing. However, in the morning I determined to have a look at it anyhow, so I bought a penny bottle of ink, and with a quill pen, and seven sheets of foolscap paper, I started off for Pope's Court.

"Well, to my surprise and delight, everything was as right as possible. The table was set out ready for me, and Mr Duncan Ross was there to see that I got fairly to work. He started me off upon the letter A, and then he left me; but he would drop in from time to time to see that all was right with me. At two o'clock he bade me good-day, complimented me upon

the amount that I had written, and locked the door of the office after me.

"This went on day after day, Mr Holmes, and on Saturday the manager came in and planked down four golden sovereigns for my week's work. It was the same next week, and the same the week after. Every morning I was there at ten, and every afternoon I left at two. By degrees Mr Duncan Ross took to coming in only once of a morning, and then, after a time, he did not come in at all. Still, of course, I never dared to leave the room for an instant, for I was not sure when he might come, and the billet was such a good one, and suited me so well that I would not risk the loss of it.

"Eight weeks passed away like this, and I had written about Abbots, and Archery, and Armour, and Architecture, and Attica, and hoped with diligence that I might get on to the B's before very long. It cost me something in foolscap, and I had pretty nearly filled a shelf with my writings. And then suddenly the whole business came to an end."

"To an end?"

"Yes, sir. And no later than this morning. I went to my work as usual at ten o'clock, but the door was shut and locked, with a little square of cardboard hammered on to the middle of the panel with a tack Here it is, and you can read for yourself."

He held up a piece of white cardboard, about the size of a sheet of note-paper. It read in this fashion:

THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE IS DISSOLVED
Oct. 9, 1890

Sherlock Holmes and I surveyed this curt announcement and the rueful face behind it, until the comical side of the affair so completely overtopped every other consideration that we both burst out into a roar of laughter.

"I cannot see that there is anything very funny," cried our client, flushing up to the roots of his flaming head. "If you can do nothing better than laugh at me, I can go elsewhere."

"No, no," cried Holmes, shoving him back into the chair from which he had half risen. "I really wouldn't miss your case for the world. It is most refreshingly unusual. But there is, if you will excuse my saying so, something just a little funny about it. Pray what steps did you take when you found the card upon the door?"

"I was staggered, sir. I did not know what to do. Then I called at the offices round, but none of them seemed to know anything about it. Finally, I went to the landlord, who is an accountant living on the ground floor, and I asked him if he could tell me what had become of the Red-headed League. He said that he had never heard of any such body. Then I asked him who Mr Duncan Ross was. He answered that the name was new to him.

"'Well,' said I, 'the gentleman at No. 4.'

"'What, the red-headed man?'

"'Yes.'

"'Oh,' said he, 'his name was William Morris. He was a solicitor, and was using my room as a temporary convenience until his new premises were ready. He moved out yesterday.'

"'Where could I find him?'

"'Oh, at his new offices. He did tell me the address. Yes, 17, King Edward Street, near St Paul's.'

"I started off, Mr Holmes, but when I got to that address it was a manufactory of artificial knee-caps, and no one in it had ever heard of either Mr William Morris or Mr Duncan Ross."

"And what did you do then?" asked Holmes.

"I went home to Saxe-Coburg Square, and I took

the advice of my assistant. But he could not help me in any way. He could only say that if I waited I should hear by post. But that was not quite good enough, Mr Holmes. I did not wish to lose such a place without a struggle, so, as I had heard that you were good enough to give advice to poor folk who were in need of it, I came right away to you."

"And you did very wisely," said Holmes. "Your case is an exceedingly remarkable one, and I shall be happy to look into it. From what you have told me I think that it is possible that graver issues hang from it than might at first sight appear."

"Grave enough!" said Mr Jabez Wilson. "Why, I have lost four pound a week."

"As far as you are personally concerned," remarked Holmes, "I do not see that you have any grievance against this extraordinary league. On the contrary, you are, as I understand, richer by some thirty pounds, to say nothing of the minute knowledge which you have gained on every subject which comes under the letter A. You have lost nothing by them."

"No, sir. But I want to find out about them, and who they are, and what their object was in playing this prank—if it was a prank—upon me. It was a pretty expensive joke for them, for it cost them two-and-thirty pounds."

"We shall endeavour to clear up these points for you. And, first, one or two questions, Mr Wilson. This assistant of yours who first called your attention to the advertisement—how long had he been with you?"

"About a month then."

"How did he come?"

"In answer to an advertisement."

"Was he the only applicant?"

"No, I had a dozen."

"Why did you pick him?"

"Because he was handy, and would come cheap."

"At half wages, in fact."

"Yes."

"What is he like, this Vincent Spaulding?"

"Small, stout-built, very quick in his ways, no hair on his face, though he's not short of thirty. Has a white splash of acid upon his forehead."

Holmes sat up in his chair in considerable excitement. "I thought as much," said he. "Have you ever observed that his ears are pierced for earrings?"

"Yes, sir. He told me that a gipsy had done it for him when he was a lad."

"Hum!" said Holmes, sinking back in deep thought. "He is still with you?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I have only just left him."

"And has your business been attended to in your absence?"

"Nothing to complain of, sir. There's never very much to do of a morning."

"That will do, Mr Wilson. I shall be happy to give you an opinion upon the subject in the course of a day or two. To-day is Saturday, and I hope that by Monday we may come to a conclusion."

"Well, Watson," said Holmes, when our visitor had left us, "what do you make of it all?"

"I make nothing of it," I answered, frankly. "It is a most mysterious business."

"As a rule," said Holmes, "the more bizarre a thing is the less mysterious it proves to be. It is your commonplace, featureless crimes which are really puzzling, just as a commonplace face is the most difficult to identify. But I must be prompt over this matter."

"What are you going to do then?" I asked.

"To smoke," he answered. "It is quite a three-

pipe problem, and I beg that you won't speak to me for fifty minutes." He curled himself up in his chair, with his thin knees drawn up to his hawk-like nose, and there he sat with his eyes closed and his black clay pipe thrusting out like the bill of some strange bird. I had come to the conclusion that he had dropped asleep, and indeed was nodding myself, when he suddenly sprang out of his chair with the gesture of a man who had made up his mind, and put his pipe down upon the mantelpiece.

"Sarasate plays at the St James's Hall this afternoon," he remarked. "What do you think, Watson? Could your patients spare you for a few hours?"

"I have nothing to do to-day. My practice is never very absorbing."

"Then put on your hat, and come. I am going through the City first, and we can have some lunch on the way. I observe that there is a good deal of German music on the programme, which is rather more to my taste than Italian or French. It is introspective, and I want to introspect. Come along!"

We travelled by the Underground as far as Aldersgate; and a short walk took us to Saxe-Coburg Square, the scene of the singular story which we had listened to in the morning. It was a pokey, little, shabby-genteel place, where four lines of dingy two-storied brick houses looked out into a small railed-in enclosure, where a lawn of weedy grass and a few clumps of faded laurel bushes made a hard fight against a smoke-laden and uncongenial atmosphere. Three gilt balls and a brown board with "JABEZ WILSON" in white letters, upon a corner house, announced the place where our red-headed client carried on his business. Sherlock Holmes stopped in front of it with his head on one side and looked it all over, with his eyes shining

brightly between puckered lids. Then he walked slowly up the street and then down again to the corner, still looking keenly at the houses. Finally he returned to the pawnbroker's, and, having thumped vigorously upon the pavement with his stick two or three times, he went up to the door and knocked. It was instantly opened by a bright-looking, clean-shaven young fellow, who asked him to step in.

"Thank you," said Holmes, "I only wished to ask you how you would go from here to the Strand."

"Third right, fourth left," answered the assistant promptly, closing the door.

"Smart fellow, that," observed Holmes as we walked away. "He is, in my judgment, the fourth smartest man in London, and for daring I am not sure that he has not a claim to be third. I have known something of him before."

"Evidently," said I, "Mr Wilson's assistant counts for a good deal in this mystery of the Red-headed League. I am sure that you inquired your way merely in order that you might see him."

"Not him."

"What then?"

"The knees of his trousers."

"And what did you see?"

"What I expected to see."

"Why did you beat the pavement?"

"My dear Doctor, this is a time for observation, not for talk. We are spies in an enemy's country. We know something of Saxe-Coburg Square. Let us now explore the paths which lie behind it."

The road in which we found ourselves as we turned round the corner from the retired Saxe-Coburg Square presented as great a contrast to it as the front of a picture does to the back. It was one of the main

arteries which convey the traffic of the City to the north and west. The roadway was blocked with the immense stream of commerce flowing in a double tide inwards and outwards, while the footpaths were black with the hurrying swarm of pedestrians. It was difficult to realise as we looked at the line of fine shops and stately business premises that they really abutted on the other side upon the faded and stagnant square which we had just quitted.

"Let me see," said Holmes, standing at the corner, and glancing along the line, "I should like just to remember the order of the houses here. It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London. There is Mortimer's, the tobacconist, the little newspaper shop, the Coburg branch of the City and Suburban Bank, the Vegetarian Restaurant, and McFarlane's carriage-building depot. That carries us right on to the other block. And now, Doctor, we've done our work, so it's time we had some play. A sandwich, and a cup of coffee, and then off to violin-land, where all is sweetness, and delicacy, and harmony, and there are no red-headed clients to vex us with their conundrums."

My friend was an enthusiastic musician, being himself not only a very capable performer, but a composer of no ordinary merit. All the afternoon he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect happiness, gently waving his long thin fingers in time to the music, while his gently smiling face and his languid dreamy eyes were as unlike those of Holmes the sleuth-hound, Holmes the relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed criminal agent, as it was possible to conceive. In his singular character the dual nature alternately asserted itself, and his extreme exactness and astuteness represented, as I have often thought, the reaction against the poetic and contemplative mood

which occasionally predominated in him. The swing of his nature took him from extreme languor to devouring energy; and, as I knew well, he was never so truly formidable as when, for days on end, he had been lounging in his armchair amid his improvisations and his black-letter editions. Then it was that the lust of the chase would suddenly come upon him, and that his brilliant reasoning power would rise to the level of intuition, until those who were unacquainted with his methods would look askance at him as on a man whose knowledge was not that of other mortals. When I saw him that afternoon so enwrapped in the music at St James's Hall I felt that an evil time might be coming upon those whom he had set himself to hunt down.

"You want to go home, no doubt, Doctor," he remarked, as we emerged.

"Yes, it would be as well."

"And I have some business to do which will take some hours. This business at Coburg Square is serious."

"Why serious?"

"A considerable crime is in contemplation. I have every reason to believe that we shall be in time to stop it.

"But to-day being Saturday rather complicates matters. I shall want your help to-night."

"At what time?"

"Ten will be early enough."

"I shall be at Baker Street at ten."

"Very well. And, I say, Doctor! there may be some little danger, so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket." He waved his hand, turned on his heel, and disappeared in an instant among the crowd.

I trust that I am not more dense than my neighbours, but I was always oppressed with a sense of my

own stupidity in my dealings with Sherlock Holmes.) Here I had heard what he had heard, I had seen what he had seen, and yet from his words it was evident that he saw clearly not only what had happened, but what was about to happen, while to me the whole business was still confused and grotesque. As I drove home to my house in Kensington I thought over it all, from the extraordinary story of the red-headed copier of the *Encyclopædia* down to the visit to Saxe-Coburg Square, and the ominous words with which he had parted from me. What was this nocturnal expedition, and why should I go armed? Where were we going, and what were we to do? I had the hint from Holmes that this smooth-faced pawnbroker's assistant was a formidable man—a man who might play a deep game. I tried to puzzle it out, but gave it up in despair, and set the matter aside until night should bring an explanation.

It was a quarter-past nine when I started from home and made my way across the Park, and so through Oxford Street to Baker Street. Two hansoms were standing at the door, and, as I entered the passage, I heard the sound of voices from above. On entering his room, I found Holmes in animated conversation with two men, one of whom I recognised as Peter Jones, the official police agent; while the other was a long, thin, sad-faced man, with a very shiny hat and oppressively respectable frock-coat.

"Ha! our party is complete," said Holmes, buttoning up his pea-jacket, and taking his heavy hunting-crop from the rack. "Watson, I think you know Mr Jones, of Scotland Yard? Let me introduce you to Mr Merryweather, who is to be our companion in to-night's adventure."

"We're hunting in couples again, Doctor, you see," said Jones, in his consequential way. "Our friend

here is a wonderful man for starting a chase. All he wants is an old dog to help him to do the running down."

"I hope a wild goose may not prove to be the end of our chase," observed Mr Merryweather, gloomily.

"You may place considerable confidence in Mr Holmes, sir," said the police agent, loftily. "He has his own little methods, which are, if he won't mind my saying so, just a little too theoretical and fantastic, but he has the making of a detective in him. It is not too much to say that once or twice, as in that business of the Sholto murder and the Agra treasure, he has been more nearly correct than the official force."

"Oh, if you say so, Mr Jones, it is all right!" said the stranger, with deference. "Still, I confess that I miss my rubber. It is the first Saturday night for seven-and-twenty years that I have not had my rubber."

"I think you will find," said Sherlock Holmes, "that you will play for a higher stake to-night than you have ever done yet, and that the play will be more exciting. For you, Mr Merryweather, the stake will be some thirty thousand pounds; and for you, Jones, it will be the man upon whom you wish to lay your hands."

"John Clay, the murderer, thief, smasher, and forger. He's a young man, Mr Merryweather, but he is at the head of his profession, and I would rather have my bracelets on him than on any criminal in London. He's a remarkable man, is young John Clay. His grandfather was a royal duke, and he himself has been to Eton and Oxford. His brain is as cunning as his fingers, and though we meet signs of him at every turn, we never know where to find the man himself. He'll crack a crib in Scotland one week, and be raising money to build an orphanage in Cornwall the next. I've been on his track for years, and have never set eyes on him yet."

"I hope that I may have the pleasure of introducing you to-night. I've had one or two little turns also with Mr John Clay, and I agree with you that he is at the head of his profession. It is past ten, however, and quite time that we started. If you two will take the first hansom, Watson and I will follow in the second."

Sherlock Holmes was not very communicative during the long drive, and lay back in the cab humming the tunes which he had heard in the afternoon. We rattled through an endless labyrinth of gas-lit streets until we emerged into Farringdon Street.

"We are close there now," my friend remarked. "This fellow Merryweather is a bank director and personally interested in the matter. I thought it as well to have Jones with us also. He is not a bad fellow, though an absolute imbecile in his profession. He has one positive virtue. He is as brave as a bulldog, and as tenacious as a lobster if he gets his claws upon anyone. Here we are, and they are waiting for us."

We had reached the same crowded thoroughfare in which we had found ourselves in the morning. Our cabs were dismissed, and, following the guidance of Mr Merryweather, we passed down a narrow passage, and through a side door, which he opened for us. Within there was a small corridor, which ended in a very massive iron gate. This also was opened, and led down a flight of winding stone steps, which terminated at another formidable gate. Mr Merryweather stopped to light a lantern, and then conducted us down a dark, earth-smelling passage, and so, after opening a third door, into a huge vault or cellar, which was piled all round with crates and massive boxes.

"You are not very vulnerable from above," Holmes remarked, as he held up the lantern and gazed about him.

"Nor from below," said Mr Merryweather, striking his stick upon the flags which lined the floor. "Why, dear me, it sounds quite hollow!" he remarked, looking up in surprise.

"I must really ask you to be a little more quiet," said Holmes, severely. "You have already imperilled the whole success of our expedition. Might I beg that you would have the goodness to sit down upon one of those boxes, and not to interfere?"

The solemn Mr Merryweather perched himself upon a crate, with a very injured expression upon his face, while Holmes fell upon his knees upon the floor, and, with the lantern and a magnifying lens, began to examine minutely the cracks between the stones. A few seconds sufficed to satisfy him, for he sprang to his feet again, and put his glass in his pocket.

"We have at least an hour before us," he remarked, "for they can hardly take any steps until the good pawnbroker is safely in bed. Then they will not lose a minute, for the sooner they do their work the longer time they will have for their escape. We are at present, Doctor—as no doubt you have divined—in the cellar of the City branch of one of the principal London banks. Mr Merryweather is the chairman of directors, and he will explain to you that there are reasons why the more daring criminals of London should take a considerable interest in this cellar at present."

"It is our French gold," whispered the director. "We have had several warnings that an attempt might be made upon it."

"Your French gold?"

"Yes. We had occasion some months ago to strengthen our resources, and borrowed, for that purpose, thirty thousand napoleons from the Bank of France. It has become known that we have never

had occasion to unpack the money, and that it is still lying in our cellar. The crate upon which I sit contains two thousand napoleons packed between layers of lead foil. Our reserve of bullion is much larger at present than is usually kept in a single branch office, and the directors have had misgivings upon the subject."

"Which were very well justified," observed Holmes. "And now it is time that we arranged our little plans. I expect that within an hour matters will come to a head. In the meantime, Mr Merryweather, we must put the screen over that dark lantern."

"And sit in the dark?"

"I am afraid so. I had brought a pack of cards in my pocket, and I thought that, as we were a *partie carrée*, you might have your rubber after all. But I see that the enemy's preparations have gone so far that we cannot risk the presence of a light And, first of all, we must choose our positions. These are daring men, and, though we shall take them at a disadvantage they may do us some harm, unless we are careful. I shall stand behind this crate, and do you conceal yourselves behind those. Then, when I flash a light upon them, close in swiftly. If they fire, Watson, have no compunction about shooting them down."

I placed my revolver, cocked, upon the top of the wooden case behind which I crouched. Holmes shot the slide across the front of his lantern, and left us in pitch darkness—such an absolute darkness as I have never before experienced. The smell of hot metal remained to assure us that the light was still there, ready to flash out at a moment's notice. To me, with my nerves worked up to a pitch of expectancy, there was something depressing and subduing in the sudden gloom, and in the cold, dank air of the vault.

"They have but one retreat," whispered Holmes. "That is back through the house into Saxe-Coburg Square. I hope that you have done what I asked you, Jones?"

"I have an inspector and two officers waiting at the front door."

"Then we have stopped all the holes. And now we must be silent and wait."

What a time it seemed! From comparing notes afterwards it was but an hour and a quarter, yet it appeared to me that the night must have almost gone, and the dawn be breaking above us. My limbs were weary and stiff, for I feared to change my position, yet my nerves were worked up to the highest pitch of tension, and my hearing was so acute that I could not only hear the gentle breathing of my companions, but I could distinguish the deeper, heavier in-breath of the bulky Jones from the thin sighing note of the bank director. From my position I could look over the case in the direction of the floor. Suddenly my eyes caught the glint of a light.

At first it was but a lurid spark upon the stone pavement. Then it lengthened out until it became a yellow line, and then, without any warning or sound, a gash seemed to open and a hand appeared, a white, almost womanly hand, which felt about in the centre of the little area of light. For a minute or more the hand, with its writhing fingers, protruded out of the floor. Then it was withdrawn as suddenly as it appeared, and all was dark again save the single lurid spark, which marked a chink between the stones.

Its disappearance, however, was but momentary. With a rending, tearing sound, one of the broad, white stones turned over upon its side, and left a square, gaping hole, through which streamed the light of a

lantern. Over the edge there peeped a clean-cut, boyish face, which looked keenly about it, and then, with a hand on either side of the aperture, drew itself shoulder high and waist high, until one knee rested upon the edge. In another instant he stood at the side of the hole, and was hauling after him a companion, lithe and small like himself, with a pale face and a shock of very red hair.

"It's all clear," he whispered. "Have you the chisel and the bags? Great Scott! Jump, Archie, jump, and I'll swing for it!"

Sherlock Holmes had sprung out and seized the intruder by the collar. The other dived down the hole, and I heard the sound of rending cloth as Jones clutched at his skirts. The light flashed upon the barrel of a revolver, but Holmes' hunting-crop came down on the man's wrist, and the pistol clinked upon the stone floor.

"It's no use, John Clay," said Holmes blandly; "you have no chance at all."

"So I see," the other answered, with the utmost coolness. "I fancy that my pal is all right, though I see you have got his coat-tails."

"There are three men waiting for him at the door," said Holmes.

"Oh, indeed. You seem to have done the thing very completely. I must compliment you."

"And I you," Holmes answered. "Your red-headed idea was very new and effective."

"You'll see your pal again presently," said Jones. "He's quicker at climbing down holes than I am. Just hold out while I fix the derbies."

"I beg that you will not touch me with your filthy hands," remarked our prisoner, as the handcuffs clattered upon his wrists. "You may not be aware

that I have royal blood in my veins. Have the goodness also when you address me always to say 'sir' and 'please.'"

"All right," said Jones, with a stare and a snigger. "Well, would you please, sir, march upstairs, where we can get a cab to carry your highness to the police-station?"

"That is better," said John Clay, serenely. He made a sweeping bow to the three of us, and walked quietly off in the custody of the detective.

"Really, Mr Holmes," said Mr Merryweather, as we followed them from the cellar, "I do not know how the bank can thank you or repay you. There is no doubt that you have detected and defeated in the most complete manner one of the most determined attempts at bank robbery that have ever come within my experience."

"I have had one or two little scores of my own to settle with Mr John Clay," said Holmes. "I have been at some small expense over this matter, which I shall expect the bank to refund, but beyond that I am amply repaid by having had an experience which is in many ways unique, and by hearing the very remarkable narrative of the Red-headed League."

"You see, Watson," he explained, in the early hours of the morning, as we sat over a glass of whisky and soda in Baker Street, "it was perfectly obvious from the first that the only possible object of this rather fantastic business of the advertisement of the League, and the copying of the *Encyclopædia*, must be to get this not over-bright pawnbroker out of the way for a number of hours every day. It was a curious way of managing it, but really it would be difficult to suggest a better. The method was no doubt suggested to Clay's ingenious mind by the colour of his accomplice's

hair. The four pounds a week was a lure which must draw him, and what was it to them, who were playing for thousands? They put in the advertisement; one rogue has the temporary office, the other rogue incites the man to apply for it, and together they manage to secure his absence every morning in the week. From the time that I heard of the assistant having come for half wages, it was obvious to me that he had some strong motive for securing the situation."

"But how could you guess what the motive was?"

"Had there been women in the house, I should have suspected a mere vulgar intrigue. That, however, was out of the question. The man's business was a small one, and there was nothing in his house which could account for such elaborate preparations, and such an expenditure as they were at. It must then be something out of the house. What could it be? I thought of the assistant's fondness for photography, and his trick of vanishing into the cellar. The cellar! There was the end of this tangled clue. Then I made inquiries as to this mysterious assistant, and found that I had to deal with one of the coolest and most daring criminals in London. He was doing something in the cellar—something which took many hours a day for months on end. What could it be, once more? I could think of nothing save that he was running a tunnel to some other building.

"So far I had got when we went to visit the scene of action. I surprised you by beating upon the pavement with my stick. I was ascertaining whether the cellar stretched out in front or behind. It was not in front. Then I rang the bell, and, as I hoped, the assistant answered it. We have had some skirmishes, but we had never set eyes on each other before. I hardly looked at his face. His knees were what I

wished to see. You must yourself have remarked how worn, wrinkled, and stained they were. They spoke of those hours of burrowing. The only remaining point was what they were burrowing for. I walked round the corner, saw that the City and Suburban Bank abutted on our friend's premises, and felt that I had solved my problem. When you drove home after the concert I called upon Scotland Yard, and upon the chairman of the bank directors, with the result that you have seen."

"And how could you tell that they would make their attempt to-night?" I asked.

"Well, when they closed their League offices that was a sign that they cared no longer about Mr Jabez Wilson's presence; in other words, that they had completed their tunnel. But it was essential that they should use it soon, as it might be discovered, or the bullion might be removed. Saturday would suit them better than any other day, as it would give them two days for their escape. For all these reasons I expected them to come to-night."

"You reasoned it out beautifully," I exclaimed, in unfeigned admiration. "It is so long a chain, and yet every link rings true."

"It saved me from *ennui*," he answered, yawning. "Alas! I already feel it closing in upon me. My life is spent in one long effort to escape from the commonplaces of existence. These little problems help me to do so."

"And you are a benefactor of the race," said I.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, perhaps, after all, it is of some little use," he remarked. "'*L'homme c'est rien—l'œuvre c'est tout*,' as Gustave Flaubert wrote to Georges Sand."

From "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes"

THE FACE ON THE WALL

E. V. LUCAS

[Mr E. V. Lucas has a charming literary style, and can write on hundreds of subjects with unfailing interest. He has written travel-books about Paris, Florence, Rome, London, Venice; he is an authority on Charles Lamb; his writings on art are excellent; and he has compiled a number of delightful anthologies like *The Open Road* and *Her Infinite Variety*. Occasionally he gives us a novel like *Rose and Rose*. But Mr E. V. Lucas is probably best known for his contributions to *Punch*—little sketches of everyday life seen from his own amusing point of view, little prose parodies, kindly satires of social events. He seems to write week after week without effort and without a lapse. "E. V. L." is inimitable.]

I STILL tingle with mortification over an experience at Dabney's last evening, the only satisfaction being that others tingle with me. We were talking of the supernatural—that unprofitable but endlessly alluring theme—and most of us had cited an instance, without, however, producing much effect. Among the strangers to me was a little man with an anxious white face, whom Rudson-Wayte had brought, and he watched each speaker with the closest attention, but said nothing. Then Dabney, wishing to include him in the talk, turned to him and asked if he had no experience to relate, no story that contained an inexplicable element.

He thought a moment. "Well," he said, "not a story in the ordinary sense of the word: nothing, that is, from hearsay, like most of your examples. Truth, I always hold, is not only vastly stranger than fiction, but also vastly more interesting. I could tell you an occurrence which happened to me personally,

and which oddly enough completed itself only this afternoon."

We begged him to begin.

"A year or two ago," he said, "I was in rooms in Great Ormond Street—an old house on the Holborn side. The bedroom walls had been distempered by a previous tenant, but the place was damp and great patches of discoloration had broken out. One of these—as indeed often happens—was exactly like a human face; but more faithfully and startlingly like than is customary. Lying in bed in the morning, putting off getting up, I used to watch it and watch it, and gradually I came to think of it as real—as my fellow-lodger, in fact. The odd thing was that while the patches on the walls grew larger and changed their contours, this never did. It remained identically the same.

"While there, I had a very bad attack of influenza, with complications, and all day long I had nothing to do but read or meditate, and it was then that this face began to get a firmer hold of me. It grew more and more real and remarkable. I may say that it dominated my thoughts day and night. There was a curious turn to the nose, and the slant of the forehead was unique. It was, in fact, full of individuality: the face of a man apart, a man in a thousand.

"Well, I got better, but the face still controlled me. I found myself searching the streets for one like it; Somewhere, I was convinced, the real man must exist, and him I must meet. Why, I had no notion: I only knew that he and I were in some way linked by fate. I frequented places where men congregate in large numbers—political meetings, football matches, the railway stations when the suburban trains pour forth their legions on the City in the morning and receive them

again in the evening. But all in vain. I had never before realized as I then did how many different faces of man there are and how few. For all differ, and yet, classified, they belong to only as many groups as you can count on your hands.

" The search became a mania with me. I neglected everything else. I stood at busy corners watching the crowd until people thought me crazy, and the police began to know me and be suspicious. Women I never glanced at: men, men, men, all the time."

He passed his hand wearily over his brow. " And then," he continued, " at last I saw him. He was in a taxi driving east along Piccadilly. I turned and ran beside it for a little way and then saw an empty one coming. ' Follow that taxi,' I gasped, and leaped in. The driver managed to keep it in sight and it took us to Charing Cross. I rushed on to the platform and found my man with two ladies and a little girl. They were going to France by the 2.20. I hung about to try and get a word with him, but in vain. Other friends had joined the party, and they moved to the train in a solid body.

" I hastily purchased a ticket to Folkestone, hoping that I should catch him on the boat before it sailed; but at Folkestone he got on board before me with his friends, and they disappeared into a large private saloon, several cabins thrown into one. Evidently he was a man of wealth.

" Again I was foiled; but I determined to cross too, feeling certain that when the voyage had begun he would leave the ladies and come out for a stroll on the deck. I had only just enough for the single fare to Boulogne, but nothing could shake me now. I took up my position opposite the saloon door and waited. After half an hour the door opened and he came out,

but with the little girl. My heart beat so that it seemed to shake the boat more than the propeller. There was no mistaking the face—every line was the same. He glanced at me and moved towards the companion-way for the upper deck. It was now or never, I felt.

" 'Excuse me,' I stammered, 'but do you mind giving me your card? I have a very important reason for wishing to communicate with you.'

