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“Millions, my dear! Literally millions!”

(Page 56).

THE HEDGE AND THE HORSE

by

HILAIRE BELLOC

With Forty Illustrations by
G. K. CHESTERTON



CASELL

and Company Limited
London, Toronto, Melbourne
and Sydney

First published . . . 1936

Printed in Great Britain by T. and A. CONSTABLE LTD.
at the University Press, Edinburgh

F35.836

To
M. H.

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THE HEDGE AND THE HORSE

I

THE world is divided—that is, the male world is divided—anyhow, the adult male world is divided—or at any rate, the adult male world of the more leisured kind is divided. . . . I feel that this is not the way to begin a book.

As you were.

The world is divided into two Clubs. One of them is much bigger than the other. The first, enormously the larger, is the Hedge Club. The second, highly restricted but strangely powerful, is the Horse Club.

Let me explain—indeed, it is high time.

There is an English proverb, dating from the grand old days when England was England, full of Horse-thieves and Hedge-beggars, and it says: “One man may steal a horse and another mayn’t look over a hedge.” If this product of the national genius be now forgotten, I have pleasure in reviving it: it is the whole business of my story.

“One man may steal a horse and another can’t look over a hedge.”

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By this we mean—we, the wise, the observant, the profound—that Fate is damnably unjust. There is a sort of man who can do anything and get away with it. To one such man there are a hundred who are pounced upon the moment they stir or speak.

Why is this?

I don't know; nor do any of you either. I think it has something to do with some woman or other who ate apples long ago in Mesopotamia. Anyhow, there it is: and it provides half the comedy of this world.

Having said so much, you will expect me, I suppose, to begin talking about a man who could not even look over a small box hedge, and about another man who could steal troops of horses and drive them off at his pleasure.

You are mistaken. We will let all that wait and simmer a bit. We will begin by noticing (if you don't mind) quite another kind of person, who never bothered about stealing horses and never dreamt of looking over hedges, but went his strong, straightforward way, which is after all the proper way to follow.

Be comforted, this personage with whom I propose to begin—because he is necessary to your understanding of what shall follow—only shoves his nose in for a short time. . . . He was already sixty-five years and ten months old, and after such an age a man plays no long part.

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His name was John Scott Guthrie. He lived in New York and was known there by name very widely, but with true knowledge hardly at all. The whole world spoke of him by the nickname of "John Scott," and the reason the whole world spoke of him by a nickname was the rumour of his immense wealth. That story had spread everywhere, fantastically stretched and as fantastically belittled, like an indiarubber band pulled out and squashed together again. One man in a group of idle gossipers would put him down at fifty million dollars. Another man three places off in the ring of smokers and drinkers, as idle as the first and as ill-informed, would swear on evidence from the horse's mouth that John Scott had tumbled right over the edge in his last deal, and was done for.

All the Rich in London longed to meet that distant name in the flesh. The middle-class worshipped it in their delightful suburbs. Even the poor had vaguely heard it, and politicians in every capital in Europe hoped desperately for windfalls. The talk of him was a joke for the gay young and a matter of religion to the aged.

Such talk had grown day after day during these last years of John Scott Guthrie's life, and meanwhile John Scott Guthrie heard nothing of it all and would have paid no attention to it if he had. Never was a man more isolated or more wilfully

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so. He was as solid as a block of Aberdeen granite paving and as indifferent to those who knew him by sight, let alone by mere repute. By speech very few indeed knew him, and these mainly to their disadvantage.

Now let me tell you the facts about John Scott Guthrie: they are always of more service than legends.

John Scott Guthrie was the only son of a small squire (or laird, as I am told they call it in those parts) on the Border between England and Scotland; born in his father's house which had stood upon the Scottish side. Certain accidents of his early youth had led him to try his luck in the United States immediately after his father's early death. The family place, heavily mortgaged, was sold. He had gone off to America at twenty-five with his share of the patrimony, simply because an opening had been offered him in New York and none had been offered him at home.