" He seemed to be astonished, as indeed well he might; but he complied. With extreme deliberation he took out his case and handed me his card and hurried on with the little girl. It was clear that he thought me a lunatic and considered it wiser to humour me than not.

" Clutching the card I hurried to a deserted corner of the ship and read it. My eyes dimmed; my head swam; for on it were the words: Mr Ormond Wall, with an address at Pittsburg, U.S.A. I remember no more until I found myself in a hospital at Boulogne. There I lay in a broken condition for some weeks, and only a month ago did I return."

He was silent.

We looked at him and at one another and waited. All the other talk of the evening was nothing compared with the story of the little pale man.

" I went back," he resumed after a moment or so, " to Great Ormond Street and set to work to discover all I could about this American in whose life I had so mysteriously intervened. I wrote to Pittsburg; I wrote to American editors; I cultivated the society of Americans in London; but all that I could find out was that he was a millionaire with English parents who had resided in London. But where? To that question I received no answer.

"And so the time went on until yesterday morning. I had gone to bed more than usually tired and slept till late. When I woke the sun was streaming into the room. As I always do, I looked at once at the wall on which the face is to be seen. I rubbed my eyes and sprang up in alarm. It was only faintly visible. Last night it had been as clear as ever—almost I could hear it speak. And now it was but a ghost of itself.

"I got up dazed and dejected and went out. The early editions of the evening papers were already out, and on the contents bill I saw, 'American Millionaire's Motor Accident.' You must all of you have seen it. I bought it and read at once what I knew I should read. Mr Ormond Wall, the Pittsburg millionaire, and party, motoring from Spezzia to Pisa, had come into collision with a wagon and were overturned; Mr Wall's condition was critical.

"I went back to my room still dazed, and sat on the bed looking with unseeing eyes at the face on the wall. And even as I looked, suddenly it completely disappeared.

"Later I found that Mr Wall had succumbed to his injuries at what I take to be that very moment."

Again he was silent.

"Most remarkable," we said; "most extraordinary," and so forth, and we meant it too.

"Yes," said the stranger. "There are three extraordinary, three most remarkable things about my story. One is that it should be possible for the discoloration in a lodging-house in London not only to form the features of a gentleman in America, but to have this intimate association with his existence. It will take Science some time to explain that. Another is that that gentleman's name should bear any relation

to the spot on which his features were being so curiously reproduced by some mysterious agency. Is it not so?"

We agreed with him, and our original discussion on supernatural manifestations set in again with increased excitement, during which the narrator of the amazing experience rose and said good-night. Just as he was at the door, one of the company—I rejoice to think it was Spanton—recalled us to the cause of our excited debate by asking him, before he left, what he considered the third extraordinary thing in connection with his deeply interesting story. "You said three things, you know," Spanton reminded him.

"Oh, the third thing," he said, as he opened the door, "I was forgetting that. The third extraordinary thing about the story is that I made it up about half an hour ago. Good-night, again."

After coming to our senses we looked round for Rudson-Wayte, who had brought this snake to bite our bosoms, but he too had disappeared.

From "London Lavender"

THE CELESTIAL OMNIBUS

E. M. FORSTER

[Mr E. M. Forster in 1924 published a novel called *A Passage to India*—the first for fourteen years. His earlier books include *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *Howard's End*, and *The Story of a Siren*. He is a most delightful writer, possessing a keen sense of beauty, a gentle humour, and an extraordinary sensitiveness to the interaction of fantasy and ordinary life. He understands " the ghosts that halo common persons and things, and the odd mystic power of moments."

" As for Mr Forster," says Mr Gerald Gould, " the fairies have showered gifts on him; sympathy, wit, knowledge, charm; but an impudent fairy came at the end and made him whimsical."]

I

THE boy who resided at Agathox Lodge, 28 Buckingham Park Road, Surbiton, had often been puzzled by the old sign-post that stood almost opposite. He asked his mother about it, and she replied that it was a joke, and not a very nice one, which had been made many years back by some naughty young men, and that the police ought to remove it. For there were two strange things about this sign-post: firstly, it pointed up a blank alley, and, secondly, it had painted on it, in faded characters, the words, " To Heaven."

" What kind of young men were they ? " he asked.

" I think your father told me that one of them wrote verses, and was expelled from the University and came to grief in other ways. Still, it was a long time ago. You must ask your father about it. He will say the same as I do, that it was put up as a joke."

" So it doesn't mean anything at all ? "

She sent him upstairs to put on his best things, for the Bonses were coming to tea, and he was to hand the cake-stand.

It struck him, as he wrenched on his tightening trousers, that he might do worse than ask Mr Bons about the sign-post. His father, though very kind, always laughed at him—shrieked with laughter whenever he or any other child asked a question or spoke. But Mr Bons was serious as well as kind. He had a beautiful house and lent one books, he was a churchwarden, and a candidate for the County Council; he had donated to the Free Library enormously, he presided over the Literary Society, and had Members of Parliament to stop with him—in short, he was probably the wisest person alive.

Yet even Mr Bons could only say that the sign-post was a joke—the joke of a person named Shelley.

"Of course!" cried the mother; "I told you so, dear. That was the name."

"Had you never heard of Shelley?" asked Mr Bons.

"No," said the boy, and hung his head.

"But is there no Shelley in the house?"

"Why, yes!" exclaimed the lady, in much agitation. "Dear Mr Bons, we aren't such Philistines as that. Two at the least. One a wedding present, and the other, smaller print, in one of the spare rooms."

"I believe we have seven Shelleys," said Mr Bons, with a slow smile. Then he brushed the cake crumbs off his stomach, and, together with his daughter, rose to go.

The boy, obeying a wink from his mother, saw them all the way to the garden gate, and when they had gone he did not at once return to the house, but gazed for a little up and down Buckingham Park Road.

His parents lived at the right end of it. After No. 39 the quality of the houses dropped very suddenly, and 64 had not even a separate servants' entrance. But at the present moment the whole road looked rather pretty, for the sun had just set in splendour, and the inequalities of rent were drowned in a saffron afterglow. Small birds twittered, and the breadwinners' train shrieked musically down through the cutting—that wonderful cutting which has drawn to itself the whole beauty out of Surbiton, and clad itself, like any Alpine valley, with the glory of the fir and the silver birch and the primrose. It was this cutting that had first stirred desires within the boy—desires for something just a little different, he knew not what, desires that would return whenever things were sunlit, as they were this evening, running up and down inside him, up and down, up and down, till he would feel quite unusual all over, and as likely as not would want to cry. This evening he was even sillier, for he slipped across the road towards the sign-post and began to run up the blank alley.

The alley runs between high walls—the walls of the gardens of "Ivanhoe" and "Belle Vista" respectively. It smells a little all the way, and is scarcely twenty yards long, including the turn at the end. So not unnaturally the boy soon came to a standstill. "I'd like to kick that Shelley," he exclaimed, and glanced idly at a piece of paper which was pasted on the wall. Rather an odd piece of paper, and he read it carefully before he turned back. This is what he read:

S. AND C. R. C. C.

Alteration in Service

Owing to lack of patronage the Company are regretfully

compelled to suspend the hourly service, and to retain only the

Sunrise and Sunset Omnibuses,

which will run as usual. It is to be hoped that the public will patronize an arrangement which is intended for their convenience. As an extra inducement, the Company will, for the first time, now issue

RETURN TICKETS!

(available one day only), which may be obtained of the driver. Passengers are again reminded that *no tickets are issued at the other end*, and that no complaints in this connection will receive consideration from the Company. Nor will the Company be responsible for any negligence or stupidity on the part of Passengers, nor for Hailstorms, Lightning, Loss of Tickets, nor for any Act of God.

For the Direction

Now he had never seen this notice before, nor could he imagine where the omnibus went to. S. of course was for Surbiton, and R.C.C. meant Road Car Company. But what was the meaning of the other C.? Coombe and Malden, perhaps, or possibly "City." Yet it could not hope to compete with the South-Western. The whole thing, the boy reflected, was run on hopelessly unbusinesslike lines. Why no tickets from the other end? And what an hour to start! Then he realized that unless the notice was a hoax, an omnibus must have been starting just as he was wishing the Bonses good-bye. He peered at the ground through the gathering dusk, and there he saw what might or might not be the marks of wheels. Yet nothing had come out of the alley. And he had never seen an omnibus at any time in the Buckingham Park Road. No: it must be a hoax, like the sign-posts,

like the fairy tales, like the dreams upon which he would wake suddenly in the night. And with a sigh he stepped from the alley—right into the arms of his father.

Oh, how his father laughed! "Poor, poor Popsey!" he cried. "Diddums! Diddums! Diddums think he'd walky-palky up to Evvink!" And his mother, also convulsed with laughter, appeared on the steps of Agathox Lodge. "Don't, Bob!" she gasped. "Don't be so naughty! Oh, you'll kill me! Oh, leave the boy alone!"

But all that evening the joke was kept up. The father implored to be taken too. Was it a very tiring walk? Need one wipe one's shoes on the doormat? And the boy went to bed feeling faint and sore, and thankful for only one thing—that he had not said a word about the omnibus. (It was a hoax, yet through his dreams it grew more and more real, and the streets of Surbiton, through which he saw it driving, seemed instead to become hoaxes and shadows. And very early in the morning he woke with a cry, for he had had a glimpse of its destination.)

He struck a match, and its light fell not only on his watch but also on his calendar, so that he knew it to be half an hour to sunrise. It was pitch dark, for the fog had come down from London in the night, and all Surbiton was wrapped in its embraces. Yet he sprang out and dressed himself, for he was determined to settle once for all which was real: the omnibus or the streets. "I shall be a fool one way or the other," he thought, "until I know." Soon he was shivering in the road under the gas lamp that guarded the entrance to the alley.

To enter the alley itself required some courage. Not only was it horribly dark, but he now realized

that it was an impossible terminus for an omnibus. If it had not been for a policeman, whom he heard approaching through the fog, he would never have made the attempt. The next moment he had made the attempt and failed. Nothing. Nothing but a blank alley and a very silly boy gaping at its dirty floor. It *was* a hoax. "I'll tell papa and mamma," he decided. "I deserve it. I deserve that they should know. I am too silly to be alive." And he went back to the gate of Agathox Lodge.

There he remembered that his watch was fast. The sun was not risen; it would not rise for two minutes. "Give the bus every chance," he thought cynically, and returned into the alley.

But the omnibus was there.

II

It had two horses, whose sides were still smoking from their journey, and its two great lamps shone through the fog against the alley's walls, changing their cobwebs and moss into tissues of fairyland. The driver was huddled up in a cape. He faced the blank wall, and how he had managed to drive in so neatly and so silently was one of the many things that the boy never discovered. Nor could he imagine how ever he would drive out.

"Please," his voice quavered through the foul brown air, "please, is that an omnibus?"

"*Omnibus est*," said the driver, without turning round. There was a moment's silence. The policeman passed, coughing, by the entrance of the alley. The boy crouched in the shadow, for he did not want to be found out. He was pretty sure, too,

that it was a Pirate; nothing else, he reasoned, would go from such odd places and at such odd hours.

"About when do you start?" He tried to sound nonchalant.

"At sunrise."

"How far do you go?"

"The whole way."

"And can I have a return ticket which will bring me all the way back?"

"You can."

"Do you know, I half think I'll come." The driver made no answer. The sun must have risen, for he unhitched the brake. And scarcely had the boy jumped in before the omnibus was off.

How? Did it turn? There was no room. Did it go forward? There was a blank wall. Yet it was moving—moving at a stately pace through the fog, which had turned from brown to yellow. The thought of warm bed and warmer breakfast made the boy feel faint. He wished he had not come. His parents would not have approved. He would have gone back to them if the weather had not made it impossible. The solitude was terrible; he was the only passenger. And the omnibus, though well-built, was cold and somewhat musty. He drew his coat round him, and in so doing chanced to feel his pocket. It was empty. He had forgotten his purse.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Stop!" And then, being of a polite disposition, he glanced up at the painted notice-board so that he might call the driver by name. "Mr Browne! stop! Oh, do please stop!"

Mr Browne did not stop, but he opened a little window and looked in at the boy. His face was a surprise, so kind it was and modest.

"Mr Browne, I've left my purse behind. I've not got a penny. I can't pay for the ticket. Will you take my watch, please? I am in the most awful hole."

"Tickets on this line," said the driver, "whether single or return, can be purchased by coinage from no terrene mint. And a chronometer, though it had solaced the vigils of Charlemagne, or measured the slumbers of Laura, can acquire by no mutation the double-cake that charms the fangless Cerberus of Heaven!" So saying, he handed in the necessary ticket, and, while the boy said "Thank you," continued. "Titular pretensions, I know it well, are vanity. Yet they merit no censure when uttered on a laughing lip, and in an homonymous world are in some sort useful, since they do serve to distinguish one Jack from his fellow. Remember me, therefore, as Sir Thomas Browne."

"Are you a Sir? Oh, sorry!" He had heard of these gentlemen drivers. "It *is* good of you about the ticket. But if you go on at this rate, however does your bus pay?"

"It does not pay. It was not intended to pay. Many are the faults of my equipage; it is compounded too curiously of foreign woods; its cushions tickle erudition rather than promote repose; and my horses are nourished not on the evergreen pastures of the moment, but on the dried bents and clovers of Latinity. But that it pays!—that error at all events was never intended and never attained."

"Sorry again," said the boy rather hopelessly. Sir Thomas looked sad, fearing that, even for a moment, he had been the cause of sadness. He invited the boy to come up and sit beside him on the box, and together they journeyed on through the fog, which was now

changing from yellow to white. There were no houses by the road; so it must be either Putney Heath or Wimbledon Common.

"Have you been a driver always?"

"I was a physician once."

"But why did you stop? Weren't you good?"

"As a healer of bodies I had scant success, and several score of my patients preceded me. But as a healer of the spirit I have succeeded beyond my hopes and my deserts. For though my draughts were not better nor subtler than those of other men, yet, by reason of the cunning goblets wherein I offered them, the queasy soul was ofttimes tempted to sip and be refreshed."

"The queasy soul," he murmured; "if the sun sets with trees in front of it, and you suddenly come strange all over, is that a queasy soul?"

"Have you felt that?"

"Why yes."

After a pause he told the boy a little, a very little, about the journey's end. But they did not chatter much, for the boy, when he liked a person, would as soon sit silent in his company as speak, and this, he discovered, was also the mind of Sir Thomas Browne and of many others with whom he was to be acquainted. He heard, however, about the young man Shelley, who was now quite a famous person, with a carriage of his own, and about some of the other drivers who are in the service of the Company. Meanwhile the light grew stronger, though the fog did not disperse. It was now more like mist than fog, and at times would travel quickly across them, as if it was part of a cloud. They had been ascending, too, in a most puzzling way; for over two hours the horses had been pulling against the collar, and even if it were Richmond Hill they ought

to have been at the top long ago. Perhaps it was Epsom, or even the North Downs; yet the air seemed keener than that which blows on either. And as to the name of their destination, Sir Thomas Browne was silent.

Crash!

"Thunder, by Jove!" said the boy, "and not so far off either. Listen to the echoes! It's more like mountains."

He thought, not very vividly, of his father and mother. He saw them sitting down to sausages and listening to the storm. He saw his own empty place. Then there would be questions, alarms, theories, jokes, consolations. They would expect him back at lunch. To lunch he would not come, nor to tea, but he would be in for dinner, and so his day's truancy would be over. If he had had his purse he would have bought them presents—not that he should have known what to get them.

Crash!

The peal and the lightning came together. The cloud quivered as if it were alive, and torn streamers of mist rushed past. "Are you afraid?" asked Sir Thomas Browne.

"What is there to be afraid of? Is it much farther?"

The horses of the omnibus stopped just as a ball of fire burst up and exploded with a ringing noise that was deafening but clear, like the noise of a blacksmith's forge. All the cloud was shattered.

"Oh, listen, Sir Thomas Browne! No, I mean look; we shall get a view at last. No, I mean listen; that sounds like a rainbow!"

The noise had died into the faintest murmur, beneath which another murmur grew, spreading stealthily,

steadily, in a curve that widened but did not vary. And in widening curves a rainbow was spreading from the horses' feet into the dissolving mists.

"But how beautiful! What colours! Where will it stop? It is more like the rainbows you can tread on. More like dreams."

The colour and the sound grew together. The rainbow spanned an enormous gulf. Clouds rushed under it and were pierced by it, and still it grew, reaching forward, conquering the darkness, until it touched something that seemed more solid than a cloud.

The boy stood up "What is that out there?" he called. "What does it rest on, out at that other end?"

In the morning sunshine a precipice shone forth beyond the gulf. A precipice—or was it a castle? The horses moved. They set their feet upon the rainbow.

"Oh, look!" the boy shouted. "Oh, listen! Those caves—or are they gateways? Oh, look between those cliffs at those ledges. I see people! I see trees!"

"Look also below," whispered Sir Thomas. "Neglect not the diviner Acheron."

The boy looked below, past the flames of the rainbow that licked against their wheels. The gulf also had cleared, and in its depths there flowed an everlasting river. One sunbeam entered and struck a green pool, and as they passed over he saw three maidens rise to the surface of the pool, singing, and playing with something that glistened like a ring.

"You down in the water——" he called.

They answered, "You up on the bridge——" There was a burst of music. "You up on the bridge, good luck to you. Truth in the depth, truth on the height."

"You down in the water, what are you doing?"

Sir Thomas Browne replied: "They sport in the mancipiary possession of their gold"; and the omnibus arrived.

III

The boy was in disgrace. He sat locked up in the nursery of Agathox Lodge, learning poetry for a punishment. His father had said, "My boy! I can pardon anything but untruthfulness," and had caned him, saying at each stroke, "There is *no* omnibus, *no* driver, *no* bridge, *no* mountain; you are a *truant*, a *guttersnipe*, a *liar*." His father could be very stern at times. His mother had begged him to say he was sorry. But he could not say that. It was the greatest day of his life, in spite of the caning and the poetry at the end of it.

He had returned punctually at sunset—driven not by Sir Thomas Browne, but by a maiden lady who was full of quiet fun. They had talked of omnibuses and also of barouche landaus. How far away her gentle voice seemed now! Yet it was scarcely three hours since he had left her up the alley.

His mother called through the door, "Dear, you are to come down and to bring your poetry with you."

He came down, and found that Mr Bons was in the smoking-room with his father. It had been a dinner-party.

"Here is the great traveller!" said his father grimly. "Here is the young gentleman who drives in an omnibus over rainbows, while young ladies sing to him." Pleased with his wit, he laughed.

"After all," said Mr Bons, smiling, "there is some-

thing a little like it in Wagner. It is odd how, in quite illiterate minds, you will find glimmers of Artistic Truth. The case interests me. Let me plead for the culprit. We have all romanced in our time, haven't we?"

"Hear how kind Mr Bons is," said his mother, while his father said, "Very well. Let him say his Poem, and that will do. He is going away to my sister on Tuesday, and *she* will cure him of this alley-slopering." (Laughter.) "Say your Poem."

The boy began. "'Standing aloof in giant ignorance.'"

His father laughed again—roared. "One for you, my son! 'Standing aloof in giant ignorance!' I never knew these poets talked sense. Just describes you. Here, Bons, you go in for poetry. Put him through it, will you, while I fetch up the whisky?"

"Yes, give me the Keats," said Mr Bons. "Let him say his Keats to me."

So for a few moments the wise man and the ignorant boy were left alone in the smoking-room.

"'Standing aloof in giant ignorance, of thee I dream and of the Cyclades, as one who sits ashore and longs perchance to visit——'"

"Quite right. To visit what?"

"'To visit dolphin coral in deep seas,'" said the boy, and burst into tears.

"Come, come! Why do you cry?"

"Because—because all these words that only rhymed before, now that I've come back they're me."

Mr Bons laid the Keats down. The case was more interesting than he had expected. "*You?*" he exclaimed. "This sonnet, *you?*"

"Yes—and look further on: 'Aye, on the shores of darkness there is light, and precipices show untrodden green.' It *is* so, sir. All these things are true."

"I never doubted it," said Mr Bons, with closed eyes.

"You—then you believe me? You believe in the omnibus and the driver and the storm and that return ticket I got for nothing and——"

"Tut, tut! No more of your yarns, my boy. I meant that I never doubted the essential truth of Poetry. Some day, when you have read more, you will understand what I mean."

"But, Mr Bons, it *is* so. There *is* light upon the shores of darkness. I have seen it coming. Light and a wind."

"Nonsense," said Mr Bons.

"If I had stopped! They tempted me. They told me to give up my ticket—for you cannot come back if you lose your ticket. They called from the river for it, and indeed I was tempted, for I have never been so happy as among those precipices. But I thought of my mother and father, and that I must fetch them. Yet they will not come, though the road starts opposite our house. It has all happened as the people up there warned me, and Mr Bons has disbelieved me like every one else. I have been caned. I shall never see that mountain again."

"What's that about me?" said Mr Bons, sitting up in his chair very suddenly.

"I told them about you, and how clever you were, and how many books you had, and they said, 'Mr Bons will certainly disbelieve you.'"

"Stuff and nonsense, my young friend. You grow impertinent. I—well—I will settle the matter. Not a word to your father. I will cure you. To-morrow evening I will myself call here to take you for a walk, and at sunset we will go up this alley opposite and hunt for your omnibus, you silly little boy."

His face grew serious, for the boy was not disconcerted, but leapt about the room singing, "Joy! joy! I told them you would believe me. We will drive together over the rainbow. I told them that you would come." After all, could there be anything in the story? Wagner? Keats? Shelley? Sir Thomas Browne? Certainly the case was interesting.

And on the morrow evening, though it was pouring with rain, Mr Bons did not omit to call at Agathox Lodge.

The boy was ready, bubbling with excitement, and skipping about in a way that rather vexed the President of the Literary Society. They took a turn down Buckingham Park Road, and then—having seen that no one was watching them—slipped up the alley. Naturally enough (for the sun was setting) they ran straight against the omnibus.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr Bons. "Good gracious heavens!"

It was not the omnibus in which the boy had driven first, nor yet that in which he had returned. There were three horses—black, gray, and white, the gray being the finest. The driver, who turned round at the mention of goodness and of heaven, was a sallow man with terrifying jaws and sunken eyes. Mr Bons, on seeing him, gave a cry as if of recognition, and began to tremble violently.

The boy jumped in.

"Is it possible?" cried Mr Bons. "Is the impossible possible?"

"Sir; come in, sir. It is such a fine omnibus Oh, here is his name—Dan some one."

Mr Bons sprang in too. A blast of wind immediately slammed the omnibus door, and the shock jerked down all the omnibus blinds, which were very weak on their springs.

"Dan . . . Show me. Good gracious heavens! we're moving."

"Hooray!" said the boy.

Mr Bons became flustered. He had not intended to be kidnapped. He could not find the door-handle, nor push up the blinds. The omnibus was quite dark, and by the time he had struck a match, night had come on outside also. They were moving rapidly.

"A strange, a memorable adventure," he said, surveying the interior of the omnibus, which was large, roomy, and constructed with extreme regularity, every part exactly answering to every other part. Over the door (the handle of which was outside) was written, "*Lasciate ogni baldanza voi che entrate*"—at least, that was what was written, but Mr Bons said that it was Lashy arty something, and that *baldanza* was a mistake for *speranza*. His voice sounded as if he was in church. Meanwhile, the boy called to the cadaverous driver for two return tickets. They were handed in without a word. Mr Bons covered his face with his hand and again trembled. "Do you know who that is?" he whispered, when the little window had shut upon them. "It is the impossible."

"Well, I don't like him as much as Sir Thomas Browne, though I shouldn't be surprised if he had even more in him."

"More in him?" He stamped irritably. "By accident you have made the greatest discovery of the century, and all you can say is that there is more in this man. Do you remember those vellum books in my library, stamped with red lilies? This—sit still, I bring you stupendous news!—*this is the man who wrote them.*"

The boy sat quite still. "I wonder if we shall see Mrs Gamp?" he asked, after a civil pause.

"Mrs——?"

"Mrs Gamp and Mrs Harris. I like Mrs Harris. I came upon them quite suddenly. Mrs Gamp's band-boxes have moved over the rainbow so badly. All the bottoms have fallen out, and two of the pippins off her bedstead tumbled into the stream."

"Out there sits the man who wrote my vellum books!" thundered Mr Bons, "and you talk to me of Dickens and of Mrs Gamp!"

"I know Mrs Gamp so well," he apologized. "I could not help being glad to see her. I recognized her voice. She was telling Mrs Harris about Mrs Prig."

"Did you spend the whole day in her elevating company?"

"Oh, no. I raced. I met a man who took me out beyond to a race-course. You run, and there are dolphins out at sea."

"Indeed. Do you remember the man's name?"

"Achilles. No; he was later. Tom Jones."

Mr Bons sighed heavily. "Well, my lad, you have made a miserable mess of it. Think of a cultured person with your opportunities! A cultured person would have known all these characters and known what to have said to each. He would not have wasted his time with a Mrs Gamp or a Tom Jones. The creations of Homer, of Shakespeare, and of Him who drives us now, would alone have contented him. He would not have raced. He would have asked intelligent questions."

"But, Mr Bons," said the boy humbly, "you will be a cultured person. I told them so."

"True, true, and I beg you not to disgrace me when we arrive. No gossiping. No running. Keep close to my side, and never speak to these Immortals unless

they speak to you. Yes, and give me the return tickets. You will be losing them."

The boy surrendered the tickets, but felt a little sore. After all, he had found the way to this place. It was hard first to be disbelieved and then to be lectured. Meanwhile, the rain had stopped, and moonlight crept into the omnibus through the cracks in the blinds.

"But how is there to be a rainbow?" cried the boy.

"You distract me," snapped Mr Bons. "I wish to meditate on beauty. I wish to goodness I was with a reverent and sympathetic person."

The lad bit his lip. He made a hundred good resolutions. He would imitate Mr Bons all the visit. He would not laugh, or run, or sing, or do any of the vulgar things that must have disgusted his new friends last time. He would be very careful to pronounce their names properly, and to remember who knew whom. Achilles did not know Tom Jones—at least, so Mr Bons said. The Duchess of Malfi was older than Mrs Gamp—at least, so Mr Bons said. He would be self-conscious, reticent, and prim. He would never say he liked anyone. Yet, when the blind flew up at a chance touch of his head, all these good resolutions went to the winds, for the omnibus had reached the summit of a moonlit hill, and there was the chasm, and there, across it, stood the old precipices, dreaming, with their feet in the everlasting river. He exclaimed, "The mountain! Listen to the new tune in the water! Look at the camp fires in the ravines," and Mr Bons, after a hasty glance, retorted, "Water? Camp fires? Ridiculous rubbish. Hold your tongue. There is nothing at all."

Yet, under his eyes, a rainbow formed, compounded not of sunlight and storm, but of moonlight and the

spray of the river. The three horses put their feet upon it. He thought it the finest rainbow he had seen, but did not dare to say so, since Mr Bons said that nothing was there. He leant out—the window had opened—and sang the tune that rose from the sleeping waters.

"The prelude to *Rhinegold*?" said Mr Bons suddenly. "Who taught you these *leit-motifs*?" He, too, looked out of the window. Then he behaved very oddly. He gave a choking cry, and fell back on to the omnibus floor. He writhed and kicked. His face was green.

"Does the bridge make you dizzy?" the boy asked.

"Dizzy!" gasped Mr Bons. "I want to go back. Tell the driver."

But the driver shook his head.

"We are nearly there," said the boy. "They are asleep. Shall I call? They will be so pleased to see you, for I have prepared them."

Mr Bons moaned. They moved over the lunar rainbow, which ever and ever broke away behind their wheels. How still the night was! Who would be sentry at the Gate?

"I am coming," he shouted, again forgetting the hundred resolutions. "I am returning—I, the boy."

"The boy is returning," cried a voice to other voices, who repeated, "The boy is returning."

"I am bringing Mr Bons with me."

Silence.

"I should have said Mr Bons is bringing me with him."

Profound silence.

"Who stands sentry?"

"Achilles."

And on the rocky causeway, close to the springing

of the rainbow bridge, he saw a young man who carried a wonderful shield.

"Mr Bons, it is Achilles, armed."

"I want to go back," said Mr Bons.

The last fragment of the rainbow melted, the wheels sang upon the living rock, the door of the omnibus burst open. Out leapt the boy—he could not resist—and sprang to meet the warrior, who, stooping suddenly, caught him on his shield.

"Achilles!" he cried, "let me get down, for I am ignorant and vulgar, and I must wait for that Mr Bons of whom I told you yesterday."

But Achilles raised him aloft. He crouched on the wonderful shield, on heroes and burning cities, on vineyards graven in gold, on every dear passion, every joy, on the entire image of the Mountain that he had discovered, encircled, like it, with an everlasting stream. "No, no," he protested, "I am not worthy. It is Mr Bons who must be up here."