It was a small business, an agency in real estate, in which his father had very imprudently risked money on the persuasion of a too sanguine friend. They had had one scoop, in a mushroom place that really had developed for a few years. Then they had begun chancing their luck by throwing good money after bad. Young John Scott Guthrie (knowing nothing of the world as yet, but admirably equipped for dealing with it) seized the one

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opening before him. He went boldly across the sea and took over the one chance he had.

His only sister, ten years younger than himself, had married, rather late, in the ordinary decent fashion. Her husband was a Sapper, of just the same world as her own; almost a neighbour, from just over the Border in Northumberland. He was one of the Straddles, even poorer than her father had been; a gentleman, an intelligent man, one with a few good and not uninfluential friends. Therefore he died poorer than ever, and when he died, whatever little money remained was prudently sunk by her trustee in an annuity—for it was more important to educate their son Wilfred, and to make certain of her own old age, than to attempt to live on the tiny income the capital would have produced.

So the boy went to his public school, like everybody else, and to the University, like everybody else—yet future for him there was none. He had not the talents which could make him remarked, either at school or at Oxford.

Meanwhile John Scott Guthrie, away in New York, the boy's uncle, was daily and assiduously following the art of accumulation.

It is a very simple art, yet success therein is attained by very few, though it is for nearly all men their chief desire. All it requires in a man of fair intelligence is unremitting labour through-

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out every moment of the day from waking to sleeping, rigorous self-denial and intense concentration on the one task of acquisition by all and any means whatsoever. The mind must be filled with the one object of adding before evening to the wealth possessed at morning.

John Scott Guthrie worked in two small rather dingy rooms far down town in New York—the back and front rooms on the first floor of a dingy house in a dingy street: one looking out on the dingy street, the other back on a small, more dingy court. Year after year the grimy doorway at the foot of the dark little stair bore the fading inscription: “GRIERSON & GUTHRIE, Agents in Real Estate.” When the time had come for the pulling down of the old shack and its replacement by one of the great buildings which soar from the rock of Manhattan, John Scott Guthrie, now for some years past the sole survivor of the little firm, had become easily able to buy up the valuable site. He bought it:—but he refused to sell.

It was his pleasure to work as he had always worked in these two dingy rooms and there to receive his unfortunate clients. By the time he was forty he had become a rumour: by the time he was fifty he had become a myth—a sort of hidden God.

For John Scott Guthrie clinched in these rooms one negotiation after another. Usually the deal

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was done by word of mouth after a brief discussion; only then would it be formally set down by his tame lawyers—and each of these negotiations left him wealthier in the evening than he had been in the morning. Yet John Scott Guthrie did not speculate, as you might think it inevitable that a dealer in real estate should. From the very first days of his activities in the New World he had found a better way. He lent money.

Of course the real estate was there as security, but the margin was always ample, and the loan was nearly always made to such as had overestimated their future. Now and again a loan would be repaid, in which case the mere usury was duly recorded and passed into the accumulation. Much more often the security lapsed to the lender. And that security, remember, was real estate. And the most of it, remember, was real estate in Manhattan. And Manhattan, remember, was in John Scott Guthrie's time a sound proposition.

So it went on, year after year. John Scott never married. His lean, tall figure never changed. His strongly-cut face never lost anything of its sharp outlines; his black hair was grown slightly scantier with the years, but not a grey thread appeared in it.

He was loyal to his own; he kept in regular correspondence, though infrequent, with his sister.

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He visited her during his rare returns to Europe (for he never allowed himself a holiday, but only such few days as he thought his duty to his blood demanded). He added by occasional, capricious, not ungenerous gifts to her scanty income. He wrote to his nephew, first at school and then at college once a quarter or so. He gave occasional, not extravagant, tips to the schoolboy and made a small allowance to the undergraduate so long as he was in residence. He kept with his sister and her son exactly the relations which he judged to be demanded by duty, and no more.

That nephew, Wilfred Straddle, of the North-umberland Straddles, had left Oxford less than half a dozen years when his mother, John Scott's sister, died.