But Mr Bons was whimpering, and Achilles trumpeted and cried, "Stand upright upon my shield!"

"Sir, I did not mean to stand! Something made me stand. Sir, why do you delay? Here is only the great Achilles, whom you knew."

Mr Bons screamed, "I see no one. I see nothing. I want to go back." Then he cried to the driver, "Save me! Let me stop in your chariot. I have honoured you. I have quoted you. I have bound you in vellum. Take me back to my world."

The driver replied, "I am the means and not the end. I am the food and not the life. Stand by yourself, as that boy has stood. I cannot save you. For poetry is a spirit; and they that would worship it must worship in spirit and in truth."

Mr Bons—he could not resist—crawled out of the

beautiful omnibus. His face appeared, gaping horribly. His hands followed, one gripping the step, the other beating the air. Now his shoulders emerged, his chest, his stomach. With a shriek of " I see London," he fell—fell against the hard, moonlit rock, fell into it as if it were water, fell through it, vanished, and was seen by the boy no more.

" Where have you fallen to, Mr Bons? Here is a procession arriving to honour you with music and torches. Here come the men and women whose names you know. The mountain is awake, the river is awake, over the racecourse the sea is awaking those dolphins, and it is all for you. They want you——"

There was the touch of fresh leaves on his forehead. Some one had crowned him.

ΤΕΛΟΣ

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From the " Kingston Gazette, Surbiton Times, and Raynes Park Observer "

The body of Mr Septimus Bons has been found in a shockingly mutilated condition in the vicinity of the Bermondsey gas-works. The deceased's pockets contained a sovereign-purse, a silver cigar-case, a bijou pronouncing dictionary, and a couple of omnibus tickets. The unfortunate gentleman had apparently been hurled from a considerable height. Foul play is suspected, and a thorough investigation is pending by the authorities.

From "The Celestial Omnibus "

THE HAPPY HANGMAN

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

[MR HAROLD BRIGHOUSE has won fame as a dramatist, and his *Hobson's Choice, Garside's Career,* and *Zack* are well known, as are also his one-act plays.[1] During the past few years, however, Mr Brighouse has been writing novels and occasionally short stories—mainly (I imagine) for the fun of the thing. His best novels are probably *Hepplestall's, The Wrong Shadow,* and *Captain Shapely.* The last is a delightful comedy of London Town and the Oxford road in the days of Queen Anne, and recounts the adventures of a dashing highwayman with humour and high spirit.]

I

THERE was a king in Naples then and Beppo was his hangman. None of your shamefaced dogs, but as hearty a fellow as ever sent a criminal to Kingdom Come with sound hemp and farewell joke. He hanged like a Christian and a sinner because but for a piece of luck he should have been hanged himself and it made him soft and kindly at his work.

They caught him one day at the trade he used to ply before they made a hangman of him. He was then a pickpocket by profession, and the fat merchant whose purse he cut could well afford the trifling loss But the merchant fell to shouting and raised such a hullabaloo in the street of Naples that Beppo was caught, though he ran like a hare, for as soon as ten pursuers were winded, twenty with fresh lungs took up the chase, and a man cannot outrun a multitude.

[1] For further particulars see *One-Act Plays of To-day,* which contains a specimen of Mr Brighouse's dramatic work in an entirely different mood. There is also an excellent study of his plays in *The Twentieth-Century Theatre,* by Frank Vernon (Harrap).

The sniffling wretch who couldn't lose a purse without crying out about it haled him before the magistrates, and Beppo was sentenced to the gallows. When they sent for the hangman to come and do his duty, the officer, worn with overwork, was saying his last prayer with the priest and inconveniently died.

So they offered Beppo what they called a choice. He could turn hangman and hang others, or he could hang. He preferred to hang others.

It is nearly as unpopular to hang as to be hanged, and Beppo found himself cold-shouldered by his old acquaintances, many of whom feared, with cause, to be one day the raw material of his handicraft. He saved his skin at a price which was heavy on a companionable man, but he hanged the fellows who cut him in the wineshops with Christian pleasantness. A less charitable man would have been churlish with the noose.

If constant occupation makes a man happy, Beppo had luck, for necks fell to his rope like mellow apples on a windy day. There were hangings, and to spare, in Naples then, and fees for Master Beppo, and perquisites as well. He was heir-at-law to whatever the felons had upon them, which, since the warders had first opportunity and nimble fingers, was nothing but their clothes. Still the clothes were often merchantable and more rarely wearable, and on the surface there were compensations in his trade. But where is the use of fees if a man must drink alone, or of fine clothes when the girls won't look at him who wears them? Beppo was tired of hanging and that's the truth of it.

Besides, there was the matter of Nita. Nita belonged, in a sort of way, to a successful thief called Pietro, and Beppo reckoned himself the better man, which might be truth or only arrogance in a mere pickpocket who had, moreover, turned hangman.

But when Pietro was careless enough to be caught knifing Nita's husband and Beppo hanged him, he did his office with peculiar kindliness, for he was thinking of Nita. That was his mistake. A man should keep his thoughts upon his work. Straying thoughts mean botched work.

Having hanged him, Beppo drew his fee, changed into Pietro's clothes, which were good and fitted him, and went to see Nita.

She was lying asleep in an upper room with a window that looked out on the sun-filled courtyard, and the sight of her was good. She was like a ripe orange, with a flush beneath her dark skin where the blood ran in her, and at the thought of kissing those lips Beppo was twice a man. She was of Naples, and that says all, except that she was beautiful beyond the wont even of Neapolitans. She lay in her bed under a bright red cloak, tired because she had been up all night in order to get a front place at the hanging of her lover.

Beppo leant over her, and she murmured "My Pietro" in her sleep.

"It's easy to see where your thoughts run o' nights," he said. "Pietro's hanged."

She stirred and woke and saw him in Pietro's clothes. Again she said "Pietro," and he laughed.

"But you——" she said, shrinking from him. "Your clothes. They are Pietro's."

"My clothes are mine," he said.

"They're his. I say they're his. See? Here I mended them."

"What?" said Beppo, disappointed. "Mended clothes?" Then he examined the elbow to which she pointed and found that the mend was neat. "Still, they are mended well. I'm glad to know you have the housewife's arts."

"Who are you? Who are you who come with his clothes on your back?"

"His heir. Heir to his clothes and heir to his—to you. Shall we sit down and talk?"

She recognized him then and shuddered back against the wall.

"You are the hangman."

"You have sharp eyes," he said, well pleased. "It needs sharp eyes to see my face through the mask I wear when I perform my duty to the State. I like you more and more."

He went to her, and saw her cringe from him.

"Come, mistress," he argued, reasonably, "I am a man like other men. A State official, it is true, but I am not on duty now. Sit by me and discover my humanity. Have you no wine to offer me?"

She eyed him defiantly. "There's nothing here for you."

"There's you."

"But not for long," she said, and made a quick rush to the door.

Beppo was quicker and he caught her before she opened it. Wanting her breath for other purposes, she did not scream. She bit his hand and he liked her spirit, but he mastered her and threw her from him into the room, locking the door and smiling gently at her. She thought of the window, but the well was deep and she shuddered back from it.

"Yes, it's a long jump, Nita," he said, looking for himself. "A man like me might jump it and survive, but not a little girl."

She stood there panting.

"You make it very plain you did not love Pietro," he remarked. "He died repentant like a worthy son of Holy Church. You should show your grati-

tude to me that sent him to a better place than this."

"Does that help me on earth?" she asked.

"I'm here to do that," he said. "Did you say you had no wine?"

Hatred still smouldered in her eyes, but she had wine and got it. She put worlds of contempt into her gesture as she poured it to the cup, but, sullenly, she poured.

"Only one cup?" he asked. "Then we must share it as lovers should. Drink, Nita," he invited her.

"Yes—if my lips could poison you."

He laughed. "But since they won't?"

"You drink alone."

He drank, toasting her eyes. "It is a hangman's fate to drink alone. Men shun me in the wineshops and women look the other way when I pass by. I'm pining for companionship. Hanging's a necessary trade, but lonely, and therefore I come to you to ease my loneliness by sharing it. The fees, I might remark, are good."

"Blood-money."

"Oh, if you like," he said, "but the coins are round like many others and more gold than most. See. This is what I earned to-day."

He fingered gold merrily on the table, and she struck him in the face. He relished the tingle of it and the mischief in her eye.

"You hellish scum! Would you tempt me with the very coin you got for taking Pietro's life?"

"Hoho," he mocked, "I tempt you then? We'll argue this, my pretty. For instance, why was Pietro hanged? Because he killed your husband and you clung to him for it. For the same reason you should cling to me, because I killed Pietro."

"Pietro killed my husband in the heat of anger. They fought for me with knives and the best man won. You killed Pietro in cold blood as a—a duty to the State."

"True," he argued, "I performed my duty to the State, and I assure you I'd perform my duties as your husband with the same success."

That gave her pause. She had no anger now. "My husband!"

He was very moral then. "Certainly a husband, Nita. A State official has to be respectable!"

"Marry a hangman!" she said contemptuously but weighed it shrewdly, liking the shape of him.

"You can forget my trade. And you will find me faithful."

"No doubt of that. Women don't want a man like you." Which was not the whole truth. They wanted but they did not dare.

"And men," he pointed out, "will think the same of you. Your record's dangerous. Two men, your husband and Pietro, have died on your account. It takes courage to be the third."

"Oh," she scoffed, "you woo me bravely."

"On the contrary, I have not begun to woo. So far I have appealed to argument."

"To insult," she suggested.

"Only to truth," he amended. "If you were ugly I might lie. I might pretend that you were beautiful, but it is not necessary to lie to you. You're beautiful, I want you for your beauty. I love you. I never hanged a man with greater kindliness than I hanged Pietro."

"You were not cold about it, then?" she asked eagerly.

"Cold! My fingers trembled, I who have hanged

a man a week for years. I hanged him with a rival's sentiment. I lusted to cut his bonds and set him free to fight with me for you."

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Beppo."

"Beppo," she repeated lingeringly, filling the wine-cup.

"Ah, on your lips it sounds the name of names. I never knew it was a fragrant name before."

She drank and offered him the cup. "Drink where I have kissed the cup."

He looked at her with question in his eyes and saw the answer in hers. Swiftly he drank, then sat and put her on his knee. They kissed and kissed as if their lips could never part.

"Now I can defy the world. Let come what may, I have held you in my arms and had your lips to mine."

"I've dreamed of finding love like this," she said.

There was the sudden sound of horses in the court-yard and the strangeness of it in that quarter of the town came first to her who lived there. She fretted in his clasp.

"Sit still," he bade her. "Horses are not so strange as that we've found each other," and she sank back happily. They kissed again and made love and cooed into each other's ears.

"I love your roughness and the strength that mastered me."

"I have not lived till now. To-day I am alive. No longer lonely and outcast, but a man who's found his mate, greater than other men because the mate is you; a giant for I have your love; inviolate because you love me——"

A knocking came at the door, and Beppo did not care. His world was in the room.

"Go on," he mocked, "knock till your knuckles ache. Shout till your bellows burst."

They knocked again and called his name, alarming Nita.

"They know you're here," she said.

"I know you're here," he said. "That's all I've room to know."

"Open," they cried, "in the name of the law."

The law? He heard a greater call than law. He heard the call of love and happiness. They could shout, those pigmies of the world. He snapped his fingers at them, looking at Nita, who was his world.

"Beppo, am I to break the door down? You know my voice—Calandro of the jail. I've news for you."

"News of the jail," he roared back. "News of the damned. Take it to hell and tell it there. This is a part of Paradise."

Another voice came from behind the locked door, and at it Nita flinched and slipped from Beppo's arms.

"*That voice!*" she said, and her face was bloodless and she shivered.

"Give me the key." He gave it to her. She had no need to ask twice in such a tone. She opened the door.

With Calandro, jailer, was the hanged lover of Nita, in a nightshirt.

II

She screamed at the sight of him and shrank away. Beppo himself gave back a step. It was new in his experience for hanged men to walk.

"Are you a ghost?" he asked.

"As cold as one," said Pietro. "Give me my clothes."

At that Calandro interposed and explained. "Beppo, you hanged him like a bungler"—that was the worst of a servant of the law indulging his private passion; hangmen should be dispassionate—"we took the body in the usual way to the doctors, and on the road the fellow stirred. By the time we were at the hospital, he sat up. The doctors gave him cordial, and as you see, the man's recovered."

"And waiting to be covered," said Pietro. "Give me my clothes."

The right of the matter seemed with Pietro, not to mention the charity. A man who has survived hanging and a ride through the streets in a hospital nightshirt deserves clothes, especially his own clothes. They were the hangman's perquisite on the theory that the hanged had no further use for them, and Pietro had a use. Pietro was cold.

"It's simple impudence to claim your perquisite after fumbling your job like this," he said.

"You're the last man to complain of that," said Beppo.

"Am I? Why, but for your lubberliness I'd now be on the way to Paradise. The priest told me himself he'd never witnessed a better repentance."

"Then come and be hanged again," suggested the botcher. "I promise you I'll not be careless twice." He opened the door in invitation.

The jailer intervened.

"That is the point which the lawyers are now considering," he said. "Pietro was sentenced to be hanged, and he has been hanged."

"Not thoroughly."

"No. It's a nice question. As I am myself a humble student of the law, I can see that the problem bristles with difficulties. Can a man be hanged twice

for the same crime? Is Pietro, having been hanged, properly a man at all? Has he legal existence? And if not, can he be said to exist in any shape? Ought he to be quietly killed and hidden away as an unnatural monstrosity? Or ought he to be ignored and permitted to live? Can we restore civil rights to a man who is legally dead, or is he an outlaw? Is he——?"

Pietro tired of the pedantry of the law.

"I tell you what I am," he said. "I'm cold."

"I am not even certain," said Calandro, "that you have the right to feel cold, but by the clemency of the Council you are allowed to claim your clothes."

"Is he?" said Beppo. "Claiming is one thing. Receiving is another."

"I should not advise you to be arrogant, Beppo," said Calandro quietly.

"Your own position is also under consideration by the lawyers. They are deliberating what is to be done with a hangman who makes a fool of the law. You have given them a very pretty problem, my friend"

"Then they ought to be grateful."

"Oh, they are. They revel in a complicated case. But it may be necessary to hang you at the end of their revels."

"To hang me?" asked Beppo, taken aback. "But why?"

The jailer was sympathetic.

"Personally, I should regret it," he said. "But don't you realize that you have brought the law into contempt? The law relies upon your skill in hanging, and you have betrayed the law. No doubt it was an accident, but there is no place in law for accidents. I can only tell you that I left the Council laughing very heartily when an old equity lawyer suggested that the best plan was to make Pietro hangman in your place

to see if he could not make a better job of hanging you than you have made of him."

"So as the matter stands," said Pietro, "we're both in danger of our lives."

The legalist considered it. "One of you is in danger of his life, but which one is a matter not decided yet."

Pietro looked at Beppo like a friend. They belonged to the rascal side of the fence, Calandro to the other. For a purpose they could form alliance.

"Hangman," he said, "this fellow's tedious."

"He splits too many hairs," Beppo agreed, seizing Calandro. They two could settle this without the law, and put the door between them and the law.

Calandro in the passage howled out threats and called on Beppo to keep the peace. He reminded him that he was an officer of the law. Beppo resigned his office through the door.

"You can't resign," said Calandro. "You're appointed for life."

Beppo laughed, and the jailer went for help. Pietro turned the key in the door with an ugly look that Beppo did not see because he was pouring wine for Pietro. He had not perceived that the alliance, made for a purpose, was already broken and the allies turned enemies.

"Pietro," he said fraternally, "for a man that's had your escape you're in a gloomy mood. Cheer up! Here's wine to help you."

Pietro knocked the wine-cup from his hand. "I do not drink with hangmen," he said.

"Mere prejudice," said Beppo, too used to that affront to be angry. "And if it comes to that, you're in jeopardy of turning hangman yourself."

Pietro ignored it and restated his claim.

"My breeches!" he demanded: "I am cold."

"*My* breeches," corrected Beppo.

"*Ours*, if you like, but give them me to wear."

"No. That admits your ownership, which I deny."

"Oh," said Pietro whimsically. "I'll admit your ownership, if you'll admit my legs."

"I stand upon my rights," said Beppo, loftily.

Pietro corrected that.

"You stand upon my boots," he said, "but if you have no mind to do a charitable act——"

"Charity?" cried Beppo. "Why in heaven's name should I feel charitable to a man who's put my life in peril by declining to die?"

"Then," said Pietro, "will you take a sportsman's chance and spin a coin for it?"

"You will lose," he said. "I warn you I'm lucky to-day."

"The same with me," said Pietro, "which makes the matter more interesting. My luck brought me past the gallows and should carry me to a pair of breeches. You'll find a copper in the left-hand pocket."

The light-fingered turnkeys had the copper, but Beppo produced gold and Pietro eyed it queerly.

"Transmuted, eh?" he said. "I have the discretion not to ask about the process, but I may guess you have not fairly earned that gold. I'm still alive. I call it heads," he added as Beppo tossed the coin.

Tails fell, and Pietro took it with philosophy.

"Lucky at play, unlucky at love," he said. "That for yourself, Hangman. Meantime, I like the colour of this cloak. Blood also is red."

He took the bright cloak from the bed and gathered it round him. "Now to our quarrel."

III

Beppo's eyes confessed his admiration. Here was a fellow who had spent the night in a condemned cell, had gone through the strain of a last confession, been hanged, carried naked to the hospital, and from there as good as naked to this house, and still had fight in him. Small wonder he survived the noose. It was magnificent, but it was absurd, for Beppo had kissed Nita. He was uplifted and indomitable, but he could pity Pietro, who had lost what he had gained, and the winning of the toss awoke the gambling fever. As he gambled for the breeches he would gamble for Nita, to spare Pietro the pains of a losing fight.

So far they had ignored Nita, who kept herself apart, and Beppo put the matter tactfully. He made play with the coin again.

"If there is anything between us two," he said, "which the toss has not decided, let us call a second time."

It is decent to be tactful about breeches: a sweetheart is another matter.

"*If* there is anything," cried Pietro. "Did you imagine I'd forgotten where we found you, with Nita, who tries to hide and skulks there in the shade?"

She came between them angrily. "I have not hidden in the shade. Your squabble for a suit of clothes was no affair of mine."

"We've finished that," he said, "and can begin with you. Nita, you love too lightly. You thought me cold this bare half-hour and welcomed the hangman."

Beppo was watching her. He wanted to see how she would rise to this occasion of a lover returned from the gallows, and he liked the challenge of her. She

stood poised on the balls of her feet, swaying a little with arms akimbo in the attitude which is either a coarse virago's or a thing of grace, and Nita did it with an air that pleased him. She had spunk, this woman of his.

"I'm free to welcome whom I choose," she said defiantly.

Pietro raised his fist but let it drop again, surprised because she did not flinch. She used to flinch, and then he used to strike.

"While I'm alive you're mine," he said. "By every right of God and man, you're mine. I've loved you and I've fought for you. I've killed for you. This carrion here has failed to kill me, though he had me pinioned and only had to put a rope around my neck and pull it tight."

"For all that, you were less helpless than I was," said Beppo, and Pietro stared at him. "Cords do not bind a man as tightly as a woman's eyes. I've never failed to hang a man before. I failed this time because I cared. I saw her and I hated you. I let my private feelings get the better of my skill. Put me before you man to man, knives in our hands, and I will undertake to give you as good account of you as you gave of Luigi for her sake."

"You're boasting, Hangman."

"No," smiled Beppo, more at Nita than at him, as if they two had a secret beyond the comprehension of the other, "neither a boaster nor a hangman now. I resign my office to you."

"It's almost worth it, for the pleasure of hanging you."

"Only," said Beppo, "I shall not stay here to be hanged. My next appointment is not with Death. It is with Love."

"You'll miss it then."

But Beppo only smiled. "No living man can hurt me now."

"Son of a rogue, you boast. No living man, you say? The lawyers sit to learn if I'm alive or not. Perhaps, Hangman, I am not a living man." And Pietro snatched from the table the only knife it held.

Beppo went to the window. The height was giddy, but he saw with satisfaction that Calandro had left the second horse in the courtyard. He thought it looked a likely racer. He thought of freedom and the frontier, and the knife in Pietro's hand did not trouble him.

Pietro sprang, and Nita shrieked in time. The aim was for his stomach, but Beppo turned and caught the eager hand and squeezed it till the knife fell from the bloodless fingers and rattled on the floor. Pietro twisted like an eel and tried to trip his adversary. They fell, and the table with them, and grappled for each other's throats. A man of parts, this Pietro, who after all could make Beppo call out his strength.

Fierce knocks were heard at the door, and then Calandro called, like a fool, "Beppo, you are to surrender to the law. It orders you to die, and Pietro is your executioner."

Beppo laughed loud. He was too busy to come and be killed. Nor was he killing, though he might have done. Pietro won too much regard for that. He rose, and when he rose Pietro rose with him, struggling but helpless, and was held on high until such time as Beppo needed him.

"Go to the window, Nita," he commanded her as the men outside began to break the door.

Wise generals throw out a scout, but Calandro lacked strategy and entered first through the shattered panels.

Beppo threw something at him hard. He threw Pietro, and a tangled mass seemed mixed for ever on the floor. The warders skirted it and made for Beppo.

With Nita in his arms, he jumped and fell into the courtyard, a madman's leap, but he rose immune.

Calandro scrambled to his feet.

"He's killed himself," he said, and went to look.

A happy laugh saluted him. Beppo had Nita on the horse and the sound of galloping hooves rang through the room. Quickly the sound was lost.

Pietro kept his wits. In a chase he too might balk the law.

"After them! After them!" he cried, struggling with the guards.

"No," said Calandro, "hold him fast. The lawyers must hear of this and sit again." He scratched his head with a fat hand. "I wonder what they will do now?"

A MODEL MAN

BARRY PAIN

[MR BARRY PAIN, who died in 1928, first attracted attention by his contributions to *Granta*. He was noted for his wit and humour, and had the great art of concentrating what he had to say in a very short space. He never wasted a word. His parodies are brilliantly clever, but behind the fun and caricature there is evidence of keen critical judgment. The list of his publications is long, and includes *De Omnibus*, *The Octave of Claudius*, *Eliza*, *Eliza's Son*, *Stories and Interludes*, and *Stories without Tears*; and he also wrote an excellent book on short-story writing.]

I

SUMMER visitors to Bunham on the East Coast generally bought a copy of *Bunham and All About It* from Mr Parkinson in the High Street. The price of that excellent guide-book is only twopence, and it contains a frontispiece representing, in rather a thin and jaded way, the Hall of Stalactites. A line of letterpress under the illustration informs the reader that this is one of the wonders of the world, and requests him to "see p. 28."

The visitor who does "see p. 28" will find on that page a description of the Hall of Stalactites. Therein is enthusiasm tempered with information. The author (chastely veiled by the pseudonym of "Mermaid," but generally believed to be Miss Parkinson) contrasts the Hall of Stalactites with the Blue Grotto of Capri and also with Westminster Abbey; and I regret to say that neither the Abbey nor the Grotto comes out of the comparison at all well. Then follows a scientific paragraph. He that masters it will ever hereafter be

able to distinguish between a stalactite and a stalagmite in the dark with one hand tied behind him, and to babble of calcium carbonate in terms of the closest intimacy. Finally, Miss Parkinson descends to common things and tells us that "the well-appointed brakes of Messrs Bodger & Son run twice daily during the season," and recommends us to provide ourselves with "a warm wrap to counteract the chill inseparable from these vast retreats of subterranean mystery."

There can be no doubt about it, the Hall of Stalactites is Bunham's trump-card, and Bunham plays it with energy. Anything in Bunham which can possibly exhibit a view of the Hall of Stalactites does exhibit it. It fills the picture post-cards, it crawls round china mugs, it gets under paper-weights. Jobson, the jeweller, sells at a derisory price small charms "guaranteed to be made from fallen portions of genuine stalactite." One way or another that Hall gets into the local paper every week; and if it is only a sonnet, signed "Mermaid," it is better than nothing.

No visitor can escape the Hall of Stalactites—the force of suggestion is too strong. It is doubtful if any visitor wishes to escape. There is not very much to do at Bunham. You can sit on the beach, or you can sit on the pier, or you can sit in one of the well-appointed brakes of Messrs Bodger & Son. A young man who arrived one Monday to spend a bright holiday at sunny Bunham went to the Hall of Stalactites the very first day. On Wednesday and Thursday he went again. On Friday he went twice. On Saturday his body was taken out of the sea, and a waiter at the Bunham Railway Hotel said at the inquest that the deceased had seemed depressed.

Brakes to the Hall of Stalactites always pulled up at the Bull Inn for purposes of reference. The Bull Inn

is described by Miss Parkinson as "a charming old-world hostelry." In front of the inn is the road; on the other side of the road is a patch of green, and on that patch every day during the season you might find Samuel Pell with his working model of a coal mine. Visitors descended from the brake, went to see if the interior of the old-world hostelry was still there, wiped their mouths, and crossed the road to interview Samuel Pell and his working model. If the visitors had any money left, Pell found means to annex it.

Samuel was an old man of dignified appearance. He had abundance of white hair and a long white beard. His speech was refined, and the sentiments that he expressed were often truly admirable. He wore a soft black felt hat, but his remaining clothes were scarcely equal to it. The conjunction of a fisherman's blue jersey and a frock-coat in the last stage of putrefaction is not happy. His aged and capacious lace boots had no laces in them, and were retained *in situ* partly by the adoption of a shuffling gait and partly by personal magnetism.

Above his exhibit was a card on which Samuel had written in capitals:

NOT A TOY
NOT A PENNY-IN-THE-SLOT MACHIN
A GENUINE SCIENTIFIC MODDLE
MY OWN WORK

The motive power of the model was supplied by Samuel himself. He turned a handle at the back. It was not hard work, but he often said he was not fitted for hard work. When he turned, various things happened in the model, which gave a sectional view of a coal mine. Up above wheels went round. A basket

was drawn up the shaft. At a lower level a cardboard pony performed the incredible feat of dragging a cardboard truck without moving its legs. A group of cardboard miners became smitten with various forms of locomotive disorder. One of them delivered blows with his pick at the rate of two a second. The blows made no sound and no coal fell.

Sometimes a thoughtless humorist would point out to the exhibitor some of these lapses from realism. Samuel admitted them politely.

" You're right enough, sir, and I only wish I had the means to alter it. But the materials alone would cost me sixpence, and that is beyond my powers. By the time I've paid for the rent of my pitch here, there's barely enough left to buy me bread."

Such patience and politeness often met with their reward.

For an audience of women he had a touching story of how he had worked in the mines himself and had been dismissed by the company's manager because, while saving another man's life at the risk of his own, he had inadvertently infringed the rule which forbids miners to speak during work hours. " So there I was, ladies, with my arm and leg broken, thrown out of my employment and with no hope for the future. But I'd my wife and family to support, and I had to do something, and then it was that I first thought of this model. Yes, ladies, I designed that and I made it, just as you see it now, while lying flat on my back in bed in agony and having only my left hand that I could use. And ever since, with the blessing of the Almighty, that model has been our means of livelihood. There are kind hearts in the world yet, and—thank you, miss; thank you, mum (don't trouble—I'll pick it up)—and Gord bless you ! "

If a group of boys came up, he drew down the blind before the model. Asked what it was, he changed the subject. Pressed further, he admitted that behind that blind was a representation of the life underground. " It's not for young boys to see. Might keep you awake all night. I should get into trouble if I showed you it. If a policeman were to see me exhibiting these horrors to the young I should be in prison before nightfall." It was not till the sum of fourpence had been reached that he would draw up the blind and turn the handle. The spectacle generally saddened the boys. If this was really devilry, then they felt that plain chocolate gave better value for the money. And sometimes they were quite rude to poor old Samuel Pell. But Samuel remained, as ever, patient and polite.

The curate of St Mark's said that the character of old Sammy Pell left much to be desired. This was, for the curate of St Mark's, horribly strong language; but it was justified.

The landlord of the " charming old-world hostelry " went into further detail about Samuel. " Yes, every morning about twelve Samuel comes in from Bunham with his rotten old show on a barrow. There he sticks on that bit o' green opposite, and no more right to the pitch than the man in the moon has. No doubt, if I was to open my mouth, I could get him turned off of it, and I take jolly good care not to do it. As long as he's there he ain't in my orchard or my fowl-run. As long as I don't interfere with him, and don't forget to stand him a pint about once every three weeks, he won't interfere with me. He never touches anything of mine, but he ain't so particular with others. The other day when he was putting up his show I saw about a dozen hen's eggs in his barrow. ' How did you get 'em, Sammy ? ' I says. ' Bought 'em,' says Sammy.

Likely! Might as well have said he'd laid 'em. Sneaked 'em from somebody's hen-house, of course, but that was no business of mine. He don't do so badly, don't old Sammy. Some days I'll bet he takes more money than I do."

But the severest critic of Samuel Pell was Herbert Chalk, the official curator and guide of the Hall of Stalactites. The words "Hall of Stalactites" were emblazoned in gold on his cap. Otherwise Mr Chalk was dressed as a decent gardener. When a visitor to the mammoth stalactite chanced, as he talked to its curator, to mention that he had seen on his way there a fine old man with an ingenious model of a coal mine, fury blazed in the curator's eyes. And when he found that the kindly visitor had given Samuel half a crown, Mr Chalk spake with his tongue.

"Then you'll excuse me, sir, but you've made a mistake. If there is a man in Bunham that ought to be put in prison and kept there till further orders, it's old Sammy Pell. I know his story. Made that model himself, did he? He did nothing of the kind. He bought it for one and nine out of a railway sale of unclaimed property twelve years ago. What's more, if its works happen to go wrong he can't even put 'em right himself, but has to go to Mr Jobson, which is the watchmaker in the High Street, and get it done for him. And he calls himself an old coal miner, does Sammy. Why doesn't he take and call himself the Prince o' Wales at once? The nearest he's ever done to any mining has been sneaking lumps of coal out of the station-yard. That he has really done, and done regular, and this winter I'm told they mean to set a trap for him. Hope he'll be caught, too. The way he swindles visitors here is enough to turn 'em against Bunham altogether."

Samuel knew that the curate disapproved of him, but did not mind. "I suppose," he observed, "that's what he's paid for." He knew that the landlord of the Bull Inn had no illusions about him, but he set against that the privileges that the landlord permitted him. But when, as inevitably happened, Samuel learned that the curator of the Hall of Stalactites had been saying things, he was aggrieved.

"Suppose I haven't got a wife and family," said Samuel to the landlord of the Bull Inn, "and suppose I didn't make the old model myself, and suppose I was never in a mine, and suppose I do pick up a lump of coal if I find it lying about—which is what any man of sense would do—what has all that got to do with Herbert Chalk? Live and let live is my motto. I'm not angry about it, but I'm going to stop it. There's going to be trouble between him and me, and he's going to get stalactites in the neck, is Mr Herbert Chalk."

II

"Hullo, Chalk," said the last of the group of visitors as he paid his sixpence and passed through the turn stile. "You here still?"

"And why not, sir?" said Chalk, as he picked up his wand of office and exchanged the post of cash-taker for that of lecturer and guide.

"Oh, nothing," said the rather dressy young man. "It was just something I heard—in at one ear and out of another."

Chalk scowled slightly. He put less enthusiasm than usual into his observations on the mammoth stalactite. He also said that the cave was first dis-

covered in eighteen thousand and seven, and was corrected severely.

When the visitors left, Chalk fastened on to the dressy young man. "I'd like just two words with you, sir," he said.

"Certainly," the young man said uneasily.

"May I ask, sir, why you thought I'd got the sack, and who it was that told you?"

"Oh, you don't want to think about that."

"No, sir—not in the ordinary way. But hints of this kind have been coming up to me lately at the rate of two or three a day, and I'm putting the matter into the hands of my solicitor. My conscience is clear enough, and I give my employers every satisfaction, and I'm not going to be slandered. Those that take away a man's character should be made to pay for it. Of course, if you'd sooner not tell me in confidence, then we shall have to subpœna you as a witness and get it that way; but this is your second season at Bunham, sir, and I should be sorry to cause you any unpleasantness."

"Look here," said the young man, "I don't want to give evidence. If I tell you in confidence will you keep me out of it?"

"I will, sir," said Chalk. "You may depend upon it."

"Well, it was an old chap who shows a model of a coal mine outside the Bull Inn. His father owned the very mine of which that is a model, and the property would have come to him, only he married beneath him, and so was disinherited."

"Oh, this is beyond words! Beg pardon, sir, and what did he say?"

"He seemed well enough disposed towards you; said it was a thousand pities, and he did hope your

employers would overlook it once more; said he'd implored you to give it up with tears in his eyes. A far better friend to you than you imagine, I should say."

"What! He dared to tell you that I drank?" said Chalk, with his eyes popping out of his head.

"Never used the word. He said certain things, and I put my interpretation on them. I may be wrong; but I think myself you'd better listen to his advice."

"And what do you mean by that, sir?"

"Well, you get very excited."

"And who wouldn't, with his character at stake?"

"And you were all muddled up with that bit you had to speak just now, though you must have said it hundreds of times. You said thousands when you meant hundreds, and inches when you meant feet. Sign off it, Chalk—sign off it!"

"I know I made mistakes, sir," said Chalk, "but that was simply because I was upset in my feelings. Is a vagabond like that to take away the character of a man in the same employ for ten years, and respected by all that know him? I can tell you all about Sammy Pell. He's the disgrace and sorrow of Bunham, he is. He ain't no son of no colliery proprietor, and there never was no property neither. He ain't been disherited, and that's all brag. He couldn't have married beneath him, because there's nothing lower than himself. He's not any class at all. He's a thief!—He's a liar!—He's a——"

"One moment," said the dressy young man. "For a chap who don't like slander you seem to me to be going it. Now, I'm not going to mix myself up in your squabbles. They don't matter to me, and I'm here on a holiday; but if you can take a hint, you'll sign off—that's all. Good morning."

Chalk was left with murder in his soul. He was given a few days in which to simmer down. But in the following week, almost the last week of the season, Samuel got to work again.

As Herbert Chalk stood at the receipt of custom at the Hall of Stalactites, an old lady of severe countenance put down half a crown to pay her entrance, and waited for change.

"Half a crown, mind!" she said warningly. "Not two shillings. Don't make any mistake!"

The thing had not yet dawned on Herbert Chalk. "That's all right, mum," he said cheerfully. "I don't often make any mistake."

The old lady glared at him. "Are you the man Chalk?" she asked.

"That's my name," said Herbert, still genial.

"Then I have a message for you." She showed tact. She waited until she could get Chalk away from the crowd before she delivered her message. "Mind you," she said, "I don't want to express any opinion one way or the other. The vicar may be right or he may be wrong. There is such a thing as misplaced generosity, and I can generally tell by the type of a man's face——"

Herbert Chalk was rude enough to interrupt. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "If you've got a message for me, let's have it."

But the old lady was composed of whalebone and pure rubber, quite indestructible, and specially built for endurance over the conversational course.

"Oh, yes, you do know what I'm talking about, and I hope it may be a warning to you. It was an old man with a long white beard asked me to deliver the message. Was coming with it himself but his feet were painful, and being active still I was glad to oblige.

'Tell him,' he says, 'that if he can get his employers to give him another chance, the vicar will make up the missing money, believing that he yielded to sudden temptation and will be more honest in the future.' And, as I said before, if——"

Chalk had whipped out his note-book. His air was that of deadly and terrific composure. "That's enough," he said; "I'll take your name and address, if you please, madam. And if somebody don't get seven years' penal for this, I'm a Dutchman. I go straight to my lawyer's from here." He touched the point of his pencil with his tongue. "Now, please, madam?"

"What?" said the old lady. "My name and address? The idea of such a thing! Why, I'd as soon trust you with my money. I do a kindness, and then you talk to me like that. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

She left him—speechless, defeated, despairing.

And while that fairly good man, the custodian of the Hall of Stalactites, suffered acutely from undeserved imputations, Samuel Pell on the bit of green opposite the Bull Inn was enjoying himself immensely. He was exhibiting his scientific model to a group of romantically minded ladies. Pointing to one of the moth-eaten figures, at present in a state of extreme but ataxic activity, he declared, "And that, ladies, is an exact representation of the miner whose life I saved!"

III

But Samuel Pell had not yet finished with his enemy. Next week Chalk's domestic peace was threatened.

Mrs Chalk, usually a smiling and cheerful woman,

became morose. She asked her husband if he was particularly partial to the name of Bella. She wondered why, if he was so fond of yellow hair, he married a woman with brown. She said that when a married man of fifty went about with a girl, it was ridiculous as well as wicked. She added that a silly young hussy who came up to the Hall of Stalactites every day, and sometimes two or three times a day, would be likely to get a broomstick across her face to give her something else to think about.

It took Herbert Chalk two days of hard and patient talking to convince his wife that the girl Bella, with the yellow hair and the unfortunate devotion to himself, was entirely mythical, had no real existence, and was invented by that bad man, Samuel Pell.

"He'll be the ruin of me, that chap will," said Chalk dejectedly.

"Ah!" said Mrs Chalk. "I dare say if you'd let Sammy alone, he'd have let you alone."

On the following Sunday Herbert Chalk, taking his nasty-tempered terrier for a run on the cliffs, espied Samuel taking his ease on one of the public seats. The dog also espied him, and at a distance of fifty yards made a rush for him, barking furiously. Chalk might have called his dog off, but did not.

Samuel appeared to move slowly, but he was quick enough for his purpose. His boot, being unimpeded by laces, came off very easily. When the dog was at a distance of ten yards that boot flew through the air, smote the dog violently amidships, and knocked him over. The dog gave it up, and returned to his master, complaining bitterly.

"I've got another boot if you care to apply for it," called Samuel.

But Herbert Chalk pretended to be unconscious of

the incident, and walked with dignity in the opposite direction.

At the close of the season Samuel Pell left Bunham for his holiday. Nobody knew where he spent his holiday. "South of France, likely," said the landlord of the Bull Inn. "He's made enough money for it this season. Wicked, I call it."

He returned to Bunham in December, and apparently still had money left to live upon. He never attempted to do any work. He spent a great part of the day in the public reading-room. But if he stayed at home—one room over a small newsagent's shop—he always had a bright and cheerful fire there. The station-master said, when he met Samuel in the street, that he'd nab him at it yet. "I don't know to what you refer," said Samuel politely.

One day, as Samuel sat in the reading-room, Herbert Chalk touched him on the shoulder.

"I should like a word with you," said Chalk in a hoarse whisper, for the rule of the reading-room prescribed silence.

"Would you?" said Samuel doubtfully.

"Over at The Railway Arms," Chalk added.

"With pleasure, Mr Chalk," said Samuel, and followed him out.

At The Railway Arms, the question being put to him, Samuel said a glass of Scotch ale was what the weather seemed to indicate.

"The fact is, Sammy," said Chalk, "that you and me didn't quite hit it together last season. I dare say I was in the wrong."

"Very likely," said Samuel.

"Well, here's Christmas upon us, and I'm ready to bury the hatchet."

"I should bury it in that dog of yours if I were you."

" I got rid of him. He took to running and snapping at everybody, and I couldn't stick it. He might have got me into trouble."

" He pretty nearly did," said Samuel. " But so far as my old memory serves me, you were there already."

" Let's forget it," said Chalk. " Christmas is coming. Peace and good will. Next season I hope to be paying you a bob a week regular, besides putting extra custom in your way."

" Peace and good will," said Samuel reflectively. " Beautiful words! And that bob a week? How do you mean? "

Herbert Chalk explained. In the following season a new line of brakes was to run, bringing up visitors from Cowslade to the Hall of Stalactites. This being so, the custodian and his wife were going to enter upon the provision and sale of teas and mineral waters.

" And," said Chalk, " if you told visitors where they could get a good cup of tea, with nice fresh fruit, and everything clean and pleasant, then I'd tell the Cowslade lot that they oughtn't to go back without stepping down to the Bull Inn green, to see the wonderful model and the man that saved forty lives. And I'd pay you a bob a week for advertising us."

" A child could do anything with me at Christmastime," said Samuel. " I ought to haggle, but I can't bring myself to it. I'd sooner be too open-handed even if I lost money by it. We'll call it a bargain."

They shook hands on it.

" And I think we ought to celebrate it," said Samuel. " We'll have just one more. Let's see, did I pay the last? "

" Oh, it's my turn, Sammy," said Chalk. And he was allowed to take it.

From " Stories without Tears "

THE ADVENTURE OF THE KIND MR SMITH

W. J. LOCKE

[Mr W. J. Locke wrote *Derelicts* in 1897, and from that date his fame has steadily increased. Perhaps *The Beloved Vagabond* is his most characteristic work, revealing as it does a keen appreciation of the man who accepts life as a great adventure and finds romance in unexpected places. Mr Locke always tells a good tale, and his outlook on life is invariably refreshing. He has little sympathy with the person who continually dissects his emotions and indulges in morbid self-vivisection. Among his best-known books must be included *The Morals of Marcus Ordeyne*, *Simon the Jester*, *Stella Maris*, and *The Joyous Adventures of Aristide Pujol*, from which this story is taken.]

ARISTIDE PUJOL started life on his own account as a *chasseur* in a Nice *café*—one of those luckless children tightly encased in bottle-green cloth by means of brass buttons, who earn a sketchy livelihood by enduring with cherubic smiles the continuous maledictions of the establishment. There he soothed his hours of servitude by dreams of vast ambitions. He would become the manager of a great hotel—not a contemptible hostelry where commercial travellers and seedy Germans were indifferently bedded, but one of those white palaces where milords (English) and millionaires (American) paid a thousand francs a night for a bedroom and five louis for a glass of beer. Now, in order to derive such profit from the Anglo-Saxon a knowledge of English was indispensable. He resolved to learn the language. How he did so, except by sheer effrontery, taking linguistic toll of frequenters of the *café*, would be a mystery to anyone unacquainted

with Aristide. But to his friends his mastery of the English tongue in such circumstances is comprehensible. To Aristide the impossible was ever the one thing easy of attainment; the possible the one thing he never could achieve. That was the paradoxical nature of the man. Before his days of hunted-little-devildom were over he had acquired sufficient knowledge of English to carry him, a few years later, through various vicissitudes in England, until, fired by new social ambitions and self-educated in a haphazard way, he found himself appointed Professor of French in an academy for young ladies.

One of these days, when I can pin my dragonfly friend down to a plain, unvarnished autobiography, I may be able to trace some chronological sequence in the kaleidoscopic changes in his career. But hitherto, in his talks with me, he flits about from any one date to any other during a couple of decades, in a manner so confusing that for the present I abandon such an attempt. All I know of the date of the episode I am about to chronicle is that it occurred immediately after the termination of his engagement at the academy just mentioned. Somehow, Aristide's history is a category of terminations.

If the head mistress of the academy had herself played dragon at his classes, all would have gone well. He would have made his pupils conjugate irregular verbs, rendered them adepts in the mysteries of the past participle and the subjunctive mood, and turned them out quite innocent of the idiomatic quaintnesses of the French tongue. But *dis aliter visum*. The gods always saw wrong-headedly otherwise in the case of Aristide. A weak-minded governess—and in a governess a sense of humour and of novelty is always a sign of a weak mind—played dragon during Aristide's

lessons. She appreciated his method, which was colloquial. The colloquial Aristide was jocular. His lessons therefore were a giggling joy from beginning to end. He imparted to his pupils delicious knowledge. *En avez-vous des-z-homards? Oh, les sales bêtes, elles ont du poil aux pattes,* which, being translated, is: "Have you any lobsters? Oh, the dirty animals, they have hair on their feet"—a catch phrase which, some years ago, added greatly to the gaiety of Paris, but in which I must confess to seeing no gleam of wit—became the historic property of the school. He recited to them, till they were word-perfect, a music-hall ditty of the early eighties, *Sur le bi, sur le banc, sur le bi du bout du banc,* and delighted them with dissertations on Mme Yvette Guilbert's earlier *répertoire.* But for him they would have gone to their lives' end without knowing that *pognon* meant money; *rouspétance,* assaulting the police; *thune,* a five-franc piece; and *bouffer,* to take nourishment. He made (according to his own statement) French a living language. There was never a school in Great Britain, the Colonies, or America on which the Parisian accent was so electrically impressed. The retort, *Eh! ta sœur,* was the purest Montmartre; also *Fich'-moi la paix, mon petit,* and *Tu as un toupet, toi*; and the delectable locution, *Allons étrangler un perroquet* (let us strangle a parrot), employed by Apaches when inviting each other to drink a glass of absinthe, soon became current French in the school for invitations to surreptitious cocoa-parties.

The progress that academy made in a real grip of the French language was miraculous; but the knowledge it gained in French grammar and syntax was deplorable. A certain mid-term examination—the paper being set by a neighbouring vicar—produced

awful results. The phrase, " How do you do, dear ? " which ought, by all the rules of Stratford-atte-Bowe, to be translated by *Comment vous portez-vous, ma chère ?* was rendered by most of the senior scholars *Eh, ma vieille, ça boulotte ?* One innocent and anachronistic damsel, writing on the execution of Charles I, declared that he *cracha dans le panier* in 1649, thereby mystifying the good vicar, who was unaware that " to spit into the basket " is to be guillotined. This wealth of vocabulary was discounted by abject poverty in other branches of the language. No one could give a list of the words in *al* that took *s* in the plural, no one knew anything at all about the defective verb *échoir*, and the orthography of the school would have disgraced a kindergarten. The head mistress suspected a lack of method in the teaching of M. Pujol, and one day paid his class a surprise visit.

The sight that met her eyes petrified her. The class, including the governess, bubbled and gurgled and shrieked with laughter. M. Pujol, his bright eyes agleam with merriment and his arms moving in frantic gestures, danced about the platform. He was telling them a story—and when Aristide told a story, he told it with the eloquence of his entire frame. He bent himself double and threw out his hands.

" *Il était saoûl comme un porc,*" he shouted.

And then came the hush of death. The rest of the artless tale about the man as drunk as a pig was never told. The head mistress, indignant majesty, strode up the room.

" M. Pujol, you have a strange way of giving French lessons."

" I believe, madame," said he, with a polite bow, " in interesting my pupils in their studies."

" Pupils have to be taught, not interested," said the

head mistress. "Will you kindly put the class through some irregular verbs?"

So for the remainder of the lesson Aristide, under the freezing eyes of the head mistress, put his sorrowful class through irregular verbs, of which his own knowledge was singularly inexact, and at the end received his dismissal. In vain he argued. Outraged Minerva was implacable. Go he must.

We find him, then, one miserable December evening, standing on the arrival platform of Euston Station (the academy was near Manchester), an unwonted statue of dubiety. At his feet lay his meagre valise; in his hand was an enormous bouquet, a useful tribute of esteem from his disconsolate pupils; around him luggage-laden porters and passengers hurried; in front were drawn up the long line of cabs, their drivers' waterproofs glistening with wet; and in his pocket rattled the few paltry coins that, for Heaven knew how long, were to keep him from starvation. Should he commit the extravagance of taking a cab or should he go forth, valise in hand, into the pouring rain? He hesitated.

"*Sacré mille cochons! Quel chien de climat!*" he muttered.

A smart footman standing by turned quickly and touched his hat.

"Beg pardon, sir; I'm from Mr Smith."

"I'm glad to hear it, my friend," said Aristide.

"You're the French gentleman from Manchester?"

"Decidedly," said Aristide.

"Then, sir, Mr Smith has sent the carriage for you."

"That's very kind of him," said Aristide.

The footman picked up the valise and darted down the platform. Aristide followed. The footman held invitingly open the door of a cosy brougham. Aristide

paused for the fraction of a second. Who was this hospitable Mr Smith?

"Bah!" said he to himself, "the best way of finding out is to go and see."

He entered the carriage, sank back luxuriously on the soft cushions, and inhaled the warm smell of leather. They started, and soon the pelting rain beat harmlessly against the windows. Aristide looked out at the streaming streets, and, hugging himself comfortably, thanked Providence and Mr Smith. But who was Mr Smith? *Tiens*, thought he, there were two little Miss Smiths at the academy; he had pitied them because they had chilblains, freckles, and perpetual colds in their heads; possibly this was their kind papa. But, after all, what did it matter whose papa he was? He was expecting him. He had sent the carriage for him. Evidently a well-bred and attentive person. And *tiens!* there was even a hot-water can on the floor of the brougham. "He thinks of everything, that man," said Aristide. "I feel I am going to like him."

The carriage stopped at a house in Hampstead, standing, as far as he could see in the darkness, in its own grounds. The footman opened the door for him to alight and escorted him up the front steps. A neat parlourmaid received him in a comfortably furnished hall and took his hat and great-coat and magnificent bouquet.

"Mr Smith hasn't come back yet from the City, sir; but Miss Christabel is in the drawing-room."

"Ah!" said Aristide. "Please give me back my bouquet."

The maid showed him into the drawing-room. A pretty girl of three-and-twenty rose from a fender-stool and advanced smilingly to meet him.

"Good afternoon, M. le Baron. I was wondering

whether Thomas would spot you. I'm so glad he did. You see, neither Father nor I could give him any description, for we had never seen you."

This fitted in with his theory. But why Baron? After all, why not? The English loved titles.

"He seems to be an intelligent fellow, mademoiselle."

There was a span of silence. The girl looked at the bouquet, then at Aristide, who looked at the girl, then at the bouquet, then at the girl again.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "will you deign to accept these flowers as a token of my respectful homage?"

Miss Christabel took the flowers and blushed prettily. She had dark hair and eyes and a fascinating, upturned little nose, and the kindest little mouth in the world.

"An Englishman would not have thought of that," she said.

Aristide smiled in his roguish way and raised a deprecating hand.

"Oh, yes, he would. But he would not have had —what you call the cheek to do it."

Miss Christabel laughed merrily, invited him to a seat by the fire, and comforted him with tea and hot muffins. The frank charm of his girl-hostess captivated Aristide and drove from his mind the riddle of his adventure. Besides, think of the Arabian Nights' enchantment of the change from his lonely and shabby bed-sitting-room in the Rusholme Road to this fragrant palace with princess and all to keep him company! He watched the firelight dancing through her hair, the dainty play of laughter over her face, and decided that the brougham had transported him to Bagdad instead of Hampstead.

"You have the air of a veritable princess," said he.

"I once met a princess—at a charity bazaar—and she was a most matter-of-fact businesslike person."

"Bah!" said Aristide. "A princess of a charity bazaar! I was talking of the princess in a fairy-tale. They are the only real ones."

"Do you know," said Miss Christabel, "that when men pay such compliments to English girls they are apt to get laughed at?"

"Englishmen, yes," replied Aristide, "because they think over a compliment for a week, so that by the time they pay it, it is addled, like a bad egg. But we of Provence pay tribute to beauty straight out of our hearts. It is true. It is sincere. And what comes out of the heart is not ridiculous."

Again the girl coloured and laughed. "I've always heard that a Frenchman makes love to every woman he meets."

"Naturally," said Aristide. "If they are pretty. What else are pretty women for? Otherwise they might as well be hideous."

"Oh!" said the girl, to whom this Provençal point of view had not occurred.

"So, if I make love to you, it is but your due."

"I wonder what my *fiancé* would say if he heard you?"

"Your——?"

"My *fiancé*! There's his photograph on the table beside you. He is six foot one, and so jealous!" she laughed again.

"The Turk!" cried Aristide, his swiftly conceived romance crumbling into dust. Then he brightened up. "But when this six feet of muscle and egotism is absent, surely other poor mortals can glean a smile?"

"You will observe that I'm not frowning," said Miss Christabel. "But you must not call my *fiancé* a Turk, for he's a very charming fellow whom I hope you'll like very much."

Aristide sighed. "And the name of this thrice-blessed mortal?"

Miss Christabel told his name—one Harry Ralston—and not only his name, but, such was the peculiar, childlike charm of Aristide Pujol, also many other things about him. He was the Honourable Harry Ralston, the heir to a great brewery peerage, and very wealthy. He was a member of Parliament, and but for Parliamentary duties would have dined there that evening; but he was to come in later, as soon as he could leave the House. He also had a house in Hampshire, full of the most beautiful works of art. It was through their common hobby that her father and Harry had first made acquaintance.

"We're supposed to have a very fine collection here," she said, with a motion of her hand.

Aristide looked round the walls and saw them hung with pictures in gold frames. In those days he had not acquired an extensive culture. Besides, who having before him the firelight gleaming through Miss Christabel's hair could waste his time over painted canvas? She noted his cursory glance.

"I thought you were a connoisseur?"

"I am," said Aristide, his bright eyes fixed on her in frank admiration.

She blushed again; but this time she rose.

"I must go and dress for dinner. Perhaps you would like to be shown your room?"

He hung his head on one side.

"Have I been too bold, mademoiselle?"

"I don't know," she said. "You see, I've never met a Frenchman before."

"Then a world of undreamed-of homage is at your feet," said he.

A servant ushered him up broad, carpeted staircases

into a bedroom such as he had never seen in his life before. It was all curtains and hangings and rugs and soft couches and satin quilts and dainty writing-tables and subdued lights, and a great fire glowed red and cheerful, and before it hung a clean shirt. His poor little toilet apparatus was laid on the dressing-table, and (with a tact which he did not appreciate, for he had, sad to tell, no dress-suit) the servant had spread his precious frock-coat and spare pair of trousers on the bed. On the pillow lay his night-shirt, neatly folded.

"Evidently," said Aristide, impressed by these preparations, "it is expected that I wash myself now and change my clothes, and that I sleep here for the night. And for all that the ravishing Miss Christabel is engaged to her Honourable Harry, this is none the less a corner of Paradise."

So Aristide attired himself in his best, which included a white tie and a pair of nearly new brown boots—a long task, as he found that his valise had been spirited away and its contents, including the white tie of ceremony (he had but one), hidden in unexpected drawers and wardrobes—and eventually went downstairs into the drawing-room. There he found Miss Christabel and, warming himself on the hearthrug, a bald-headed, beefy-faced Briton, with little pig's eyes and a hearty manner, attired in a dinner-suit.

"My dear fellow," said this personage, with outstretched hand, "I'm delighted to have you here. I've heard so much about you; and my little girl has been singing your praises."

"Mademoiselle is too kind," said Aristide.

"You must take us as you find us," said Mr Smith. "We're just ordinary folk, but I can give you a good bottle of wine and a good cigar—it's only in England, you know, that you can get champagne fit to drink

and cigars fit to smoke—and I can give you a glimpse of a modest English home. I believe you haven't a word for it in French."

"*Ma foi*, no," said Aristide, who had once or twice before heard this lunatic charge brought against his country. "In France the men all live in *cafés*, the children are all put out to nurse, and the women, saving the respect of mademoiselle—well, the less said about them the better."

"England is the only place, isn't it?" Mr Smith declared, heartily. "I don't say that Paris hasn't its points. But after all—the Moulin Rouge and the Folies Bergères and that sort of thing soon pall, you know—soon pall."

"Yet Paris has its serious side," argued Aristide. "There is always the tomb of Napoleon."

"Papa will never take me to Paris," sighed the girl.

"You shall go there on your honeymoon," said Mr Smith.

Dinner was announced. Aristide gave his arm to Miss Christabel, and proud not only of his partner, but also of his frock-coat, white tie, and shiny brown boots, strutted into the dining-room. The host sat at the end of the beautifully set table, his daughter on his right, Aristide on his left. The meal began gaily. The kind Mr Smith was in the best of humours.

"And how is our dear old friend, Jules Dancourt?" he asked.

"*Tiens!*" said Aristide, to himself, "we have a dear friend Jules Dancourt. Wonderfully well," he replied at a venture, "but he suffers terribly at times from the gout."

"So do I, confound it!" said Mr Smith, drinking sherry.

"You and the good Jules were always sympa-

thetic," said Aristide. "Ah! he has spoken to me so often about you, the tears in his eyes."

"Men cry, my dear, in France," Mr Smith explained. "They also kiss each other."

"*Ah, mais c'est un beau pays, mademoiselle!*" cried Aristide, and he began to talk of France and to draw pictures of his country which set the girl's eyes dancing. After that he told some of the funny little stories which had brought him disaster at the academy. Mr Smith, with jovial magnanimity, declared that he was the first Frenchman he had ever met with a sense of humour.

"But I thought, Baron," said he, "that you lived all your life shut up in that old *château* of yours?"

"*Tiens!*" thought Aristide. "I am still a Baron, and I have an old *château*."

"Tell us about the *château*. Has it a fosse and a drawbridge and a Gothic chapel?" asked Miss Christabel.

"Which one do you mean?" inquired Aristide, airily. "For I have two."

When relating to me this Arabian Nights' adventure, he drew my special attention to his astuteness.

His host's eye quivered in a wink. "The one in Languedoc," said he.