John Scott had had warning of her illness, and he had come over. She could still recognize him on her deathbed when he arrived. He was so moved that the armour he wore to divide himself from his fellow beings was almost pierced—yet not pierced. He allowed himself a very brief space in which to make full acquaintance with the lad who was now his only kin. He stayed on our side less than a month, helping to wind things up and making provision for what he had determined to do.

During the five and a half years since he had left college Wilfred Straddle had qualified for no

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profession. He went on living idly in his mother's house on her exiguous means; occasionally making visits to the house of a friend, occasionally receiving one. His horizon was that of a small north-country town, its neighbouring fields and open moors, small squires and local professional men whom he just met and no more. And all the while they drifted—and now that his mother was dying and her annuity with her, Wilfred was faced with a blank. That was no doubt the mother's fault as well as the boy's. They had both taken it for granted that he would be provided for when she should die.

During all those five years John Scott Guthrie had said nothing in his letters, nor even during his occasional appearances in Europe, upon the young man's future. After the University, the expense of which he regarded as capital outlay, he made no further remittance. He knew very well what his sister was thinking, and there was a delicacy beneath the hardness of his exterior which forbade him to express what he felt. For what he felt to the very core of his being was that a man who was not doing a man's work in this world in his early twenties was a wastrel. But if his sister had suggested no examination or apprenticeship for Wilfred, it wasn't for him to advise.

John Scott, to confirm his judgment, took the

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young fellow aside and looked at the body and face before him with as searching an eye as though he were dealing with a borrower. The last time he had been over, while his sister was yet alive, Wilfred Guthrie Straddle was a schoolboy, rather short for his age, and diffident. That was nearly ten years ago. Now Wilfred Guthrie Straddle was a man, but the face was much the same—a face inexperienced, undecided, gentle enough, perhaps slightly discontented, but not too much so, with smooth brown hair carefully parted in the middle. The whole face was negative: nothing very much one way or the other. There was nothing in it of the Guthrie drive. He was wholly a Straddle—and therefore it was certain that at least they would not quarrel. When they parted John Scott fell into reverie.

He thought it all out. It was incumbent upon him to see that the boy was provided for. In what degree and with what object?

John Scott, nearly sixty-six at the moment of his sister's death, was forty years older than Wilfred, to whom he must now be everything or nothing. Of affection he felt none, save a sort of bond such as binds a man to his clan: of personal feeling, not a trace. He had had little love from his sister, whom, after all, he had but rarely seen and for brief moments in the course of his long life. Her son as an individual meant nothing to him. But

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his conception of duty—which included a hawk-like pouncing on every chance of making money out of others—compelled him to see that this apparently feckless boy should not go under. After reading his chapter of the Bible—a thing he did every night of his life before he slept—he thought it out carefully in his room, alone, the night after the funeral, and determined upon his plan.

He would give the boy a large allowance—five hundred pounds a quarter—and he would arrange with his agents in London that it should be paid free of tax. It was a good deal for a boy who had been living narrowly and idly with a widowed mother in a small Northumberland town, on the few hundreds of an annuity, but John Scott Guthrie had weighed the whole matter. It would not be so large a sum as to risk Wilfred's being outrageously sponged upon. It would not tempt others to lure him into the very rich world of England, for which he would be unsuited and which John Scott, who had only heard of that world at very long range and knew nothing at all about, despised with all his heart and wholly condemned as a sink of iniquity. But it would be enough to make him fully at his ease with the few friends of equal rank whom he had made at the University and whom he had visited from time to time since he went down. He would have proper rooms in

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London, his Club, and a life without extravagance but without ill-ease.

What provision he might make for his nephew in his will, John Scott Guthrie would not yet determine. He would see how the boy shaped. It was in his power to make the lad very rich after he himself had passed. A fraction of his increasing accumulation would be a large fortune. But even what that fraction should be he would not decide. He would first put Wilfred through probation and see what might follow. As for taking his nephew into the business in New York, the idea repelled him. To be absolutely alone, with none to share his secrets and his figures, was life and death to John Scott. No: it should be £2000 a year net, tax free prepaid, quarterly, without promise or document. Later on they would see.