Languedoc! Almost Pujol's own country! With entire lack of morality, but with picturesque imagination, Aristide plunged into a description of that non-existent baronial hall. Fosse, drawbridge, Gothic chapel were but insignificant features. It had tourelles, emblazoned gateways, bastions, donjons, barbicans; it had innumerable rooms; in the *salle des chevaliers* two hundred men-at-arms had his ancestors fed at a sitting. There was the room in which François Premier had slept, and one in which Joan of Arc had almost been assassinated. What the name of himself or of his ancestors was supposed to be

Aristide had no ghost of an idea. But as he proceeded with the erection of his airy palace he gradually began to believe in it. He invested the place with a living atmosphere; conjured up a staff of family retainers, notably one Marie-Joseph Loufoque, the wizened old major-domo, with his long white whiskers and blue and silver livery. There were also Madeline Mioulles the cook, and Bernadet the groom, and La Petite Fripette the goose girl. Ah! they should see La Petite Fripette! And he kept dogs and horses and cows and ducks and hens—and there was a great pond whence frogs were drawn to be fed for the consumption of the household.

Miss Christabel shivered. "I should not like to eat frogs."

"They also eat snails," said her father.

"I have a snail farm," said Aristide. "You never saw such interesting little animals. They are so intelligent. If you're kind to them they come and eat out of your hand."

"You've forgotten the pictures," said Mr Smith.

"Ah! the pictures," cried Aristide, with a wide sweep of his arms. "Galleries full of them. Raphael, Michael Angelo, Wiertz, Reynolds——"

He paused, not in order to produce the effect of a dramatic aposiopesis, but because he could not for the moment remember other names of painters.

"It is a truly historical *château*," said he.

"I should love to see it," said the girl.

Aristide threw out his arms across the table. "It is yours, mademoiselle, for your honeymoon," said he.

Dinner came to an end. Miss Christabel left the gentlemen to their wine, an excellent port whose English qualities were vaunted by the host. Aristide, full of food and drink and the mellow glories of the

castle in Languedoc, and smoking an enormous cigar, felt at ease with all the world. He knew he should like the kind Mr Smith, hospitable though somewhat insular man. He could stay with him for a week—or a month—why not a year?

After coffee and liqueurs had been served Mr Smith rose and switched on a powerful electric light at the end of the large room, showing a picture on an easel covered by a curtain. He beckoned to Aristide to join him and, drawing the curtain, disclosed the picture.

"There!" said he. "Isn't it a stunner?"

It was a picture all grey skies and grey water and grey feathery trees, and a little man in the foreground wore a red cap.

"It is beautiful, but indeed it is magnificent!" cried Aristide, always impressionable to things of beauty.

"Genuine Corot, isn't it?"

"Without doubt," said Aristide.

His host poked him in the ribs. "I thought I'd astonish you. You wouldn't believe Gottschalk could have done it. There it is—as large as life and twice as natural. If you or anyone else can tell it from a genuine Corot I'll eat my hat. And all for eight pounds."

Aristide looked at the beefy face and caught a look of cunning in the little pig's eyes.

"Now are you satisfied?" asked Mr Smith.

"More than satisfied," said Aristide, though what he was to be satisfied about passed, for the moment, his comprehension.

"If it was a copy of an existing picture, you know—one might have understood it—that, of course, would be dangerous—but for a man to go and get bits out of various Corots and stick them together like this is miraculous. If it hadn't been for a matter of business principle I'd have given the fellow eight guineas

instead of pounds—hanged if I wouldn't! He deserves it."

"He does indeed," said Aristide Pujol.

"And now that you've seen it with your own eyes, what do you think you might ask me for it? I suggested something between two and three thousand—shall we say three? You're the owner, you know." Again the process of rib-digging. "Came out of that historic *château* of yours. My eye! you're a holy terror when you begin to talk. You almost persuaded me it was real."

"*Tiens!*" said Aristide to himself. "I don't seem to have a *château* after all."

"Certainly three thousand," said he, with a grave face.

"That young man thinks he knows a lot, but he doesn't," said Mr Smith.

"Ah!" said Aristide, with singular laconicism.

"Not a blooming thing," continued his host. "But he'll pay three thousand, which is the principal, isn't it? He's partner in the show, you know, Ralston, Wiggins, and Wix's Brewery"—Aristide pricked up his ears—"and when his doddering old father dies he'll be Lord Ranelagh and come into a million of money."

"Has he seen the picture?" asked Aristide.

"Oh, yes. Regards it as a masterpiece. Didn't Brauneberger tell you of the Lancret we planted on the American?" Mr Smith rubbed hearty hands at the memory of the iniquity. "Same old game. Always easy. I have nothing to do with the bargaining or the sale. Just an old friend of the ruined French nobleman with the historic *château* and family treasures. He comes along and fixes the price. I told our friend Harry——"

"Good," thought Aristide. "This is the same

Honourable Harry, M.P., who is engaged to the ravishing Miss Christabel."

"I told him," said Mr Smith, "that it might come to three or four thousand. He jibbed a bit—so when I wrote to you I said two or three. But you might try him with three to begin with."

Aristide went back to the table and poured himself out a fresh glass of his kind host's 1865 brandy and drank it off.

"Exquisite, my dear fellow," said he. "I've none finer in my historic *château*."

"Don't suppose you have," grinned the host, joining him. He slapped him on the back. "Well," said he, with a shifty look in his little pig's eyes, "let us talk business. What do you think would be your fair commission? You see, all the trouble and invention have been mine. What do you say to four hundred pounds?"

"Five," said Aristide, promptly.

A sudden gleam came into the little pig's eyes.

"Done!" said Mr Smith, who had imagined that the other would demand a thousand and was prepared to pay eight hundred. "Done!" said he again.

They shook hands to seal the bargain and drank another glass of old brandy. At that moment, a servant, entering, took the host aside.

"Please excuse me a moment," said he, and went with the servant out of the room.

Aristide, left alone, lighted another of his kind host's fat cigars and threw himself into a great leathern arm-chair by the fire, and surrendered himself deliciously to the soothing charm of the moment. Now and then he laughed, finding a certain comicality in his position. And what a charming father-in-law, this kind Mr Smith!

His cheerful reflections were soon disturbed by the sudden irruption of his host and a grizzled, elderly, foxy-faced gentleman with a white moustache, wearing the ribbon of the Legion of Honour in the buttonhole of his overcoat.

"Here, you!" cried the kind Mr Smith, striding up to Aristide, with a very red face. "Will you have the kindness to tell me who the devil you are?"

Aristide rose, and, putting his hands behind the tails of his frock-coat, stood smiling radiantly on the hearthrug. A wit much less alert than my irresponsible friend's would have instantly appreciated the fact that the real Simon Pure had arrived on the scene.

"I, my dear friend," said he, "am the Baron de Je ne Sais Plus."

"You're a confounded impostor," spluttered Mr Smith.

"And this gentleman here to whom I have not had the pleasure of being introduced?" asked Aristide, blandly.

"I am M. Poiron, monsieur, the agent of Messrs Brauneberger and Compagnie, art dealers, of the Rue Notre-Dame des Petits Champs of Paris," said the newcomer, with an air of defiance.

"Ah, I thought you were the Baron," said Aristide.

"There's no blooming Baron at all about it!" screamed Mr Smith. "Are you Poiron, or is he?"

"I would not have a name like Poiron for anything in the world," said Aristide. "My name is Aristide Pujol, soldier of fortune, at your service."

"How the blazes did you get here?"

"Your servant asked me if I was a French gentleman from Manchester. I was. He said that Mr Smith had sent his carriage for me. I thought it hospitable of the kind Mr Smith. I entered the carriage—*et voilà!*"

"Then clear out of here this very minute," said Mr Smith, reaching forward his hand to the bell-push.

Aristide checked his impulsive action.

"Pardon me, dear host," said he. "It is raining dogs and cats outside. I am very comfortable in your luxurious home. I am here, and here I stay."

"I'm shot if you do," said the kind Mr Smith, his face growing redder and uglier. "Now, will you go out, or will you be thrown out?"

Aristide, who had no desire whatever to be ejected from this snug nest into the welter of the wet and friendless world, puffed at his cigar, and looked at his host with the irresistible drollery of his eyes.

"You forget, *mon cher ami*," said he, "that neither the beautiful Miss Christabel nor her affianced, the Honourable Harry, M.P., would care to know that the talented Gottschalk got only eight pounds, not even guineas, for painting that three-thousand-pound picture."

"So it's blackmail, eh?"

"Precisely," said Aristide, "and I don't blush at it."

"You infernal little blackguard!"

"I seem to be in congenial company," said Aristide. "I don't think our friend M. Poiron has more scruples than he has right to the ribbon of the Legion of Honour which he is wearing."

"How much will you take to go out? I have a cheque-book handy."

Mr Smith moved a few steps from the hearthrug. Aristide sat down in the armchair. An engaging, fantastic impudence was one of the charms of Aristide Pujol.

"I'll take five hundred pounds," said he, "to stay in."

"Stay in?" Mr Smith grew apoplectic.

"Yes," said Aristide. "You can't do without me. Your daughter and your servants know me as M. le Baron—by the way, what is my name? And where is my historic *château* in Languedoc?"

"Mireilles," said M. Poiron, who was sitting grim and taciturn on one of the dining-room chairs. "And the place is the same, near Montpellier."

"I like to meet an intelligent man," said Aristide.

"I should like to wring your infernal neck," said the kind Mr Smith. "But, by George, if we do let you in you'll have to sign me a receipt implicating yourself up to the hilt. I'm not going to be put into the cart by you, you can bet your life."

"Anything you like," said Aristide, "so long as we all swing together."

Now, when Aristide Pujol arrived at this point in his narrative I, his chronicler, who am nothing if not an eminently respectable, law-abiding Briton, took him warmly to task for his sheer absence of moral sense. His eyes, as they sometimes did, assumed a luminous pathos.

"My dear friend," said he, "have you ever faced the world in a foreign country in December with no character and fifteen pounds five and threepence in your pocket? Five hundred pounds was a fortune. It is one now. And to be gained just by lending oneself to a good farce, which didn't hurt anybody. You and your British morals! Bah!" said he, with a fine flourish.

Aristide, after much parleying, was finally admitted into the nefarious brotherhood. He was to retain his rank as the Baron de Mireilles, and play the part of the pecuniarily inconvenienced nobleman forced to sell some of his rare collection. Mr Smith had heard of

the Corot through their dear old common friend, Jules Dancourt of Rheims, had mentioned it alluringly to the Honourable Harry, had arranged for the Baron, who was visiting England, to bring it over and dispatch it to Mr Smith's house, and on his return from Manchester to pay a visit to Mr Smith, so that he could meet the Honourable Harry in person. In whatever transaction ensued Mr Smith, so far as his prospective son-in-law was concerned, was to be the purely disinterested friend. It was Aristide's wit which invented a part for the supplanted M. Poiron. He should be the eminent Parisian expert who, chancing to be in London, had been telephoned for by the kind Mr Smith.

"It would not be wise for M. Poiron," said Aristide, chuckling inwardly with puckish glee, "to stay here for the night—or for two or three days—or a week—like myself. He must go back to his hotel when the business is concluded."

"*Mais, pardon!*" cried M. Poiron, who had been formally invited, and had arrived late solely because he had missed his train at Manchester, and come on by the next one. "I cannot go out into the wet, and I have no hotel to go to."

Aristide appealed to his host. "But he is unreasonable, *cher ami*. He must play his *rôle*. M. Poiron has been telephoned for. He can't possibly stay here. Surely five hundred pounds is worth one little night of discomfort? And there are a legion of hotels in London."

"Five hundred pounds!" exclaimed M. Poiron. "*Qu'est-ce que vous chantez là?* I want more than five hundred pounds."

"Then you're jolly well not going to get it," cried Mr Smith, in a rage. "And as for you"—he turned on Aristide—"I'll wring your infernal neck yet."

"Calm yourself, calm yourself!" smiled Aristide, who was enjoying himself hugely.

At this moment the door opened and Miss Christabel appeared. On seeing the decorated stranger she started with a little "Oh!" of surprise.

"I beg your pardon."

Mr Smith's angry face wreathed itself in smiles.

"This, my darling, is M. Poiron, the eminent Paris expert, who has been good enough to come and give us his opinion on the picture."

M. Poiron bowed. Aristide advanced.

"Mademoiselle, your appearance is like a mirage in a desert."

She smiled indulgently and turned to her father. "I've been wondering what had become of you. Harry has been here for the last half-hour."

"Bring him in, dear child, bring him in!" said Mr Smith, with all the heartiness of the fine old English gentleman. "Our good friends are dying to meet him."

The girl flickered out of the room like a sunbeam (the phrase is Aristide's), and the three precious rascals put their heads together in a hurried and earnest colloquy. Presently Miss Christabel returned, and with her came the Honourable Harry Ralston, a tall, soldierly fellow, with close-cropped fair curly hair and a fair moustache, and frank blue eyes that, even in Parliament, had seen no harm in his fellow-creatures. Aristide's magical vision caught him wincing ever so little at Mr Smith's effusive greeting and overdone introductions. He shook Aristide warmly by the hand.

"You have a beauty there, Baron, a perfect beauty," said he, with the insane ingenuousness of youth. "I wonder how you can manage to part with it."

"*Ma foi*," said Aristide, with his back against the

end of the dining-table and gazing at the masterpiece. "I have so many at the Château de Mireilles. When one begins to collect, you know—and when one's grandfather and father have had also the divine mania——"

"You were saying, M. le Baron," said M. Poiron of Paris, "that your respected grandfather bought this direct from Corot himself."

"A commission," said Aristide. "My grandfather was a patron of Corot."

"Do you like it, dear?" asked the Honourable Harry.

"Oh, yes!" replied the girl, fervently. "It is beautiful. I feel like Harry about it." She turned to Aristide. "How can you part with it? Were you really in earnest when you said you would like me to come and see your collection?"

"For me," said Aristide, "it would be a visit of enchantment."

"You must take me, then," she whispered to Harry. "The Baron has been telling us about his lovely old *château*."

"Will you come, monsieur?" asked Aristide.

"Since I'm going to rob you of your picture," said the young man, with smiling courtesy, "the least I can do is to pay you a visit of apology. Lovely!" said he, going up to the Corot.

Aristide took Miss Christabel, now more bewitching than ever with the glow of young love in her eyes and a flush on her cheek, a step or two aside and whispered:

"But he is charming, your *fiancé*! He almost deserves his good fortune."

"Why almost?" she laughed, shyly.

"It is not a man, but a demi-god, that would deserve you, mademoiselle."

M. Poiron's harsh voice broke out.

"You see, it is painted in the beginning of Corot's later manner—it is 1864. There is the mystery which, when he was quite an old man, became a trick. If you were to put it up to auction at Christie's it would fetch, I am sure, five thousand pounds."

"That's more than I can afford to give," said the young man, with a laugh. "Mr Smith mentioned something between three and four thousand pounds. I don't think I can go above three."

"I have nothing to do with it, my dear boy, nothing whatever," said Mr Smith, rubbing his hands. "You wanted a Corot. I said I thought I could put you on to one. It's for the Baron here to mention his price. I retire now and for ever."

"Well, Baron?" said the young man, cheerfully. "What's your idea?"

Aristide came forward and resumed his place at the end of the table. The picture was in front of him beneath the strong electric light; on his left stood Mr Smith and Poiron, on his right Miss Christabel and the Honourable Harry.

"I'll not take three thousand pounds for it," said Aristide. "A picture like that! Never!"

"I assure you it would be a fair price," said Poiron.

"You mentioned that figure yourself only just now," said Mr Smith, with an ugly glitter in his little pig's eyes.

"I presume, gentlemen," said Aristide, "that this picture is my own property." He turned engagingly to his host. "Is it not, *cher ami*?"

"Of course it is. Who said it wasn't?"

"And you, M. Poiron, acknowledge formally that it is mine?" he asked, in French.

"*Sans aucun doute.*"

"*Eh bien,*" said Aristide, throwing open his arms

and gazing round sweetly. "I have changed my mind. I do not sell the picture at all."

"Not sell it? What the—what do you mean?" asked Mr Smith, striving to mellow the gathering thunder on his brow.

"I do not sell," said Aristide. "Listen, my dear friends!" He was in the seventh heaven of happiness—the principal man, the star, taking the centre of the stage. "I have an announcement to make to you. I have fallen desperately in love with mademoiselle."

There was a general gasp. Mr Smith looked at him, red-faced and open-mouthed. Miss Christabel blushed furiously and emitted a sound half between a laugh and a scream. Harry Ralston's eyes flashed.

"My dear sir——" he began.

"Pardon," said Aristide, disarming him with the merry splendour of his glance. "I do not wish to take mademoiselle from you. My love is hopeless! I know it. But it will feed me to my dying day. In return for the joy of this hopeless passion I will not sell you the picture—I give it to you as a wedding present."

He stood, with the air of a hero, both arms extended towards the amazed pair of lovers.

"I give it to you," said he. "It is mine. I have no wish but for your happiness. In my Château de Mireilles there are a hundred others."

"This is madness!" said Mr Smith, bursting with suppressed indignation, so that his bald head grew scarlet.

"My dear fellow!" said Mr Harry Ralston. "It is unheard-of generosity on your part. But we can't accept it."

"Then," said Aristide, advancing dramatically to the picture, "I take it under my arm, I put it in a hansom cab, and I go with it back to Languedoc."

Mr Smith caught him by the wrist and dragged him out of the room.

"You little brute! Do you want your neck broken?"

"Do you want the marriage of your daughter with the rich and Honourable Harry broken?" asked Aristide.

"Oh, damn! Oh, damn! Oh, damn!" cried Mr Smith, stamping about helplessly and half weeping.

Aristide entered the dining-room and beamed on the company.

"The kind Mr Smith has consented. Mr Honourable Harry and Miss Christabel, there is your Corot. And now, may I be permitted?" He rang the bell. A servant appeared.

"Some champagne to drink to the health of the *fiancés*," he cried. "Lots of champagne."

Mr Smith looked at him almost admiringly.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "You *have* got a nerve."

"*Voilà!*" said Aristide, when he had finished the story.

"And did they accept the Corot?" I asked.

"Of course. It is hanging now in the big house in Hampshire. I stayed with the kind Mr Smith for six weeks," he added, doubling himself up in his chair and hugging himself with mirth, "and we became very good friends. And I was at the wedding."

"And what about their honeymoon visit to Languedoc?"

"Alas!" said Aristide. "The morning before the wedding I had a telegram—it was from my old father at Aigues-Mortes—to tell me that the historic Château de Mireilles, with my priceless collection of pictures, had been burned to the ground."

From "The Joyous Adventures of Aristide Pujol"

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

W. PETT RIDGE

[MR PETT RIDGE says that his favourite recreation is "roaming east of Aldgate and south." He loves London, and finds his inspiration there as surely as Mr Leonard Merrick finds his inspiration in Paris. He knows the street-arab of the East End through and through; he likewise knows his 'fawver,' his 'muvver,' and all his relations. Mr Pett Ridge has not been depressed by his studies of low life: he has emerged an incurable optimist, and has tremendous faith in human nature. He finds comedy in the most unsuspected places. Mr Pett Ridge is extremely successful in finding good titles for his books. Among his best known are *'Erb*, *Nine to Six-thirty*, and *Name of Garland*.]

THERE seemed to Peter Haffenden something criminal in the waste of time. He had been ready since half-past six—people of the village were accustomed to rise early—and his married sister, who was going to take him to London for the day, had been ready since seven; yet they had to wait for the hour of half-past nine ere the excursion was due. His sister, a masterful general, had been arranging the plan of campaign for months; this included a precise arrangement to make for the railway station at ten minutes to nine, which would enable them to reach that point at nine exactly; thus touching the middle course between undignified, premature arrival and dangerous tardiness. The two sat in the front room, and this fact in itself marked the importance of the day; the morning was cold, but the avalanche of coloured paper in the fireplace had not been disturbed; his sister, upright in a horsehair chair, had on her head a little bonnet of white tulle, with bridles coming over the

shoulder from the back, intended to let London see that other places also knew something of the latest fashions.

"Don't keep fiddlin' about so with your Scotch cap, Peter," she said, severely. "You'll have the strings off else." The boy changed his method of indicating impatience. "Leave your new elastic-side boots alone, will you, or won't you? I only want to know," added the married sister, plaintively. "Ain't so sure but what I ought to leave you at 'ome after all."

"Is it nearly time for us to be on the move?" inquired the boy, after a pause.

"You never can keep still for a minute together. Go out in the kitchen and see the time by the clock again."

The boy returned with the information that the clock said it was twenty-five to ten, which meant that the correct hour was a quarter to nine. The fact that it was twenty-five to ten by any clock alarmed the sister, and, declaring that they would have to hurry fit to break their respective necks, she set about collecting her parcels, which consisted partly of food for the journey (from the extent of this you would have guessed the intent to be to relieve the besieged city of Paris), partly of country produce for an aunt in service in Grosvenor Square. The boy went first, loaded up with these packages; the sister stopped to lock the door and to place the key with great artfulness underneath the mat, where her husband, who was in the secret, would look for it on his return from work. The two felt proud to notice on the way to the station that they were watched from every cottage; at one or two, ladies who had the privilege of intimate acquaintance waved aprons. They were warm by the time they arrived, and they became still more heated when the stationmaster, meeting them outside, assured them that the next train to London had already gone, and

that there would not be one before the last; they remembered after the first shock that the stationmaster was one of the very few men in the village permitted to jest on serious matters. Good-tempered man, the stationmaster; he raised no argument about issuing a half return to the boy, and only begged that if they should encounter in the course of the day Sir Roger Tichborne, they would present to the Claimant the stationmaster's fond regards.

"Expect he thinks I've forgotten him," remarked the stationmaster, self-reproachfully.

There were others on the platform waiting for the excursion, and the boy resented this circumstance; it seemed to vulgarise an important event. He induced his sister to go to the top end of the platform by pointing out the great advantage that would accrue on reaching London in being able to alight amongst the first. The excursion train was late, and the boy became possessed of a horrid fear lest something untoward should have happened; he had already begun to picture himself returning through the village with his sister, dejected, and carrying on their shoulders disappointment, when the signalman came out of his box and swung a brass bell in a delightfully threatening manner, and Peter Haffenden (for whom railways had no secrets) was able to inform his sister that the train had left the neighbouring station.

"Now you've got to keep 'old of my hand," ordered his sister, "and you've got to keep 'old of it tight."

The excursion, with a white, oval plate on the engine, worn as a medal, looked full, for passengers were standing up and looking out at every window; but Peter's sister was not a woman to be taken in by this, and whilst others ran up and down the platform, alarmedly, she opened the door that came nearest and

stepped in; it was only when the train had started that she discovered that the class of the carriage was higher than the class of her tickets. A nervous commander would have shown signs of perturbation on this, but Peter's sister whispered to him that if anyone came to inspect he was to support her in the statement that an official had insisted they should get into this compartment, ignoring their honest frankness. As the stations went on the boy lost his first feeling of nervousness, and took hold of the arm sling with an air of assurance; the two listened haughtily to the apprehensive remarks of other passengers, who expressed fears that tickets might be collected at some point before the destination. The sister was something of a traveller, for she had been up to London to see her aunt on no less than two previous occasions. Calmness of behaviour decreased once the green meadows and the stark trees became rarer; when whole streets of houses came, Peter Haffenden stood up, and, rubbing the moisture from the windows, stared with both eyes.

"We're there now!" he said.

"Oh, no, we're not!" replied his sister, acutely. "We're only jest on the fringe of it, my lad."

"Shan't we see Sin Paul's soon?"

"You jest wait!" His sister spoke with a proprietorial air, indicating that the sights of town would not be exhibited until she gave the word.

The boy found encouragement in the fact that his sister began to shake the crumbs out of the tissue paper bags (with one exception, the whole compartment had eaten steadily through the journey; Peter himself was too excited to take food), to put on her white cotton gloves, to adjust a boot which she had loosened; he knew what these signs meant. The houses were more crowded now. They seemed to be

jostling and elbowing each other out of the way. So many groups of chimney pots that one might think they were put up for fun, and when the train gave signs of slackening he wanted to open the door, whereupon his sister shook him, and the whole compartment told him of the fines and penalties inflicted on anyone venturesome enough to indulge in a fatal accident. Only by exercise of superior force was he restrained from alighting at the first London station; he had to be held back by his jacket when the train crossed the river.

"Wonderfully like the picture of it," he cried, excitedly.

On the train backing out of a station to cross the river again, the compartment told him, with a fine affectation of seriousness, that they were all on their way home; he was at the very edge of tears, but his sister, jealous of the family's reputation, came to his support, and told the other passengers to mind their own business. The terminus came at last, but not before the train had crossed the river a third time, a phenomenon which even Peter's sister could not explain clearly, although admitting it had been described to her more than once.

"What on earth are you a-dancing for on the platform?" demanded his sister.

"Got pins and needles in me foot."

"Then you leave off having pins and needles," she ordered, dictatorially. "Any of your nonsense, and I'll leave you here until I come back at night. I've got quite enough on my mind without *you*."

"Shall we get into an omnibus now?"

"Do you think I'm made of money?"

The married sister had intended to take some kind of public conveyance, and two or three buses, with clean straw on the floors, tempted her outside the

station, the drivers giving a look of glad surprise, the conductors swinging out from the steps and taking her arm in their anxiety to secure fares; but as Peter had suggested that form of transport, she decided that they should walk. In St Martin's Lane they stopped to count parcels, and she wailed aloud on finding that two were missing. An interested crowd ran up from all the points of the star, and the two policemen on fixed duty at the centre had moved when the boy reminded his sister that she had eaten the two parcels on the journey. Allowing herself to be reassured, the two continued their way in the direction of Oxford Street and the West End. The boy found a hundred things to attract his attention; every hansom cab proved enchanting, and shop windows drew him as a magnet affects a needle, so that his sister was all the way a little in front of him, calling over her shoulder:

"Oh, come along, do! We shall never get there."

In Oxford Street, which looked in the slight mist as though it reached to the end of the world, the allurements were many, but he trotted along by her side, his new boots squeaking so loudly as to extort criticism from tradesmen's boys. Peter wished that he were skilled in repartee that he might have replied to them at once; he knew that an appropriate answer would occur to him in the course of two or three weeks, but that would be too late.

"Much further?"

"Shan't tell you!" replied the married sister. "Lift your feet off the ground when you walk, and look out for a turning on this side called North Audley Street."

The boy was the first to espy the desired street, and two minutes later they were in a square in which the most delightful scents of cooking strolled up from the areas. A private carriage stood outside the house

which they wanted, and the two remained near the railings until an opulent matron had come down the steps and had driven away.

"Isn't she lovely!"

"'Ush!" said the sister, in an awed whisper, "that's me lady."

They pulled over the lever that rang the area bell, and a page-boy came out below and bawled up asking whether they were Cook's lot. The aunt herself appeared at that moment, and, albeit a bulky woman, ran up the white steps and, opening the gate, embraced the two with enthusiasm. It could not have happened better, cried the aunt delightedly. The family was lunching out, and after the visitors had had a snack of something they would be able to go right over the entire house.

"Come on down!" she said hospitably. "You've had a terr'ble long journey, and you'll be glad of a rest. I like your panier," went on the agreeable stout aunt, "and presently I'll get the lady's-maid to give you a new idea for doing your hair. As for you" (this to the boy, as she stopped for breath at the foot of the stairs), "I declare to goodness I should never have known you. You've growed so! If I'd met you out in the Square I should have passed you by. Too big, I s'pose, now to kiss anybody!"

"Don't mind kissing you, Aunt Emma, if you partic'larly want it!" answered the boy, reddening.

"Hullo, hullo!" said a pretty servant in the kitchen, who had one sleeve rolled up above the elbow. "Just caught you two. What do I get for not telling? I've always suspected you, Cook. You quiet ones!"

"How many young men have *you* got?" inquired Peter.

This question had a success that astonished the boy, and placed him in a position as a satirist, which he

found some difficulty in filling. For the pretty servant, it appeared, was notable for the number of her engagements, and the dexterity shown in carrying on several at the same time, and this casual inquiry of Peter's was held to be an extremely neat stroke. The women-folk were so much amused, and found it such an opportunity for rallying conversation, that Peter —who was a growing boy, and wanted a lot to eat, and wanted it often—began to fear that the more urgent subject of meals might be overlooked. The situation was made the more tantalising by the presence in front of the fire of a slowly swinging joint, which gave, as it revolved, a gurgling hiss that made the boy's mouth water. Of what account were mere love affairs when a royal joint like this was expressing impatience at delay in being set upon the table? Peter sighed, and his aunt turned to him with sympathy.

"My precious!" cried Aunt Emma. "What a shame to keep you waiting! Let me see if I can find you a snack of something to go on with."

His aunt's ideal of a snack was near to other people's notion of a meal, and the huge wedge of steak and kidney pie, with its elusive bits of jelly, gave him a comfort that conversation alone could never have supplied. He noted that his married sister lowered her voice, and he knew that she was now giving her account of the behaviour of her husband on his return home last club day; he heard the verdict of the jury and the rider—"Well, men are a mystery, nothing more nor less!"—with no desire to contest or argue. The clock on the wall, which exposed its works in a curiously frank and open way, gave a snort, and Aunt Emma moved that the meeting should be adjourned, that she might concentrate her efforts on the subject of lunch. The footman came in at this moment,

entering as though expecting to be ordered out again; he was a shy youth, a target for the pretty servant, and Aunt Emma, and all the other ladies of the establishment; he coloured bashfully at every remark made to him. He obeyed Aunt Emma's command, and took the boy off to his room for a wash. Once free of female society, the footman was at some pains to describe himself as a perfect terror amongst the girls, and one whose life consisted of a series of magnificent conquests.

"After all," said the young footman, as he touched his side whiskers with a clothes brush, "after all, we've only got one life in this world, and we may as well make the most of it."

Peter only just recognised his sister when she appeared after lunch, ready for the journey to the waxworks in Baker Street. Ten minutes' work on the part of the lady's-maid had transformed her into one moving in the best London society, and with this change came a slight affectation of the accents of town. Aunt Emma had also attired herself for public promenade, and the three set out, the pretty servant imploring the boy not to forget that he was solemnly engaged to her, and the footman, with a cap on, accompanying them as a form of protection as far as the beginning of Orchard Street, at which point Aunt Emma accepted responsibility.

"Not going to be frightened, are you, Peter?"

"No fear, Aunt," said the boy.

"Because you needn't come into the Chamber of 'Orrors unless you like."

"I don't want to miss nothing," he replied.

"Seems a pity now we are here," remarked his sister, with some anxiety, "not to do the place thoroughly."

An amiable wrangle at the entrance in which the

boy himself did not take part. Each lady was anxious to charge herself with the task of paying, and the dispute only ended when the collector of tolls hinted a willingness to accept the total sum from both parties. The figures inside had a suspicious resemblance to the people they were supposed to represent; all of them leaned forward slightly; few appeared to be in perfect health. His sister tried to find some faults (excepting in the Royal groups), but the boy would not hear a word against any one of them. Aunt Emma and himself organised a secret conspiracy, and pointed out to the sister the figure of a policeman, and the sister went up to it and, touching it, said, "Well, well, that *is* lifelike," whereupon the constable, to her great perturbation, thanked her, and walked away.

The boy felt proud of himself on finding that he was able to go through the sixpenny room without a tremor. The visitors spoke in awed whispers; the light was dim, and the associations with each name grisly, but he was too elated at being in a place of which he had heard much to find room for other emotions. Aunt Emma, who seemed well versed in the details of contemporary murders, supplied facts which had escaped the memory of the married sister, the while he looked at everything, determined to keep it all in his memory.

Nevertheless, Peter was glad to get back into the gayer rooms and hear pleasing suggestions concerning tea. It seemed that there were not many places where this rare beverage could be obtained, but Aunt Emma increased the boy's growing admiration for her by proclaiming knowledge of a shop in Oxford Street, kept by a gentleman who had once been a butler, in which establishment buns of an unexceptionable quality could be obtained. Aunt Emma said that people

walked miles in order to taste them. They went down Baker Street and, snatching a fearful joy by dashing, after one or two feints, right across the stream of traffic—"I really thought," said his sister afterwards, "that every moment was going to be the last"—they found the tea rooms, with little oval glass advertisements in the window announcing, in an ejaculatory way, "Muffins!" and "Wines!" and "Sandwiches!" and there they might have been dukes (to quote again the report on the day of the married sister), judging by the reception accorded to them. It appeared that in their slim youth the proprietor and Aunt Emma had been on the very point of being engaged to each other; the proprietor was now married to a businesslike lady, who managed the shop and managed him, and was kind enough to look with tolerance on this long past incident, rather gratified, indeed, that some one beside herself had desired the hand of the proprietor, and that she had been fortunate in winning the prize.

"Had enough to eat, Peter?"

"I feel," said the boy, "as though I shall never want to eat again."

The businesslike lady stuffed his pockets with varied pieces of cake, and when Aunt Emma, producing her long net purse, said "What's the damage?" the proprietor's wife declared good-temperedly that she had never been so much insulted in all her life; things had come to a pretty pass if she and her husband could not afford to entertain a few friends. So Aunt Emma gave instead a cordial invitation for any Sunday afternoon, and the three came out in excellent spirits.

Time had flown. Aunt Emma (who had to get back to see to the dinner) hailed a four-wheeler with a calmness that astonished Peter, and in it they rolled off to

Grosvenor Square. Her ladyship had not yet returned and all was well. Whilst Aunt Emma changed into her working habits, the pretty servant took the two over the house, listening carefully the while for a possible ring at the front door; the country visitors were astonished to find that the gilded chairs were not, as they had assumed, made of pure gold. It was difficult to drag the sister away from the full-length mirrors in the dressing-rooms, and the pretty servant—who would have flirted with a gargoyle if left alone with it—pinched the boy's ear and whispered to him that he could give her a kiss if he liked; he pushed her away and told her to mind her own business. (In after years nothing made him so remorseful as the memory of this incident.) The front door bell rang, and they scattered themselves affrightedly.

The shy footman, obeying orders, had been on a tour of inspection during the afternoon, and he now reported in the kitchen the result.

"Very well," said Aunt Emma. "So long as there's nothing in the piece that the boy ought not to see——"

"I was particular to ask," said the footman, modestly. "They assured me there was nothing of the doobel ontonder about it."

What happened after this was so much like a dream that Peter could never be quite sure how much of it was real, and how much imagination. From Grosvenor Square to Long Acre he flew—at least, this was how it seemed to him; it might have been that he only walked. There was a crowd at the pit door, and his sister expressed doubts whether it would be possible for them to find places within, but Aunt Emma encouraged her to be cheerful, and set about to make her way, under a variety of excuses, near to the doors. A sound of unbarring, an earthquake, and the rest

without doubt was a dream. It could not have been real. For here were Cavaliers and Roundheads, and a charming young lady (whom the boy loved), in the most perplexing situations, with an imperfect man called Colonel Kirke (whom the boy disliked), and more estimable people in the bravest costumes, ready to draw their swords on the most insignificant provocation. Restful moments between the acts, when one awoke, as it were, and peeled an orange, and then off again into this delightful dream.

"Now we've got to hurry," said his married sister, when the curtain rolled down for the last time. "Aunt Emma, you'll have to show us the way."

If it had been difficult before to distinguish, it was harder now. Was this brilliantly lighted street the narrow Strand, and, with these crowds of people about, could it possibly be night? And the excursion train, that was filling up quickly, but not so quickly that they could dare this time to enter a first-class carriage —was that real? The large silver coin, which Aunt Emma put into his jacket pocket, and the tears in her eyes when she said good-bye—there could be no doubt about them. But was Amos Clarke in the compartment on the journey down, and did the boy really have a desperate struggle with Colonel Kirke in his anxiety to protect a fair lady from his attacks? Anyway, it was surely a miracle that enabled him and his sister to open their eyes at the very moment when the train pulled up at their little wooden station.

"Well, Peter?" said his sister, sleepily. They went down the dark, blank, grass-bordered road of the village.

"Don't talk to me, don't talk to me!" begged the boy. "I'm thinkin'!"

From "Next Door Neighbours"

AT HOME, BELOVED, AT HOME

LEONARD MERRICK

[MR LEONARD MERRICK was born in London, but he finds most of his inspiration in Paris. His prevailing qualities (as Mr St John Adcock observes in *Gods of Modern Grub Street*) are "a Gallic sparkle and effervescence of wit and gaiety, . . . limitless charity and pity for the follies, weaknesses, caprices of mankind, a charm of sentiment that just stops short of sentimentality, a quick sensitiveness to the humour and pathos of common life, the tragedy of straitened circumstances, the sheer joy of living in spite of everything." Mr Merrick's chief novels include *Conrad in Quest of his Youth*, *The Position of Peggy Harper*, *The Quaint Companions*, and *The Actor-Manager*. He prefers the short story to the novel, however, and *The Call of the Past* is a collection of some of his most characteristic work in this medium. He has absolutely mastered the technique of writing fiction, and no one recognizes his achievement more whole-heartedly than do his fellow-craftsmen. He is a novelist's novelist as Keats is a poet's poet.]

EVIDENCE is lacking that Tricotrin's devotion for the young woman whom he encountered in such grievous circumstances was of a lasting nature. Having related how she preserved him from his dread resolve, one would rejoice to add that thereafter she exercised upon his career an exalting and abiding influence, but all ascertainable facts seem to indicate that the attachment was brief. It is said, indeed, that on the morrow she referred to the dread resolve in terms of derision. Be this as it may, the girl appears to have transferred her interest to another suitor at a date which points painfully to lightness of conduct. Moreover, there is reason to fear that Tricotrin's laments at her desertion must be ascribed to poetic licence. Nothing in the following records, gathered impartially

from the next three or four years of a youth which alas! can only be described as ill-spent, leads us to infer that Delphine remained the dominant factor in the poet's life.

Tricotrin was residing at Montmartre. It was in this quarter of Paris that he had established himself when he spurned the path of commerce in Lyons to write the blank-verse tragedies which have not been performed yet; it was here that he displayed later such base ingratitude towards the excellent uncle who had offered him a future in silk that the worthy Monsieur Rigaud had elaborately cursed him. Though it has been affirmed by Anglo-Saxon commentators more than once that he was a denizen of the *quartier Latin*, the statement may be dismissed as erroneous; the poet's choice was ever Montmartre. Financial considerations impelled him to manifold changes of domicile, but he was constant to the locality.

As usual, he was residing in a garret. The room contained two beds, of which the second was occupied by his best friend, Nicolas Pitou, the Futurist composer. Little Pitou was responsible for half the rent. The comrades' social circle, which was both artistic and extensive, consisted chiefly of young men who had also acquired a wide experience of Parisian garrets in a comparatively short space of time.

On a certain wet day in June, when Paris had begun to give up all hope of seeing a self-respecting summer that year, Tricotrin chanced to meet one of these young men—Didier by name, a painter. And the painter remarked to the poet, "Do you know there is something mysterious about our pal the novelist? That silly ass Lajeunie is very queer lately."

"He gets up thinner every morning," replied Tricotrin. "It is sad, but I should not describe it

as 'mysterious.' Experience has proved to me that ambition and high thoughts constitute a meagre diet."

"Well, but listen! he does not buy nourishment when he has the means—that is the strange part. A few days ago he called upon me to confide that he was starving, and I lent him sixteen sous. I do not say it vaingloriously, but I was touched and I lent him sixteen sous."

"It was a handsome action."

"Well, a few minutes afterwards I chanced to see him on the boulevard, and his furtive air prompted me to keep an eye on him. Figure yourself my feelings when he slunk into the establishment where you drop discs into a slot to listen to tunes on the Pathéphone! It costs four sous a melody, that distraction; and, as heaven is my witness, he squandered the whole of my loan before he left the place. Trembling with indignation I stood and watched him through the window."

"Really? That was scandalous of him to borrow your sixteen sous and squander it on tunes. Now you come to mention it, I have seen him hanging about that establishment more than once lately. I was never aware that music was one of his weaknesses?"

"Nor I," returned the painter. "I hope he is not going out of his mind."

"I shall look into the matter," said Tricotrin. "I take an interest in Lajeunie."

And having made inquiries in the interval, he said to Pitou that evening:

"Nicolas, has it ever been your view that Lajeunie was uncommonly musical?"

"Lajeunie?" echoed Pitou. "The poor lad has no more taste for music than a Pom."

"Well, it will astonish you to learn that it has

become a secret vice with him. I am told in the *quartier* that he has been borrowing money right and left, and there is every reason to suppose that he lavishes it all upon tunes on the Pathéphone. Moreover, to judge by his emaciated appearance, his professional income is all chucked in the same weird way. It appears to have become a mania with the poor fellow."

"One must have a talk with him!" said Pitou, shocked. "Music is the divinest of the arts, but I do not approve of the form his devotion takes."

"Let us put on our hats and step round to his place without delay," suggested Tricotrin. "I am of your own opinion—it is a crisis that calls for the intervention of his friends."

Lajeunie was at this period lodging on a fifth floor in an unsavoury court that was named the "City of Repose"; and when the artists had climbed to his attic the literary man was discovered in reverie, with his heels upon a manuscript on the table. His face brightened at their entrance.

"I trust that we are not interrupting the flow of composition?" said the twain simultaneously.

"On the contrary, I am rejoiced to see you," declared the author. "It must be Providence that guided you here. Not to beat about the bush, every editor that I have called on to-day has been 'engaged,' and my purse is as void as my interior. You find me ravenous. Positively I am sinking with exhaustion. Could either of you oblige me with a small sum to get a meal?"

The visitors exchanged glances.

"Alas! our accounts at the Banque de France and the Crédit Lyonnais are both overdrawn," said Pitou. "It is a most unfortunate coincidence. I tell you

what, however : you can come back with us and share our dinner, which for once in a way is ample."

The hopeful expression on the features of the novelist faded. "If you could make it four sous instead, dear old boy," he said desperately, "it would suit me better."

"Lajeunie," said Tricotrin in solemn tones, "you are not being open with us. Our offer does not touch the spot. Now why? To the ravenous, a share of an ample dinner is worth more than four sous. Avow the truth and say that you seek the coppers to gratify some ignoble passion!"

"Not at all," stammered Lajeunie; "my condition speaks for itself—I am reduced to skin and bone. Look at my arm!" And he took off his coat and displayed a very skinny arm indeed.

"We are not discussing your weight," said Pitou; "let us keep to the point. Besides, you were always as thin as they make them."

"Lajeunie," urged the poet, "we are your friends, and we realise that to err is human; we will be gentle with you; we will help you to conquer the craving. But make a clean breast of it! Come, come; is it not a fact that, were we to supply you with the funds you seek, you would forthwith slip a disc into a slot and dissipate them on a phonograph?"

Lajeunie started. "Since all is known, I shall not stoop to make denials," he groaned, pulling down his shirt-sleeve.

"You admit it, then?" said Pitou. "All those loans that you have been raising in the *quartier*, on the plea of an empty stomach, have gone down slots? You have imposed on good hearts to gratify this corroding vice?"

"I have imposed on no good heart," objected Lajeunie with hauteur. "In saying that I had an

empty stomach, my statements have been strictly accurate. If I nevertheless preferred to apply the money to the Pathéphone, that was my affair. What right has anybody to complain of that? I have not shrunk from applying my own money to it."

"Lajeunie," persisted the poet, "we seek your confidence. Our expostulations are dictated by an affectionate interest in your case. Is it not so, Nicolas?"

"It is!" affirmed Pitou. "We will not bully-rag you, old chap; if I spoke harshly, I ask your pardon. You may confide in us without misgiving—we shall be as mild as ducklings, I assure you."

"As ducklings!" repeated Tricotrin. "You will realise that, to the cursory view, the craving of an ill-nourished literary man to drop all his cash down slots appears surprising? Will you not explain to us the fascination of the course? Let us analyse it together. Let us make an effort to extricate you from the snare of this damnable invention! What is the ulterior motive—is it that you aspire to have heard all the records in the *répertoire* before you die? Believe me, the ambition is hopeless; you will have gone to your last account before you have exhausted even the list of orchestral selections."

"I do not listen to the orchestral selections," demurred Lajeunie sulkily; "I listen to the song *At Home, Beloved, at Home.*"

"But not always *At Home, Beloved, at Home*?"

"Yes, always. When I have the means I listen to it twice. The other day a friend lent me sixteen sous, and I set the indicator at the song four times running."

The young men regarded him with consternation.

"You have not noticed any other distressing symptoms, Lajeunie?" inquired Tricotrin very gently. "No pains in the head, or lapses of memory?"

"No, I have noticed nothing of the sort, thank you. I am as right in my head as you—and a damned sight righter."

"But, *mon ami*," remonstrated the musician, "the song is commonplace in the extreme. If you want to set indicators at songs four times running, wait till my opera is produced. In the duet I have just written between the Tenor and Soprano you will hear a descending scale of great thirds that terminates in a wild orgie of consecutive fifths. It is superb. The voices sing the major E and C; the wood wind play a full chord of B major; the harps play chromatic scales *ad lib.*, and the brass thunder out the love *motif* in B flat. *At Home, Beloved, at Home* is muck."

"You do not understand," faltered Lajeunie, beginning to cry; "it is not the technical excellence of the song that allures me—it is Her Voice! I adore her, and we are apart. I cannot endure it. The only respite to my despair is to hear her sing on the phonograph."

"*Sapristi!* it is love!" ejaculated Pitou.

And with a gesture of supreme relief Tricotrin panted: "Oh, my dear boy, what a burden you have lifted from my mind! I was becoming very anxious about you. You love, and you listen to her on the phonograph? That is rational, that is entirely sane; all my misgivings are removed. Who is she?"

"She is called Amélie Constant. A blonde. Ravishing. She has a smile that thrills. . . . It is a long story."

"No matter," said Pitou, "no matter; let us have it, I beg!"

"It began some months ago. I could not pay my rent in the Rue Legendre, and they turned me out late at night. It was freezing. There was no prospect of

a bed. I decided to order a bock in a cheap night *café* and take shelter there till the morning."

"Not a bad scheme!"

"It grew tedious by five o'clock. And the waiter kept looking at my glass, to see if it was empty yet; I would never have believed that a drink could be made to last so long. There was a girl who sang *At Home, Beloved, at Home.* Veritably an artist! She wore a black lace frock. I marvelled at her being there. Quite young, too. It was only my interest in her that kept me from nodding off. I wished to make her acquaintance, but I did not dare to expect it, because the beer had left me stoney; one cannot very well open a conversation with a lady when it is impossible to say 'May I offer you some refreshment, mademoiselle?'"

"Don't elaborate the obvious!"

"Well, the crowd kept thinning—the *café* became drearier every quarter of an hour. At last there was scarcely anybody left but two tinselled dancing girls, gaping in a corner, and the right girl, and myself. I spoke to her then, and chanced it. I said, 'It is not exactly rollicking?'

"'It is enough to give one the hump,' she said; 'why on earth don't you go away?'

"I said, 'I have nowhere to go. Why don't *you*?—have you got to sing any more?'

"'No,' she said. 'But I always sit here like this till it is broad daylight.'

"'You always sit here till it is broad daylight? What, even if you are left here by yourself?'

"'Yes,' she said; 'I have a lonely walk; and the apaches watch these places for us girls to leave—I am afraid of being murdered if I go before it's light.'

"Figure yourself the girl, half dead with sleep, wait-

ing regularly for the day to break, lest she should be murdered on her way home! Is it not literary?"

"Admirable," assented the poet with gusto. "It appeals to me very much indeed."

"I intend to make use of it, myself," said Lajeunie warningly.

"Well, why did she not lodge somewhere else, instead?" asked Pitou.

"That was a point that I put to her. I learnt that she was a stranger in Paris. Also that she did not propose to remain at the *café* for a day longer than was necessary. Next, as she was so tired, I volunteered to protect her on the walk if she liked to go at once. But I am not of Herculean build, and she said she would rather wait. So we went on talking. I repeat that I was stoney broke—and she conversed with me till seven o'clock in the morning! It is not every girl who would have done so much as that."

"Oh, it is evident that she has qualities!" said Tricotrin.

"The sun had risen when we climbed together to the Butte. Already I recognised a kindred soul. I parted from her at her door with the understanding that I would see her at the *café* again as soon as I contrived to raise the wherewithal for another bock; her gaze dwelt deeply on me as she said how earnestly she hoped that I should not have the key of the street that night too. Well, her good wishes appeared to bring me fortune—by midday I had made a sale! An editor to whom I had offered a hundred-thousand-word serial six months before proved willing to pay a hundred and twenty francs for it; and after a strenuous tussle I extracted a louis from him on account. Before I broke my fast I sent a telegram, inviting her to supper."

"It was well done," said the composer, "very diligent!"

"How sweet were her felicitations when we met! How divine were now the days that saw the flowering of a mutual love! I implored her to seek an engagement worthier of her talents without loss of time. I indicated a theatrical agent to her. In our first interview with this worthy he was sanguine of serving her very speedily; but after we had parted with the fee that he exacted for entering her name in his books, his confidence diminished. I racked my brains for other methods to advance her. It was thanks to my indomitable energies and a stroke of luck that she touched a bit for the phonograph record. A little later she secured an offer for the chorus in the theatre round the corner; it was to reopen during the last week of May with a revival of *La Fille de Madame Angot*. Would to Heaven that she had gone there!"

"Why did she not go there?"

"She did not go there because, no sooner had she settled to do so, than up popped a prospect somewhere else! There was a person who had arranged to open an *al-fresco* theatre on June 1 in the park at Ville-Nogent. He was enthusiastic about her voice, absolutely enthusiastic! He urged her to give the other show the go-by. He pointed out that, with him, she would have better parts and more satisfactory terms. How could we hesitate? To be sure, it was a suburb and I should have tram fares to pay when I went to see her, but it's an imperfect world. She asked the people round the corner to cancel her engagement, and they resentfully did so. This was the commencement of my misery."

"Proceed!"

"We had reckoned without the temperature!

Towards the end of May the fellow told her that unless the weather speedily grew milder he should not open before the 8th. And towards the 8th he said that, the evenings being still so chilly, it would be madness to open before the 15th. And when the 15th approached he explained that the tardy summer rendered an open-air season so highly speculative that he was compelled to reduce his programme and dispense with her services altogether. You may be sure I went to see him. I said :

" ' *Mon Dieu !* Mademoiselle Constant has cancelled an agreement elsewhere at your earnest solicitation ! '

" He said, ' I regret infinitely, but I have no more to say about it.'

" I said, ' That cat won't jump. You engaged the lady, and we hold you to your contract.'

" He said, ' Well, when you produce the contract we will talk again ! '

" Of course, there was *no* written contract. The man was a black-hearted villain, but we had to give him best. Her situation was desperate now—my resources were at their last gasp, and soon she was on the verge of destitution. Nothing was possible but for her to return to her step-mother at Lizy-sur-Ourcq ! There are emotions too terrible for words to paint. We sobbed on each other's necks. We sobbed for hours. Ah, that parting ! When she had gone, the animation of the streets was torture to me ; I staggered to the Cemetery and flung myself, face downward, upon the turf. The other mourners respected my bereavement—they passed me with hushed tones. Since then my days and nights have been unspeakable. Life yields but one suspension of the agony—to hear her sing upon the phonograph the song she used to sing upon my heart. *At Home, Beloved, at Home !*

It shows me each fleeting expression on her mobile face; once more I regain the humble room that was transfigured by our tenderness. *At Home, Beloved, at Home!* I feel the flutter of her breath upon my cheek, the clasp of the loving arms that made home Heaven. And then—crackle-popple-bump! The apparatus stops short, the dream is over—and naught is left me in my desolation but the frenzied hope of borrowing four sous again."

"Lajeunie," quavered Tricotrin, dashing away tears, "we have done you a grave injustice. I am rejoiced that we have had this talk—it will enable me to re-establish you in the esteem of the *quartier*."

"*Mon pauvre ami!*" wept Pitou. "We have wronged you bitterly. Something shall be done, Lajeunie! In the circumstances that scoundrel must be forced to engage her. Is it not so, Gustave?"

"Obviously," said Tricotrin. "Courage, cocky, we will arrange matters for you yet! Your pals may not be wealthy, but they are multitudinous; do not figure yourself that you will be allowed to pine into a grave for lack of influence. Your need is urgent, and we shall hold a council on your affair forthwith. See you to-morrow. Again, be brave!" And putting him upon his honour to expend the whole amount on viands, the pair lent him forty sous, and, after embracing him tenderly, departed to enlighten Didier.

Within a couple of hours many artistic heads had been put together. And since it was not the custom of that circle to allow grass to grow beneath their feet in such emergencies as appealed to them, they passed a resolution that delegates should wait upon the recreant manager the following day.

At this stage of the proceedings it was discovered that the poet and Pitou had omitted to ascertain his

name and address. The question arose whether he was to be found at Ville-Nogent; perhaps the unpropitious skies had delayed his opening again?

"Gentlemen," said Tricotrin, "I move that the Meeting be adjourned for twenty minutes, while we run back to inquire."

"The poor devil will be bucked to hear of the progress we have made," he remarked to Pitou, as they sped along. And as they passed a brilliantly lighted window, through which absorbed figures were visible with their elbows on the tables, and receivers clapped to their ears, "There is the fatal place!" he added. "Fortunately——" The words that he was about to speak remained unuttered, and Pitou clutched him by the arm. At that instant one of the heads inside had been raised, and with a throb of horror they saw that the victim had succumbed once more.

"*Mon Dieu!*" shuddered Tricotrin; "this is frightful."

The novelist came blindly out—in his eyes the dazed stare of a slave to some insidious drug. As they confronted him, he trembled violently, and stood speechless.

"Apostate!" thundered Tricotrin. "Are you lost to all self-control?"

"Pardon!" moaned Lajeunie, "pardon!"

"It exceeds the limits of forbearance," stormed Pitou. "We trusted you; we put faith in your vows of reformation!"

"You were right," sobbed the culprit. "I meant all I said. No one has ever meant anything more nobly."

"In less than two hours you are at it again! Have you eaten? We insist upon the truth—how many goes have you paid for in there?"

"Mercy!" wailed Lajeunie. "It is a passion stronger than myself. I didn't want to do it."

"Do not quote miserable songs to us! How many? Reply!"

"Ten," whimpered the author.

"*Morbleu!* Has this sinister machine entirely undermined your reason? Are you bent on suicide? Has it robbed you of the last remnants of prudence and common sense?"

"*C'est plus fort que moi!*" repeated Lajeunie. "Have you no hearts? Can you not realise the witchery? Do not scold me, for I am grateful to you with all my being. If you divined the quarter of an hour's rapture that you have given to me! Space was annihilated. Her voice caressed me as of yore; I saw her smile; I bowed my head upon her breast——"

"You told us all that in your room," interrupted the poet. "I do not say that I cannot comprehend the drunken fascination, but forty sous is a lot of money. If you had taken even five turns I might find excuses for you. But ten! It is an orgy for a millionaire."

"Deliberately I did not mean to take ten—I was tempted one by one. Each time the awakening crackle-popple-bump came, I said 'Just one dream more!' Be pitiful! It asks for superhuman strength to live sundered from the woman you love when you know that you have only to lift two tubes off hooks to hear her."

"Of course there is something in what you say," conceded the composer; "nobody denies it. Well, look here, your affair is going swimmingly! Everybody is deeply interested. We are assembled at the Bel Avenir—you will go there with us. And as you

are totally irresponsible, we shall see that you are fed there! Step lively, now!"

The Council was apprised that the manager was a Monsieur Cupillat. Whether the Théâtre Sous Bois had inaugurated its season at Ville-Nogent Lajeunie could not say, but the dastard was believed to be staying at a *pension de famille* in the suburb.

On the morrow, therefore, Tricotrin, accompanied by Sanquereau, the sculptor, who was chosen because he had a frock-coat, and could simulate a dry, attorney-like tone, proceeded by an electric tram to interview the gentleman. Tricotrin, who had no frock-coat, carried a black portfolio, such as those in which grave advocates may be seen transporting legal documents. The sight of the portfolio had encouraged Lajeunie considerably; he felt that it could scarcely fail to impress Monsieur Cupillat with the danger of his ways.

"It will not do to lose one's temper with him," observed Sanquereau, as the tram bounded and crashed over the course in its native manner; "we shall have more effect if we are ominously calm."

"Understood!" panted the poet, struggling to retain his seat. "But I wish these untamed trams did not always make me feel sick."

Their ring at the bell of the *pension de famille* evoked a crimson-faced woman of vast dimensions. Beholding two strangers, whom she took for prospective boarders, she beamed upon them with a solicitude that was well-nigh maternal, but on learning that they merely wished to see Monsieur Cupillat, she snapped that he was "at the show," and promptly returned to the kitchen.

The park was easily discoverable, however, and some minutes later they found themselves in the presence of the *entrepreneur* himself. Perhaps by reason

of the thermometer, which remained depressing to one who was committed to open an *al-fresco* theatre in three days' time, his brow was dark.

"*Eh bien, messieurs?* What is it? I have my hands full."

"Monsieur," began the sculptor judicially, "our affair concerns the engagement that you entered into with Mademoiselle Amélie Constant. It appears that you hesitate to fulfil your undertaking."