John Scott, in fixing upon that large allowance, was moved, less consciously, by a further motive. Men would know that there was a rich uncle in America. How much that uncle might be worth they would not know, but they would know there was some such person in the background. They would learn that rich uncle's name—and John Scott Guthrie was proud of his name and of his forbears as men of these Border families have a right to be. He did not choose that the grandson of a Guthrie should be embarrassed or that men should accuse himself, John Scott, of meanness

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even though he should be but a distant name to them.

After a good deal of hesitation he decided that he would attach no necessary condition—not even reading for the Bar. It was a bit of a struggle to give up the opportunity for preaching—but he faced it. No conditions—save one—and he feared even that one might be too irksome. He did not want to be a bully, but it was a point upon which he felt as strongly as a man of his type and sombre religion could feel. He called it “Alcohol”—strange Arabian word! But he knew no other name for the Evil Thing.

John Scott Guthrie was one of that great army among those who speak the English and the Scandinavian tongues, in whose eyes the said Alcohol was a raging devil, a murderer of the body and of the soul. He had seen that devil at work over and over again; he had seen the ruin and the agony, and though it had never laid claws upon himself, it had, through the prospect of it in others, affected his life more sharply than any other experience. Many of those upon whose ruin he had grown rich, perhaps the most of them, had fallen into the talons of that demon and had been torn and destroyed by its fangs. He hated weakness and its degradation even more than he hated the things which he had been taught were evil, and the miserable consequences of that plague, the

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physical and moral nothingness in which it ended, even before the victim was killed, repelled him with a loathing like nausea.

All that. Yet he hesitated to make it a necessary condition, for though he had spent his whole life in exile, he had been born a gentleman. He had long ago forgotten the distinction between this and that sort of liquor, but he knew that in his nephew's world wine was drunk. He made no distinction between a sound claret and your deadliest potato spirit from Hamburg.

What he would do was to make an appeal. He associated with the boy continually during the few days in which he remained in Europe to help to wind up the family affairs. He told him what arrangements he was making for the future. He earned Wilfred Straddle's strong and real gratitude. He told him the importance of a profession, even though he should now be independent, and suggested wisely enough that he should read for the Bar. It would be a status, and perhaps later, if any energy developed, an occupation. But he did not insist.

Before he sailed back for America, John Scott took young Straddle aside, and did two things, each with some solemnity.

First of all he told his nephew how matters would stand after his own death, which at his age, he insisted, might come at any time. He told the

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young man nothing precise, gave him no figures even of the vaguest on that very large fortune which these long years of usury had piled up, but left it presumable that, on his own death, his nephew would find enough had been left to provide a tax-free income at least the equivalent of what the allowance had been during his uncle's life.

In his heart John Scott intended to make it vastly more. He did not intend to leave the lad his fortune as a whole, or a quarter of it. There also his conception of duty came in. The mass of it should go to public uses. No young man was the better for such gigantic wealth. At any rate, he had in general planned that when John Scott Guthrie should come to be examined in some detail by his Maker on the Whole Duty of Man, Wilfred Guthrie Straddle (still on probation—though predestined one way or the other) should be in a position to bring up a family largely, and settle even many sons and daughters in what had of old been the Guthrie position of life. He had a picture in his mind of a substantial house growing up on the Border, such as the Guthrie blood was entitled to: of marriage, in this second generation, with other such affiliated houses.

So, vaguely and in general to reassure the boy was his first task on that last morning. His second task was more difficult. It turned upon the Demon. He did not mean to ask his nephew for a pledge,

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but he became eloquent. The man hardly ever betrayed emotion, but here and now he was on fire with a subdued but intense flame.

“I implore ye!” he had said, twice, “I implorrrre ye!”

What he implored was not for a promise that no wine should pass the rather weak mouth of the young man he was leaving, but in general to beware of the awful peril, as one might beware of an agonizing plague.

“It steals upon ye!” he said. “It steals upon ye, man! It’s stealthy, I tell ye. It’s like a snake, as ye might say. Ye’ll not know it’s there, and it will have been there for years. An’ then it strikes.”

Wilfred Straddle at the end of the harangue answered simply enough.

“It doesn’t mean much to me one way or the other, Uncle. I don’t care for beer, and I pass weeks without wine.”