"I do not hesitate—I know nothing about it."

"*Permettez!* Influenced by your representations, Mademoiselle Constant, hereinafter referred to as 'the Artist,' renounced a lucrative arrangement in another quarter."

"Listen, monsieur!" broke in the faithless Cupillat sharply. "I have no leisure to attend to these rigmaroles. My business presses!"

"*Permettez!* The maintenance of amicable relations between the Manager and the Artist is a matter so much to be desired that we should be loth to think that in our client's interests we shall be compelled to resort to extremities. The case may still be settled out of court. This offer is made without prejudice."

"And it is our earnest hope," added Tricotrin, "that after our little conference has concluded you will be induced to take a broader and more enlightened view of a question so important to the local development of dramatic enterprise."

"A word in your ear!" said Cupillat. "Also without prejudice. You may go to the devil!"

"It is like that, you blackleg, is it?" stuttered Sanquereau in a fury. "I have a good mind to kick you in the eye."

"Let us dip him in the canal!" suggested Tricotrin, white with rage.

"A couple of trumpery students!" muttered Cupillat, backing hurriedly. "I snap my fingers at you and your 'client'!"

"Students!" spluttered the emissaries, frantic at the insult. "We are no students, you ignorant ape—we are full-blown. And you will see if you can snap your fingers at us! Since courtesy is unappreciated, we will try other measures, *voyons!* We have not done with you."

"Get out!" scoffed Cupillat, who was already at some distance from them.

"It is war!" bellowed the pair. And after the parties had gesticulated a good deal, Cupillat dived into his little wooden theatre, and slammed the door with derision.

"By the Powers, it is war!" swore Sanquereau, gritting his teeth.

"It is war to the knife!" asseverated Tricotrin vengefully.

"After this, he shall take her, or I will hound him out of the place!"

"I will burst his infernal show up!" vowed the poet. And then, as they began to recover their mental balance, "But—but—I say! Precisely—er—what is there we can do?"

Sanquereau looked blank:

"We shall have to consider—another Council must be summoned. One thing is certain, the question of expense must not be allowed to deter us! Personally, I would pawn my shoes for a chance to get even with the ruffian."

And that was the view taken by the Assembly. In his stirring appeal for a Fund, Didier cried: "Gentlemen, to-day we have to bear in mind more than the rights of an *artiste*, more than the sufferings

of a comrade. Obloquy has been heaped on our ambassadors, and nothing less than the Honour of the *Quartier* is at stake! Had I jewels, I would strip them from me in the sacred cause. I guarantee two francs!"

It illustrates the spirit of the Convocation when it is stated that as much as twenty-nine francs forty-five centimes was subscribed even before anybody had the least idea how the Fund would advance matters. One member, less public-spirited than the rest, had asked for information on this point at the termination of the speech. He said, "Impressed as I am by the fervour of the last speaker, I rise to inquire what the desired Fund is for?" Didier, with a sublime gesture, had replied in a single word, "Conquest!" And the cheers were deafening. Pitou's feeble tenor started *La Marseillaise.*

It was after *La Marseillaise* had been chorused that a plan of campaign was sought.

"It is now," said the President, "that we must determine how to apply this noble expression of widespread sympathy. Splendid as our finances are, they will not suffice for us to open an opposition show and bring the blackguard to his knees in that way. Has any chap a suggestion to offer?"

An ominous silence fell. Seconds ticked past, each more fateful than its predecessor. Boys turned to one another with haggard eyes.

At this crisis, a reputation was brilliantly enhanced. Beginning in a firm yet modest voice, "Monsieur le Président, and other rotters, I would direct attention to the fact that a powerful ally is the weather," a member proceeded to outline a proposal which first puzzled, then captivated, and finally swept the House to enthusiasm. He resumed his seat amid salvos of

applause. The member was M. Gustave Tricotrin, the poet.

Truth to tell, it was more like March than midsummer, the evening on which the lamps of the Théâtre Sous Bois at Ville-Nogent were lit at last. Nevertheless, the spot being as dismal as any other suburb of Paris, a sparse audience had risked colds in the head to seek distraction. They wore stout boots because the ground was damp. The depressed Cupillat, in the pay-box between two gloomy poplars, was not kept too busy to observe that a score of strangers filtered in—young men who in no wise resembled the respectable *bourgeoisie* of Ville-Nogent; he inferred that there must be an art school somewhere in the vicinity, and was encouraged by the prospect of its continued patronage.

The programme announced:

SPECTACLE VARIÉ EN TOUS GENRES
COMÉDIE, VAUDEVILLE,
ROMANCE
CHANSONNETTES, DUOS, RÉCITS,
SCÈNES COMIQUES

The little curtain rose jerkily, and a lady of mature age advanced towards the six footlights to recite.

In the middle of the final stanza, one of the strange young men in the front row sneezed with such alarming violence that heads turned to him. The lady looked disconcerted, and several persons in his neighbourhood, who had hitherto appeared fairly cheerful, shivered from sympathy.

The lady concluded. And the young man got up, and stamping hard, commenced to promote circulation by a swift arm-and-leg exercise. Some minutes

later an equally tremendous sneeze exploded from a young man in the centre benches. Two matrons, sitting behind him, exchanged an apprehensive glance, and a solicitous parent folded a pocket-handkerchief around his offspring's neck. "One must, my little one; it makes cold, *voyons!*" he said in urgent tones.

At the expiration of half an hour the number of artistic young men who were shuddering turbulently was so extensive, and the reports of brobdingnagian sneezes were so continuous, that all the spectators had hunched their shoulders in misgiving. During the sprightly vaudeville a racking cough from Sanquereau was succeeded by a paroxysm from Pitou; and before the duos were reached Lajeunie was stumbling, with chattering teeth, over a dozen pairs of feet in his haste to flee from further danger.

His prudence was emulated, at brief intervals, by nineteen other young men, obviously chilled to the bone. The solicitous parent decided that it was no place for his offspring, and the child was dragged forth, protesting loudly. Fear had now spread like an epidemic, and vacant seats displayed themselves every minute.

The next evening the audience was more exiguous still. But it contained twenty young men who again demonstrated to the public the severity of the maladies that they were likely to contract by patronising this entertainment.

When the exodus began, MM. Tricotrin and Sanquereau found their way barred by a raging manager:

"You bandits!" foamed Cupillat, "beware of the police! Do not figure yourselves you will do this devil's work to-morrow—I shall recognise the faces of you all and you will be refused admission!"

"My poor fellow," replied Tricotrin, "we are as manifold as the sands of Sahara. We could provide a fresh contingent every night for a year—and we shall have settled your hash in a week! The police? It is not criminal to sneeze. However, if you should feel inclined to strengthen your attractions by a certain engagement, I do not say but what we might find the temperature more genial."

On the following Monday the bills of the Théâtre Sous Bois proclaimed the appearance of "Mlle Amélie Constant." She sang *At Home, Beloved, at Home*, and nineteen young men, to say nothing of the ecstatic Lajeunie, were so enchanted by her gifts that her performance made a veritable *furore*.

From "While Paris Laughed"

SHEEP SLEEP

DION CLAYTON CALTHROP

[MR DION CLAYTON CALTHROP is an author, a painter, a theatrical dress-designer, and a dramatist. His books include *A History of English Costume* (illustrated by himself), *King Peter, The Dance of Love, A Trap to Catch a Dream,* and *Breadandbutterflies,* and among his many plays may be mentioned *The Gate of Dreams, The Mask,* and *The Great Man.* He is whimsical, imaginative, and extremely versatile; he seems able to do so many things well.]

WHAT an old man!

What an old, ancient, weather-beaten, venerable, hoary old man!

With a beard like moss.

Perhaps it was moss. All tangled and twisted like Travellers' Joy. And even flowering here and there.

By him a crooked stick. On him clothes tailored by brambles and coloured by sun and wind.

He sat on a bank just against the gap in the hedge. And when I spoke to him he never stirred.

But he answered "Nod."

I could not nod. I was terribly awake—so awake that my eyes seemed to see more clearly than usual. I could see the diamond eyes of every fairy in every dewdrop. And there were millions. And I could hear a fat bee talking to himself all the time as he went round on his ridiculous job of posting letters in the flowers. "Hum. What, no more than that this morning? What's pollen coming to?"

And a rabbit sat up and brushed its whiskers and yawned and yawned and yawned.

And a great fat frog under a dock leaf shook the cobwebs with his snores.

"Nod," said the incredibly old man.

Yet I was so awake that I could hear the stars whispering in the sky. And I said so. I said, "My dear old gentleman, I can't sleep."

And then he opened his eyes of blue and smiled at me and said, "Drowsy. Dreamy. Lullaby."

So I answered, "You foolish old man, you dotard and hunks, you silly, childish, moth-eaten relic, haven't I just told you I can't sleep?"

And he replied, "Opiate. Nod. Snooze." All in a low, crooning voice—the voice one uses to a sleepy child.

The world about me seemed asleep; the bee had gone, the rabbit lay curled up dreaming, the tangled honeysuckle in the hedge nodded against the briar rose. I saw it all, for all my senses tingled with a wakefulness cruel and pitiless. I could hear a beggar fairy being sent to sleep in the out-house with the caterpillars. And the rattle of a spider at her loom came sharp and clear.

I said again, "I cannot sleep."

He rose, that venerable man, and stretched his limbs and smiled. And then he hobbled like some hoary scarecrow to the place where something—something now I guessed by passages of many years—had broken through the hedge and made a gap.

He called.

There came the tiny tingling of a bell; of two; of ten; of hundreds just shivering—a silver shivering in the breeze.

I said, "My sainted aunt, I know. It is the sheep. The sheep of sleep. He is the shepherd of dreams. What does one do? I know. Count them."

The first came through, and I said, "One."

The sheep bowed gravely. "My story," she began, "is simple but pathetic."

I said to her, "Go away and baa, you stupid animal."

"I was the lamb that Mary had," she answered, mournfully regarding me. "My fleece was once as white as snow. Do you know snow? It tumbles down all dancing silently. It comes when the angels are doing the bedrooms, they tell me. Feather mattresses, you understand. Though some say an old, old woman plucks her geese. A nice girl, Mary. I followed her to school one day. Not a bad school. They taught her to make her own flocks."

"Frocks," I corrected.

"I said flocks," said the sheep. "I went everywhere with her. A sweet child. Do you like children or macaroni? I prefer lobsters with boiled earwigs. However, I wander. I was a little lamb, and I followed her to school one day. Do I bore you? I thought so. I'll go on. It was sewing day, and they wanted her to make a flock to mutton up the back."

"Button," I said angrily.

"I said mutton," said the sheep, drearily. "Are you sleepy?"

"No," I shouted. "Go away."

"It was against the rule," said the sheep. "And I made the children laugh. I was a real wagonette in those days."

"How could you be a wagonette?" I said irritably.

"Well," said the sheep, "I was a little bit of a wag. They liked me; I was such a lamb, they said. The teacher——"

"Ah!" I said, sarcastically. "So there was a teacher."

"The torture," the sheep continued.

"Just now it was a teacher," I said, and threw a clod of earth at her.

"He was a torture. His name was Ptolemy Wilkinson, and his face was like a ladder of blard."

"Ridiculous fat sheep," said I. "Go away. Go away, please, and send the rest of the flock. Perhaps they all tell abominably long stories."

"They all have tails," she replied imperturbably. "A careless girl. She lost her sheep and didn't know where to find them. Christian name Bo. Surname Peep. Peep of Peep's Dairy. Farmers. Nice people. But the girl! A day-dreamer, that's all about it. Not like my Mary. Odd name Bo; sounds Chinese, doesn't it?"

"Look here," I cried; "I came here to sleep, not to listen to drivel. I always understood that one thought of nothing, or ate a biscuit, or counted sheep, but it's no use. I can't sleep."

"Sheep, sleep, sheep, sleep," murmured the sheep drowsily. "Think of nothing, multiply it, then take away the date and halve it. What is left is over."

"What is left is madness," I said.

"Mary was not mad," the sheep went on, "I followed her to school one day. I told you that."

"I'm sick of hearing it," said I.

"I've told this story to hundreds of thousands of people," said the sheep anxiously. "And they like it. It sends them to sleep. So many people can't sleep; now, I can always sleep; can't you?"

In desperation I shouted the word "Butcher!" at her.

She smiled and winked a silly eye at me, and then replied: "Mint Sauce! That's nothing. I've heard

that thousands of times. Think of all the people I meet every night who go to sleep counting me."

"Don't they ever get beyond One?" I cried.

"Number Three," she said, "is the sheep out of the Ark. So old-fashioned, but so entertaining. You'd like her; she tells the jokes Noah used to make. A dear thing. We are an old family."

"Don't you think you might go on and give the others a chance?" I asked politely.

"Number Four," she said, and I saw her settle herself more comfortably, "is the March Lamb."

"I understood it to be a Hare," said I, and I found my voice sounding very far away.

"She comes in as a lion and goes out as a lamb. It's a great change, but the weather does it. Do you like weather or walnuts? Mary liked the school; they taught her to make puffs."

I found my head nodding, my eyes were half shut, but I struggled to be polite, though the sheep seemed miles away now, and very indistinct. I said: "How did she make puffs?"

Then the sheep blew out her cheeks full and suddenly let them collapse with a gasp. I nodded again and said in a whisper: "Puffs. How shall I remember that?"

And then the field grew deliciously warm and comfortable, and I saw the sheep get up and amble away, and then the old man's voice said something, and thousands of sheep began to pour through the gap in the hedge, and I began to count.

"Two, three, four, five——" I slept.

From "Breadandbutterflies"

THE BURGLARS

KENNETH GRAHAME

[MR KENNETH GRAHAME has the rare gift of writing delightfully about children, yet no one enjoys his books more than do the adults—especially those adults who (like Stevenson and Shelley) contrive never to grow up. His best-known works are *The Golden Age*, *Dream Days*, and *The Wind in the Willows*. In these stories Mr Grahame succeeds perfectly where so many writers have failed lamentably. Certain of the tales of Kipling and stories like *The Would-be Goods* (by E. Nesbit) catch the right spirit; but most writers forget how they talked and thought and felt when they were young. That cannot be said of the author of *The Burglars*.]

IT was much too fine a night to think of going to bed at once, and so, although the witching hour of 9 P.M. had struck, Edward and I were still leaning out of the open window in our nightshirts, watching the play of the cedar-branch shadows on the moonlit lawn, and planning schemes of fresh devilry for the sunshiny morrow. From below, strains of the jocund piano declared that the Olympians were enjoying themselves in their listless, impotent way; for the new curate had been bidden to dinner that night, and was at the moment unclerically proclaiming to all the world that he feared no foe. His discordant vociferations doubtless started a train of thought in Edward's mind, for he presently remarked, *à propos* of nothing whatever that had been said before, "I believe the new curate's rather gone on Aunt Maria."

I scouted the notion. "Why, she's quite old," I said. (She must have seen some five-and-twenty summers.)

"Of course she is," replied Edward scornfully. "It's not her, it's her money he's after, you bet!"

"Didn't know she had any money," I observed timidly.

"Sure to have," said my brother with confidence—"heaps and heaps."

Silence ensued, both our minds being busy with the new situation thus presented: mine in wonderment at this flaw that so often declared itself in enviable natures of fullest endowment—in a grown-up man and a good cricketer, for instance, even as this curate; Edward's (apparently) in the consideration of how such a state of things, supposing it existed, could be best turned to his own advantage.

"Bobby Ferris told me," began Edward, in due course, "that there was a fellow spooning his sister once——"

"What's spooning?" I asked meekly.

"Oh, *I* dunno," said Edward indifferently. "It's—it's—it's just a thing they do, you know. And he used to carry notes and messages and things between 'em, and he got a shilling almost every time."

"What, from each of 'em?" I innocently inquired.

Edward looked at me with scornful pity. "Girls never have any money," he briefly explained. "But she did his exercises and got him out of rows, and told stories for him when he needed it—and much better ones than he could have made up for himself. Girls are useful in some ways. So he was living in clover, when unfortunately they went and quarrelled about something."

"Don't see what that's got to do with it," I said.

"Nor don't I," rejoined Edward. "But anyhow the notes and things stopped, and so did the shillings. Bobby was fairly cornered, for he had bought two

ferrets on tick, and promised to pay a shilling a week, thinking the shillings were going on for ever, the silly young ass. So when the week was up and he was being dunned for the shilling, he went off to the fellow and said: 'Your broken-hearted Bella implores you to meet her at sundown. By the hollow oak, as of old, be it only for a moment. Do not fail!' He got all that out of some rotten book, of course. The fellow looked puzzled, and said:

"'What hollow oak? I don't know any hollow oak.'

"'Perhaps it was the Royal Oak?' said Bobby promptly, 'cos he saw he had made a slip through trusting too much to the rotten book; but this didn't seem to make the fellow any happier."

"Should think not," I said; "the Royal Oak's an awful low sort of pub."

"I know," said Edward. "Well, at last the fellow said, 'I think I know what she means: the hollow tree in your father's paddock. It happens to be an elm, but she wouldn't know the difference. All right; I say I'll be there.' Bobby hung about a bit, for he hadn't got his money. 'She was crying awfully,' he said. Then he got his shilling."

"And wasn't the fellow riled," I inquired, "when he got to the place and found nothing?"

"He found Bobby," said Edward indignantly. "Young Ferris was a gentleman, every inch of him. He brought the fellow another message from Bella: 'I dare not leave the house. My cruel parents immure me closely. If you only knew what I suffer!—Your broken-hearted Bella.' Out of the same rotten book. This made the fellow a little suspicious, 'cos it was the old Ferrises who had been keen about the thing all through. The fellow, you see, had tin."

"But what's that got to——?" I began again.

"Oh, *I* dunno," said Edward impatiently. "I'm telling you just what Bobby told me. He got suspicious, anyhow, but he couldn't exactly call Bella's brother a liar, so Bobby escaped for the time. But when he was in a hole next week, over a stiff French exercise, and tried the same sort of game on his sister, she was too sharp for him, and he got caught out. Somehow women seem more mistrustful than men. They're so beastly suspicious by nature, you know."

"*I* know," said I. "But did the two—the fellow and the sister—make it up afterwards?"

"I don't remember about that," replied Edward indifferently; "but Bobby got packed off to school a whole year earlier than his people meant to send him. Which was just what he wanted. So you see it all came right in the end!"

I was trying to puzzle out the moral of this story—it was evidently meant to contain one somewhere—when a flood of golden lamplight mingled with the moon-rays on the lawn, and Aunt Maria and the new curate strolled out on the grass below us, and took the direction of a garden-seat which was backed by a dense laurel shrubbery reaching round in a half-circle to the house. Edward meditated moodily. "If we only knew what they were talking about," said he, "you'd soon see whether I was right or not. Look here! Let's send the kid down by the porch to reconnoitre!"

"Harold's asleep," I said; "it seems rather a shame——"

"Oh, rot!" said my brother; "he's the youngest, and he's got to do as he's told!"

So the luckless Harold was hauled out of bed and given his sailing orders. He was naturally rather

vexed at being stood up suddenly on the cold floor, and the job had no particular interest for him; but he was both staunch and well-disciplined. The means of exit were simple enough. A porch of iron trellis came up to within easy reach of the window, and was habitually used by all three of us when modestly anxious to avoid public notice. Harold climbed deftly down the porch like a white rat, and his nightgown glimmered a moment on the gravel walk ere he was lost to sight in the darkness of the shrubbery. A brief interval of silence ensued, broken suddenly by a sound of scuffle, and then a shrill, long-drawn squeal, as of metallic surfaces in friction. Our scout had fallen into the hands of the enemy!

Indolence alone had made us devolve the task of investigation on our younger brother. Now that danger had declared itself, there was no hesitation. In a second we were down the side of the porch, and crawling Cherokee-wise through the laurels to the back of the garden-seat. Piteous was the sight that greeted us. Aunt Maria was on the seat, in a white evening frock, looking—for an aunt—really quite nice. On the lawn stood an incensed curate, grasping our small brother by a large ear, which—judging from the row he was making—seemed on the point of parting company with the head it completed and adorned. The gruesome noise he was emitting did not really affect us otherwise than æsthetically. To one who has tried both, the wail of genuine physical anguish is easily distinguishable from the pumped-up *ad misericordiam* blubber. Harold's could clearly be recognized as belonging to the latter class. "Now you young——" (whelp, *I* think it was, but Edward stoutly maintains it was devil), said the curate sternly, "tell us what you mean by it!"

"Well, leggo of my ear then," shrilled Harold, "and I'll tell you the solemn truth!"

"Very well," agreed the curate, releasing him; "now go ahead, and don't lie more than you can help."

We abode the promised disclosure without the least misgiving; but even we had hardly given Harold due credit for his fertility of resource and powers of imagination.

"I had just finished saying my prayers," began that young gentleman slowly, "when I happened to look out of the window, and on the lawn I saw a sight which froze the marrow in my veins! A burglar was approaching the house with snake-like tread! He had a scowl and a dark lantern, and he was armed to the teeth!"

We listened with interest. The style, though unlike Harold's native notes, seemed strangely familiar.

"Go on," said the curate grimly.

"Pausing in his stealthy career," continued Harold, "he gave a low whistle. Instantly the signal was responded to, and from the adjacent shadows two more figures glided forth. The miscreants were both armed to the teeth."

"Excellent," said the curate: "proceed."

"The robber chief," pursued Harold, warming to his work, "joined his nefarious comrades, and conversed with them in silent tones. His expression was truly ferocious, and I ought to have said that he was armed to the t——"

"There, never mind his teeth," interrupted the curate rudely; "there's too much jaw about you altogether. Hurry up and have done."

"I was in a frightful funk," continued the narrator, warily guarding his ear with his hand; "but just then

the drawing-room window opened, and you and Aunt Maria came out—I mean emerged. The burglars vanished silently into the laurels, with horrid implications!"

The curate looked slightly puzzled. The tale was well sustained, and certainly circumstantial. After all, the boy might really have seen something. How was the poor man to know—though the chaste and lofty diction might have supplied a hint—that the whole yarn was a free adaptation from the last Penny Dreadful lent us by the knife-and-boot boy?

"Why did you not alarm the house?" he asked.

"'Cos I was afraid," said Harold sweetly, "that p'raps they mightn't believe me."

"But how did you get down here, you naughty little boy?" put in Aunt Maria.

Harold was hard pressed—by his own flesh and blood, too!

At that moment Edward touched me on the shoulder and glided off through the laurels. When some ten yards away he gave a low whistle. I replied with another. The effect was magical. Aunt Maria started up with a shriek. Harold gave one startled glance around, and then fled like a hare, made straight for the back door, burst in upon the servants at supper, and buried himself in the broad bosom of the cook, his special ally. The curate faced the laurels—hesitatingly. But Aunt Maria flung herself on him. "Oh, Mr. Hodgitts," I heard her cry, "you are brave! for my sake do not be rash!" He was not rash. When I peeped out a second later the coast was entirely clear.

By this time there were sounds of a household timidly emerging, and Edward remarked to me that perhaps we had better be off. Retreat was an easy

matter. A stunted laurel gave a leg-up on to the garden wall, which led in its turn to the roof of an outhouse, up which, at a dubious angle, we could crawl to the window of the box-room. This overland route had been revealed to us one day by the domestic cat, when hard pressed in the course of an otter-hunt, in which the cat—somewhat unwillingly—was filling the title *rôle*; and it had proved distinctly useful on occasions like the present. We were snug in bed—minus some cuticle from knees and elbows—and Harold, sleepily chewing something sticky, had been carried up in the arms of the friendly cook ere the clamour of the burglar-hunters had died away.

The curate's undaunted demeanour, as reported by Aunt Maria, was generally supposed to have terrified the burglars into flight, and much kudos accrued to him thereby. Some days later, however, when he had dropped in to afternoon tea, and was making a mild curatorial joke about the moral courage required for taking the last piece of bread-and-butter, I felt constrained to remark dreamily, and as it were to the universe at large, "Mr Hodgitts, you are brave! for my sake do not be rash!"

Fortunately for me, the vicar also was a caller on that day; and it was always a comparatively easy matter to dodge my long-coated friend in the open.

From "The Golden Age"

THE THREE TOOLS OF DEATH

G. K. CHESTERTON

[Mr G. K. Chesterton is a poet, an essayist, a novelist, a biographer, and a playwright. He is also a controversialist of unusual skill, and tears his opponents' arguments to small pieces with hilarity, for he has a rapier wit and boisterous humour. His best stories are *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, *The Man who was Thursday*, *The Ball and the Cross*, and the collections of short stories—*The Club of Queer Trades*, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, and *The Wisdom of Father Brown*. Mr Chesterton's detective stories are unique. Other detectives succeed because they are exceedingly subtle, but Father Brown is there to note the obvious things which are overlooked by the clever person. He stands in odd contrast against the heroes of Poe, Gaboriau, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.]

BOTH by calling and conviction Father Brown knew better than most of us that every man is dignified when he is dead. But even he felt a pang of incongruity when he was knocked up at daybreak and told that Sir Aaron Armstrong had been murdered. There was something absurd and unseemly about secret violence in connexion with so entirely entertaining and popular a figure. For Sir Aaron Armstrong was entertaining to the point of being comic; and popular in such a manner as to be almost legendary. It was like hearing that Sunny Jim had hanged himself; or that Mr Pickwick had died in Hanwell. For though Sir Aaron was a philanthropist, and thus dealt with the darker side of our society, he prided himself on dealing with it in the brightest possible style. His political and social speeches were cataracts of anecdotes and "loud laughter"; his bodily health was of a bursting sort; his ethics were

all optimism; and he dealt with the Drink problem (his favourite topic) with that immortal or even monotonous gaiety which is so often a mark of the prosperous total abstainer.

The established story of his conversion was familiar on the more puritanic platforms and pulpits, how he had been, when only a boy, drawn away from Scotch theology to Scotch whisky, and how he had risen out of both and become (as he modestly put it) what he was. Yet his wide white beard, cherubic face, and sparkling spectacles, at the numberless dinners and congresses where they appeared, made it hard to believe, somehow, that he had ever been anything so morbid as either a dram-drinker or a Calvinist. He was, one felt, the most seriously merry of all the sons of men.

He had lived on the rural skirt of Hampstead in a handsome house, high but not broad, a modern and prosaic tower. The narrowest of its narrow sides overhung the steep green bank of a railway, and was shaken by passing trains. Sir Aaron Armstrong, as he boisterously explained, had no nerves. But if the train had often given a shock to the house, that morning the tables were turned, and it was the house that gave a shock to the train.

The engine slowed down and stopped just beyond that point where an angle of the house impinged upon the sharp slope of turf. The arrest of most mechanical things must be slow; but the living cause of this had been very rapid. A man clad completely in black, even (it was remembered) to the dreadful detail of black gloves, appeared on the ridge above the engine, and waved his black hands like some sable windmill. This in itself would hardly have stopped even a lingering train. But there came out of him a cry which was

talked of afterwards as something utterly unnatural and new. It was one of those shouts that are horridly distinct even when we cannot hear what is shouted. The word in this case was "Murder!"

But the engine-driver swears he would have pulled up just the same if he had heard only the dreadful and definite accent and not the word.

The train once arrested, the most superficial stare could take in many features of the tragedy. The man in black on the green bank was Sir Aaron Armstrong's manservant Magnus. The baronet in his optimism had often laughed at the black gloves of this dismal attendant; but no one was likely to laugh at him just now.

So soon as an inquirer or two had stepped off the line and across the smoky hedge, they saw, rolled down almost to the bottom of the bank, the body of an old man in a yellow dressing-gown with a very vivid scarlet lining. A scrap of rope seemed caught about his leg, entangled presumably in a struggle. There was a smear or so of blood, though very little; but the body was bent or broken into a posture impossible to any living thing. It was Sir Aaron Armstrong. A few more bewildered moments brought out a big fair-bearded man, whom some travellers could salute as the dead man's secretary, Patrick Royce, once well known in Bohemian society and even famous in the Bohemian arts. In a manner more vague, but even more convincing, he echoed the agony of the servant. By the time the third figure of that household, Alice Armstrong, daughter of the dead man, had come already tottering and wavering into the garden, the engine-driver had put a stop to his stoppage. The whistle had blown and the train had panted on to get help from the next station.

Father Brown had been thus rapidly summoned at the request of Patrick Royce, the big ex-Bohemian secretary. Royce was an Irishman by birth; and that casual kind of Catholic that never remembers his religion until he is really in a hole. But Royce's request might have been less promptly complied with if one of the official detectives had not been a friend and admirer of the unofficial Flambeau; and it was impossible to be a friend of Flambeau without hearing numberless stories about Father Brown. Hence, while the young detective (whose name was Merton) led the little priest across the fields to the railway, their talk was more confidential than could be expected between two total strangers.

"As far as I can see," said Mr Merton candidly, "there is no sense to be made of it at all. There is nobody one can suspect. Magnus is a solemn old fool; far too much of a fool to be an assassin. Royce has been the baronet's best friend for years; and his daughter undoubtedly adored him. Besides, it's all too absurd. Who would kill such a cheery old chap as Armstrong? Who could dip his hands in the gore of an after-dinner speaker? It would be like killing Father Christmas."

"Yes, it was a cheery house," assented Father Brown. "It was a cheery house while he was alive. Do you think it will be cheery now he is dead?"

Merton started a little and regarded his companion with an enlivened eye. "Now he is dead?" he repeated.

"Yes," continued the priest stolidly, "*he* was cheerful. But did he communicate his cheerfulness? Frankly, was anyone else in the house cheerful but he?"

A window in Merton's mind let in that strange light

of surprise in which we see for the first time things we have known all along. He had often been to the Armstrongs', on little police jobs of the philanthropist; and, now he came to think of it, it was in itself a depressing house. The rooms were very high and very cold; the decoration mean and provincial; the draughty corridors were lit by electricity that was bleaker than moonlight. And though the old man's scarlet face and silver beard had blazed like a bonfire in each room or passage in turn, it did not leave any warmth behind it. Doubtless this spectral discomfort in the place was partly due to the very vitality and exuberance of its owner; (he needed no stoves or lamps, he would say, but carried his own warmth with him.) But when Merton recalled the other inmates, he was compelled to confess that they also were as shadows of their lord. The moody manservant, with his monstrous black gloves, was almost a nightmare; Royce, the secretary, was solid enough, a big bull of a man, in tweeds, with a short beard; but the straw-coloured beard was startlingly salted with grey like the tweeds, and the broad forehead was barred with premature wrinkles. He was good-natured enough also, but it was a sad sort of good-nature, almost a heart-broken sort—he had the general air of being some sort of failure in life. As for Armstrong's daughter, it was almost incredible that she was his daughter; she was so pallid in colour and sensitive in outline. She was graceful, but there was a quiver in the very shape of her that was like the lines of an aspen. Merton had sometimes wondered if she had learnt to quail at the crash of the passing trains.

"You see," said Father Brown, blinking modestly, "I'm not sure that the Armstrong cheerfulness is so very cheerful—for other people. You say that nobody

could kill such a happy old man, but I'm not sure; *ne nos inducas in tentationem.* If ever I murdered somebody," he added quite simply, "I dare say it might be an Optimist."

"Why?" cried Merton, amused. "Do you think people dislike cheerfulness?"

"People like frequent laughter," answered Father Brown, "but I don't think they like a permanent smile. Cheerfulness without humour is a very trying thing."

They walked some way in silence along the windy grassy bank by the rail, and just as they came under the far-flung shadow of the tall Armstrong house, Father Brown said suddenly, like a man throwing away a troublesome thought rather than offering it seriously: "Of course, drink is neither good nor bad in itself. But I can't help sometimes feeling that men like Armstrong want an occasional glass of wine, to sadden them."

Merton's official superior, a grizzled and capable detective named Gilder, was standing on the green bank waiting for the coroner, talking to Patrick Royce, whose big shoulders and bristly beard and hair towered above him. This was the more noticeable because Royce walked always with a sort of powerful stoop, and seemed to be going about his small clerical and domestic duties in a heavy and humbled style, like a buffalo drawing a go-cart.

He raised his head with unusual pleasure at the sight of the priest, and took him a few paces apart. Meanwhile Merton was addressing the older detective respectfully indeed, but not without a certain boyish impatience.

"Well, Mr Gilder, have you got much farther with the mystery?"

"There is no mystery," replied Gilder, as he looked under dreamy eyelids at the rooks.

"Well, there is for me, at any rate," said Merton, smiling.

"It is simple enough, my boy," observed the senior investigator, stroking his grey, pointed beard. "Three minutes after you'd gone for Mr Royce's parson the whole thing came out. You know that pasty-faced servant in the black gloves who stopped the train?"

"I should know him anywhere. Somehow he rather gave me the creeps."

"Well," drawled Gilder, "when the train had gone on again, that man had gone too. Rather a cool criminal, don't you think, to escape by the very train that went off for the police?"

"You're pretty sure, I suppose," remarked the young man, "that he really did kill his master?"

"Yes, my son, I'm pretty sure," replied Gilder drily, "for the trifling reason that he has gone off with twenty thousand pounds in papers that were in his master's desk. No, the only thing worth calling a difficulty is how he killed him. The skull seems broken as with some big weapon, but there's no weapon at all lying about, and the murderer would have found it awkward to carry it away, unless the weapon was too small to be noticed."

"Perhaps the weapon was too big to be noticed," said the priest, with an odd little giggle.

Gilder looked round at this wild remark, and rather sternly asked Brown what he meant.

"Silly way of putting it, I know," said Father Brown apologetically. "Sounds like a fairy tale. But poor Armstrong was killed with a giant's club, a great green club, too big to be seen, and which we

call the earth. He was broken against this green bank we are standing on."

"How do you mean?" asked the detective quickly.

Father Brown turned his moon face up to the narrow façade of the house and blinked hopelessly up. Following his eyes, they saw that right at the top of this otherwise blind back quarter of the building, an attic window stood open.

"Don't you see," he explained, pointing a little awkwardly like a child, "he was thrown down from there?"

Gilder frowningly scrutinized the window, and then said: "Well, it is certainly possible. But I don't see why you are so sure about it."

Brown opened his grey eyes wide. "Why," he said, "there's a bit of rope round the dead man's leg. Don't you see that other bit of rope up there caught at the corner of the window?"

At that height the thing looked like the faintest particle of dust or hair, but the shrewd old investigator was satisfied. "You're quite right, sir," he said to Father Brown; "that is certainly one to you."

Almost as he spoke a special train with one carriage took the curve of the line on their left, and, stopping, disgorged another group of policemen, in whose midst was the hangdog visage of Magnus, the absconded servant.

"By Jove! they've got him," cried Gilder, and stepped forward with quite a new alertness.

"Have you got the money?" he cried to the first policeman.

The man looked him in the face with a rather curious expression and said: "No." Then he added: "At least, not here."

"Which is the Inspector, please?" asked the man called Magnus.

When he spoke every one instantly understood how this voice had stopped a train. He was a dull-looking man with flat black hair, a colourless face, and a faint suggestion of the East in the level slits in his eyes and mouth His blood and name, indeed, had remained dubious, ever since Sir Aaron had ' rescued ' him from a waitership in a London restaurant, and (as some said) from more infamous things. But his voice was as vivid as his face was dead. Whether through exactitude in a foreign language, or in deference to his master (who had been somewhat deaf), Magnus's tones had a peculiarly ringing and piercing quality, and the whole group quite jumped when he spoke.

" I always knew this would happen," he said aloud with brazen blandness. " My poor old master made game of me for wearing black ; but I always said I should be ready for his funeral."

And he made a momentary movement with his two dark-gloved hands.

" Sergeant," said Inspector Gilder, eyeing the black hands with wrath, " aren't you putting the bracelets on this fellow ? He looks pretty dangerous."

" Well, sir," said the sergeant, with the same odd look of wonder, " I don't know that we can."

" What do you mean ? " asked the other sharply. " Haven't you arrested him ? "

A faint scorn widened the slit-like mouth, and the whistle of an approaching train seemed oddly to echo the mockery.

" We arrested him," replied the sergeant gravely, " just as he was coming out of the police station at Highgate, where he had deposited all his master's money in the care of Inspector Robinson."

Gilder looked at the manservant in utter amazement. " Why on earth did you do that ? " he asked of Magnus.

"To keep it safe from the criminal, of course," replied that person placidly.

"Surely," said Gilder, "Sir Aaron's money might have been safely left with Sir Aaron's family."

The tail of his sentence was drowned in the roar of the train as it went rocking and clanking; but through all the hell of noises to which that unhappy house was periodically subject, they could hear the syllables of Magnus's answer, in all their bell-like distinctness: "I have no reason to feel confidence in Sir Aaron's family."

All the motionless men had the ghostly sensation of the presence of some new person, and Merton was scarcely surprised when he looked up and saw the pale face of Armstrong's daughter over Father Brown's shoulder. She was still young and beautiful in a silvery style, but her hair was of so dusty and hueless a brown that in some shadows it seemed to have turned totally grey.

"Be careful what you say," said Royce gruffly, "you'll frighten Miss Armstrong."

"I hope so," said the man with the clear voice.

As the woman winced and every one else wondered, he went on: "I am somewhat used to Miss Armstrong's tremors. I have seen her trembling off and on for years. And some said she was shaking with cold and some she was shaking with fear, but I know she was shaking with hate and wicked anger—fiends that have had their feast this morning. She would have been away by now with her lover and all the money but for me. Ever since my poor old master prevented her from marrying that gipsy blackguard——"

"Stop," said Gilder very sternly. "We have nothing to do with your family fancies or suspicions.

Unless you have some practical evidence your mere opinions——"

"Oh! I'll give you practical evidence," cut in Magnus, in his hacking accent. "You'll have to subpœna me, Mr Inspector, and I shall have to tell the truth. And the truth is this: An instant after the old man was pitched bleeding out of the window, I ran into the attic, and found his daughter swooning on the floor with a red dagger still in her hand. Allow me to hand that also to the proper authorities." He took from his tail-pocket a long horn-hilted knife with a red smear on it, and handed it politely to the sergeant. Then he stood back again, and his slits of eyes almost faded from his face in one fat Chinese sneer.

Merton felt an almost bodily sickness at the sight of him; and he muttered to Gilder: "Surely you would take Miss Armstrong's word against his?"

Father Brown suddenly lifted a face so absurdly fresh that it looked somehow as if he had just washed it. "Yes," he said, radiating innocence, "but is Miss Armstrong's word against his?"

The girl uttered a startled, singular little cry; every one looked at her. Her figure was rigid as if paralysed; only her face within its frame of faint brown hair was alive with an appalling surprise. She stood like one of a sudden lassooed and throttled.

"This man," said Mr Gilder gravely, "actually says that you were found grasping a knife, insensible, after the murder."

"He says the truth," answered Alice.

The next fact of which they were conscious was that Patrick Royce strode with his great stooping head into their ring and uttered the singular words: "Well, if I've got to go, I'll have a bit of pleasure first."

His huge shoulder heaved and he sent an iron fist

smash into Magnus's bland Mongolian visage, laying him on the lawn as flat as a starfish. Two or three of the police instantly put their hands on Royce; but to the rest it seemed as if all reason had broken up and the universe were turning into a brainless harlequinade.

"None of that, Mr Royce," Gilder had called out authoritatively. "I shall arrest you for assault."

"No, you won't," answered the secretary in a voice like an iron gong, "you will arrest me for murder."

Gilder threw an alarmed glance at the man knocked down; but since that outraged person was already sitting up and wiping a little blood off a substantially uninjured face, he only said shortly: "What do you mean?"

"It is quite true, as this fellow says," explained Royce, "that Miss Armstrong fainted with a knife in her hand. But she had not snatched the knife to attack her father, but to defend him."

"To defend him," repeated Gilder gravely. "Against whom?"

"Against me," answered the secretary.

Alice looked at him with a complex and baffling face; then she said in a low voice: "After it all, I am still glad you are brave."

"Come upstairs," said Patrick Royce heavily, "and I will show you the whole cursed thing."

The attic, which was the secretary's private place (and rather a small cell for so large a hermit), had indeed all the vestiges of a violent drama. Near the centre of the floor lay a large revolver as if flung away; nearer to the left was rolled a whisky bottle, open but not quite empty. The cloth of the little table lay dragged and trampled, and a length of cord, like that found on the corpse, was cast wildly across the window-

sill. Two vases were smashed on the mantelpiece and one on the carpet.

"I was drunk," said Royce; and this simplicity in the prematurely battered man somehow had the pathos of the first sin of a baby.

"You all know about me," he continued huskily; "everybody knows how my story began, and it may as well end like that too. I was called a clever man once, and might have been a happy one; Armstrong saved the remains of a brain and body from the taverns, and was always kind to me in his own way, poor fellow! Only he wouldn't let me marry Alice here; and it will always be said that he was right enough. Well, you can form your own conclusions, and you won't want me to go into details. That is my whisky bottle half emptied in the corner; that is my revolver quite emptied on the carpet. It was the rope from my box that was found on the corpse, and it was from my window the corpse was thrown. You need not set detectives to grub up my tragedy; it is a common enough weed in this world. I give myself to the gallows; and, by God, that is enough!"

At a sufficiently delicate sign, the police gathered round the large man to lead him away; but their unobtrusiveness was somewhat staggered by the remarkable appearance of Father Brown, who was on his hands and knees on the carpet in the doorway, as if engaged in some kind of undignified prayers. Being a person utterly insensible to the social figure he cut, he remained in this posture, but turned a bright round face up at the company, presenting the appearance of a quadruped with a very comic human head.

"I say," he said good-naturedly, "this really won't do at all, you know. At the beginning you said we'd found no weapon. But now we're finding too many;

there's the knife to stab, and the rope to strangle, and the pistol to shoot; and after all he broke his neck by falling out of a window! It won't do. It's not economical." And he shook his head at the ground as a horse does grazing.

Inspector Gilder had opened his mouth with serious intentions, but before he could speak the grotesque figure on the floor had gone on quite volubly.

"And now three quite impossible things. First, these holes in the carpet, where the six bullets have gone in. Why on earth should anybody fire at the carpet? A drunken man lets fly at his enemy's head, the thing that's grinning at him. He doesn't pick a quarrel with his feet, or lay siege to his slippers. And then there's the rope"—and having done with the carpet the speaker lifted his hands and put them in his pockets, but continued unaffectedly on his knees —"in what conceivable intoxication would anybody try to put a rope round a man's neck and finally put it round his leg? Royce, anyhow, was not so drunk as that, or he would be sleeping like a log by now. And, plainest of all, the whisky bottle. You suggest a dipsomaniac fought for the whisky bottle, and then, having won, rolled it away in a corner, spilling one half and leaving the other. That is the very last thing a dipsomaniac would do."

He scrambled awkwardly to his feet, and said to the self-accused murderer in tones of limpid penitence: "I'm awfully sorry, my dear sir, but your tale is really rubbish."

"Sir," said Alice Armstrong in a low tone to the priest, "can I speak to you alone for a moment?"

This request forced the communicative cleric out of the gangway, and before he could speak in the next room, the girl was talking with strange incisiveness.

"You are a clever man," she said, "and you are trying to save Patrick, I know. But it's no use. The core of all this is black, and the more things you find out the more there will be against the miserable man I love."

"Why?" asked Brown, looking at her steadily.

"Because," she answered equally steadily, "I saw him commit the crime myself."

"Ah!" said the unmoved Brown, "and what did he do?"

"I was in this room next to them," she explained; "both doors were closed, but I suddenly heard a voice, such as I had never heard on earth, roaring 'Hell, hell, hell,' again and again, and then the two doors shook with the first explosion of the revolver. Thrice again the thing banged before I got the two doors open and found the room full of smoke; but the pistol was smoking in my poor, mad Patrick's hand; and I saw him fire the last murderous volley with my own eyes. Then he leapt on my father, who was clinging in terror to the window-sill, and, grappling, tried to strangle him with the rope, which he threw over his head, but which slipped over his struggling shoulders to his feet. Then it tightened round one leg and Patrick dragged him along like a maniac. I snatched a knife from the mat, and, rushing between them, managed to cut the rope before I fainted."

"I see," said Father Brown, with the same wooden civility. "Thank you."

As the girl collapsed under memories, the priest passed stiffly into the next room, where he found Gilder and Merton alone with Patrick Royce, who sat in a chair, handcuffed. There he said to the Inspector submissively:

"Might I say a word to the prisoner in your

presence; and might he take off those funny cuffs for a minute?"

"He is a very powerful man," said Merton in an undertone. "Why do you want them taken off?"

"Why, I thought," replied the priest humbly, "that perhaps I might have the very great honour of shaking hands with him."

Both detectives stared, and Father Brown added: "Won't you tell them about it, sir?"

The man on the chair shook his tousled head, and the priest turned impatiently.

"Then I will," he said. "Private lives are more important than public reputations. I am going to save the living, and let the dead bury their dead."

He went to the fatal window, and blinked out of it as he went on talking.

"I told you that in this case there were too many weapons and only one death. I tell you now that they were not weapons, and were not used to cause death. All those grisly tools, the noose, the bloody knife, the exploding pistol, were instruments of a curious mercy. They were not used to kill Sir Aaron, but to save him."

"To save him!" repeated Gilder. "And from what?"

"From himself," said Father Brown. "He was a suicidal maniac."

"*What?*" cried Merton in an incredulous tone. "And the Religion of Cheerfulness——"

"It is a cruel religion," said the priest, looking out of the window. "Why couldn't they let him weep a little, like his fathers before him? His plans stiffened, his views grew cold; behind that merry mask was the empty mind of the atheist. At last, to keep up his hilarious public level, he fell back on that dram-drink-

ing he had abandoned long ago. But there is this horror about alcoholism in a sincere teetotaller, that he pictures and expects that psychological inferno from which he has warned others. It leapt upon poor Armstrong prematurely, and by this morning he was in such a case that he sat here and cried he was in hell, in so crazy a voice that his daughter did not know it. He was mad for death, and with the monkey tricks of the mad he had scattered round him death in many shapes—a running noose and his friend's revolver and a knife. Royce entered accidentally and acted in a flash. He flung the knife on the mat behind him, snatched up the revolver, and having no time to unload it, emptied it shot after shot all over the floor. The suicide saw a fourth shape of death, and made a dash for the window. The rescuer did the only thing he could—ran after him with the rope and tried to tie him hand and foot. Then it was that the unlucky girl ran in, and misunderstanding the struggle, strove to slash her father free. At first she only slashed poor Royce's knuckles, from which has come all the little blood in this affair. But, of course, you noticed that he left blood, but no wound, on that servant's face? Only before the poor woman swooned, she did hack her father loose, so that he went crashing through that window into eternity."

There was a long stillness slowly broken by the metallic noises of Gilder unlocking the handcuffs of Patrick Royce, to whom he said: "I think I should have told the truth, sir. You and the young lady are worth more than Armstrong's obituary notices."

"Confound Armstrong's notices," cried Royce roughly. "Don't you see it was because she mustn't know?"

"Mustn't know what?" asked Merton.

"Why, that she killed her father, you fool!" roared the other. "He'd have been alive now but for her. It might craze her to know that."

"No, I don't think it would," remarked Father Brown, as he picked up his hat. "I rather think I should tell her. Even the most murderous blunders don't poison life like sins; anyhow, I think you may both be the happier now. I've got to go back to the Deaf School."

As he went out on to the gusty grass an acquaintance from Highgate stopped him and said:

"The coroner has arrived. The inquiry is just going to begin."

"I've got to get back to the Deaf School," said Father Brown. "I'm sorry I can't stop for the inquiry."

From "The Innocence of Father Brown"

EXERCISES

EXERCISES

LITTLE WHITE FROCK

1. Write a brief summary of the *incidents* of the story. (Not more than 200 words.)

2. Write, very briefly, the thoughts of (*a*) Alice, (*b*) her husband, (*c*) the old actor after the conclusion of the events narrated here.

3. Which passages in the story do you regard as (*a*) humorous, (*b*) pathetic?

4. Collect the adjectives which are applied to Colin Brancker, and show how they are justified by his behaviour.

5. Say what were your own feelings after Mrs Windsor had gone out with the little white frock.

6. Compose an original story which, like *Little White Frock*, has an entirely unexpected ending.

FALSE COLOURS

1. What is the essential plot of this story?

2. Study the way in which the author leads up to the main idea, making it appear plausible and preparing the reader's mind to accept it.

3. Suppose that the story had been told directly instead of through the medium of the night-watchman. Would there be any important gain or loss?

4. Quote examples of humorous 'touches' and 'asides' (*a*) in this story, (*b*) in any other story by Jacobs.

5. Explain the difference between (*a*) wit and humour, (*b*) conscious and unconscious humour.

THE MAN WHO WAS BLIND

1. What circumstances in this story prepare the reader (*a*) for a tragic ending, (*b*) for a happy ending?

2. Do you consider that the ending is justifiable? Does it spring naturally from the facts of the story, or is it 'forced'?

3. Give illustrations of the way in which the author keeps up the interest by means of suspense.

4. How many important characters are there in this story? Could any one be omitted? Would the story be improved if others were introduced?

5. Explain why this story is written throughout in good 'King's English,' while the two preceding stories contain badly written letters and ungrammatical conversation.

6. Write an essay on "Happy Endings," or on "Blindness."

THE TRUTH ABOUT PYECRAFT

1. What is the central idea of this story? Do you know any other story in which the author has played with a similar idea?

2. Write the first eleven lines in the third person.

3. Describe the characteristics of Mr Pyecraft and of Mr Formalyn, and explain their attitude toward each other.

4. Do you think the story would gain or lose if it were told by an outsider instead of by one of the characters? Can you suggest how the night-watchman might have begun?

5. Write an original story dealing with a subsequent adventure of Pyecraft. (It might be told by the man himself.)

PRISCILLA

1. Summarize the incidents of the story (*a*) in the order in which they are revealed, (*b*) in the order in which they actually occurred.

2. What emotions are aroused in the reader as the story unfolds?

3. At what moment in the story does the truth about Priscilla disclose itself?

4. Note the simplicity and dignity of the language—the Saxon words, the homely sentences. Do you consider that the story would be more moving if the language were more ornate and elaborate?

5. Write an essay on "Artistic Restraint," or "The Spinster in Fiction."

EXERCISES

À PROPOS DES BOTTES

1. What is the meaning of the title? Explain its significance.
2. What is (in your opinion) the most humorous part of the story?
3. Give examples of the way in which Macleary makes the story more amusing by his gift of narrative.
4. Describe the character of Brennan as seen by Macleary.
5. Write brief notes on the famous waxwork figures referred to in the story.
6. A famous thinker has asserted that humour is a defence of the mind against suffering. Can you quote other examples of the way in which disaster has provoked mirth?

THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE

1. Compare the characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson. What purpose does the latter serve in the story?
2. At what point does the actual 'adventure' begin? How does the author employ the preceding paragraphs?
3. Why do most people like detective stories?
4. It is said that the author of the Sherlock Holmes stories thought out the incidents backward before beginning to write. Can you suggest why he did this?
5. Some writers of detective stories do not 'play the game' with their readers. Can you explain what is meant by this criticism?
6. Write an essay on "Putting Two and Two Together," explaining incidentally what is meant by 'reading between the lines.' *Or* explain the difference between deduction and induction,[1] giving illustrations. *Or* write a summary of an original detective story.

THE FACE ON THE WALL

1. Do you consider that the story would be improved or spoilt by omitting the final 'sting'?
2. What adjectives would you use to describe stories of this nature?

[1] See *Exercises in Thinking and Expressing* (Harrap, 2s.).

3. Do you prefer a ghost story which remains a mystery or one which can be explained away? (Discussion.)

4. Suppose that you wished for more information concerning Mr E. V. Lucas (or any other author represented in this volume). How would you set to work to obtain it?

5. Write an original short story entitled "Queer, wasn't it?"

THE CELESTIAL OMNIBUS

(A few explanatory notes may be useful:

P. 147. 'Mr Bons'—obviously 'Mr Snob.' *Cf.* Mr Senoj and Mr Nosnibor in *Erewhon.*

P. 156. *Cf.* the closing scene of *Das Rheingold.*

P. 157. The barouche landau—from *Emma.*

P. 160. Dante—the three horses are the three Canticles.

P. 161. *Lasciate . . .* —see *Inferno,* III, 9.

P. 162. Mrs Gamp and Mrs Harris—see *Martin Chuzzlewit.*

P. 165. Achilles—see *Iliad.*)

1. What do you know about Shelley, Keats, Sir Thomas Browne, the Duchess of Malfi, Tom Jones?

2. What is the great imaginative idea in this story?

3. Can you suggest why a little boy should be able to see what was hidden from the learned Mr Bons?

4. Write an essay on "A Child's Idea of Heaven."

THE HAPPY HANGMAN

1. Which incident may be regarded as the most dramatic in this story? What 'hints' are given to prepare the reader's mind to accept the incident when it occurs?

2. Compare the characters of Beppo and Pietro.

3. What is meant by 'turning the tables'? Give illustrations (*a*) from this story, (*b*) from other stories you have read.

4. If you had to change this story into a play, at what point would you begin? Write the first twenty lines of the dialogue.

5. Describe a possible conversation between Beppo and Nita at their first halting-place after their escape.

EXERCISES

A MODEL MAN

1. What is the theme of this story ?
2. What other modern author would have enjoyed writing this story ?
3. Quote examples of humorous observation (*a*) by the author, (*b*) by the characters in this story.
4. Say what you candidly think about (*a*) Samuel Pell, (*b*) Herbert Chalk.
5. In most popular short stories the scamp is exposed and disgraced, but Pell emerges a victorious scoundrel. Make any intelligent comment on this ' happy ending.'
6. Write an essay on " Rogues in Literature."

THE ADVENTURE OF THE KIND MR SMITH

1. What was Mr Smith's scheme for making money, and how did Aristide Pujol succeed in frustrating it ?
2. Discuss the ' moral ' of this story, and compare it with that of " The Happy Hangman " and " A Model Man."
3. Write the conversation which may have taken place when M. Poiron arrived at Mr Smith's house.
4. Give examples of coincidences (*a*) in fiction, (*b*) in drama, (*c*) in life.
5. Write an essay on " Imaginary Castles."

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

1. What is the outstanding difference between this story and the preceding one ?
2. Explain how an experience which may appear commonplace to an adult may be a thrilling adventure to a boy.
3. Suppose that the married sister had to give an account of her day in London. What do you think she would say ?
4. What is the difference between a short story and a series of incidents ?
5. In what way does Mr Pett Ridge remind you of Charles Dickens ?

AT HOME, BELOVED, AT HOME

1. Compare this story with " The Adventure of the Kind Mr Smith."
2. Give a short summary of the plot of this story, and describe its nature.
3. Do you know any other stories in which the gramophone plays an important part ? If not, try to invent one.
4. Can you suggest how the idea of this story may have occurred to the author ?
5. Discuss Leonard Merrick's style as it is revealed in this story.
6. What is usually meant by the 'atmosphere' of a story ?
7. Compare Tricotrin with ' the Card ' (in Arnold Bennett's novel) and with Sentimental Tommy (in Sir James Barrie's novel).

SHEEP SLEEP

1. In what way is this story different from all the others in this book ?
2. Mention three or four ways in which it reminds you of the work of Lewis Carroll.
3. What is the central idea or theme of this story ?
4. Discuss the literary qualities of the story and their appropriateness to the subject.
5. Write an essay on " Falling Asleep."

THE BURGLARS

1. Rewrite the main incident of the story as it might have been told by (*a*) the curate, (*b*) Harold.
2. In what way is the language of the ' blood ' different from that of (*a*) good journalism, (*b*) everyday conversation ? Quote examples.
3. Write an account of a runaway horse in two different styles.
4. Compare " The Burglars " with " First Impressions."
5. " Sensational Stories." (A debate.)

EXERCISES

THE THREE TOOLS OF DEATH

1. What are the three tools of death referred to? Suggest another title for the story.

2. What circumstances seem to throw suspicion on (*a*) Magnus, (*b*) Royce, (*c*) Miss Armstrong?

3. What were the salient features in the appearance of Mr Armstrong and of the other members of his household?

4. What do you imagine would be the verdict at the coroner's inquest which followed the events related in the story?

5. Write an account of the inquest, giving summaries of the evidence of the various witnesses.

6. Compare Father Brown and Sherlock Holmes in (*a*) appearance, (*b*) character, (*c*) methods of work.

7. Write a short essay on "Artificial Cheerfulness."

MISCELLANEOUS

1. Which stories in this collection do you consider to be (*a*) heavy comedy, (*b*) light comedy, (*c*) pathetic, (*d*) thrilling, (*e*) allegorical, (*f*) nonsensical, (*g*) fantastic, (*h*) uncanny?

2. Give examples of stories which are (*a*) primarily studies of character, (*b*) essentially descriptions of events.

3. Make comments on the titles, and where possible suggest alternatives.

4. Study the opening sentences to discover which stories grip your attention immediately and which of them 'play' with your interest for a time.

5. Which stories, in your opinion, have the most effective endings?

6. Study the literary style of each story, noting how it varies with the subject as also with the author. Suggest (if possible) how any one story might have been treated by another author.