“And Sperrits?” shot out the financier with sudden energy.

“All the same to me,” said Wilfred a little wearily. “They give me a liqueur occasionally with my coffee, but I never want it. You are being very good to me, it’s only fair that I should do something in return for you, and it’s really very little for me to do, seeing I care nothing about it.”



“ I implorre ye ! ”

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“Ye mean—ye’ll not touch the stuff?” asked John Scott incredulously, his whole face changing.

“Yes, Uncle, that’s just what I do mean. I tell you, it’s no sacrifice, and I know it will please you.”

The shock to John Scott was so great that he almost broke down into an open display of affection.

“Ye’ll never regret it, Willy,” he said. “Ye’ll never regret it!”

More than that he did not say.

Then they turned to matters which were, to that earnest elder, of almost equal importance with the downing of the Demon: I mean, to the details of money.

John Scott had taken all the trouble. The sale of the furniture was in good hands: did Wilfred want to keep any for his rooms in London? No? Well, no matter. Of one thing John Scott Guthrie had been quickly convinced during this short but intimate interval between his sister’s funeral and his own return to the business in New York, which could not get on without him; and this was, that Wilfred Straddle was never made for that kind of conflict called business which was to John Scott himself the whole savour of life. It would have been as useless as it would have been distasteful to offer the young man any chance on his own side of the Atlantic. It was better to make him independent and to leave it at that. Therefore had John Scott taken out of the young man’s hands

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even the trifling matter of the selling of chairs and tables. He knew that if Wilfred had had the handling of it, he would have been outrageously swindled. As he put it to his own inmost soul, he knew that even the petty hucksters of an English country town were greater men than this last of the Guthries: greater by the only true test of greatness, which is accumulation.

Such was the mood in which the uncle stood towards the nephew when they had said good-bye at Southampton, and John Scott Guthrie, sitting deliberately apart in his state-room as the liner slipped down Southampton Water, reviewed the future.

He had left things behind him fairly settled. The allowance would be paid in, with no legal bond behind it. It could not be anticipated. Not that he saw anything of the spendthrift in Wilfred, but men of that sort might easily be preyed upon if they were given command of capital too young. He could see no disasters ahead. He believed the boy to have been probably sincere in his promise, and he was touched by the spontaneity of that promise. One thing only he did dread—and how much he dreaded it only those will understand who have themselves come across the Demon. He dreaded the influence of others. With Wilfred independent in London, he might be led through those first doors that open the way to ruin through

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the Demon. And if that happened, John Scott knew bitterly well down what slope the remaining years would slide. Good-bye to the founding of the Guthries and the substantial house and the established family in the Border hills! And as for inheritance, to provide for a man once caught by the Demon was stoking the fires of hell.

John Scott thought it not only foolish but a sin to leave unwatched a young man for whose mortal career he would be responsible. He would have thought it not only unwise but a sin to spend any money whatsoever on the unsupported word of a youth with an uncertain face, of whose will power there was not sufficient outward proof and whose tenacity he had not tested.

Therefore was it that he acted thus.—Among his other arrangements he saw to it in these last days of his in England that there should be someone to report to him upon the nephew's way of life after the uncle should be out of sight. He knew how to keep his own affairs to himself, he pulled the right strings through his agents on this side, but without their finding out whom he ultimately employed to watch for him.

The man he ultimately employed, with good references and recommendations well tested, was one who had lost his last place, as a valet, for blackmail, had done time, was thoroughly well known to the police, therefore, and one who now

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got a precarious living as a waiter under police protection. This fellow gave the police information when they needed it, for that is the chief activity of such men. And he was ready to give information to his new patron on this side-line.

His job was simple. He was to write a letter every week. It would be paid for at a fixed rate by return of mail by postal order, and John Scott had hinted that he would add to that fixed sum whenever information of special value to him was contained in any letter.

That was the bargain struck between them. It was terminable, of course, at any moment by the employer—and equally a matter of course that there was nothing in writing on the employer's side, but very definite written pledges from the employee.

That useful man took on the job. John Scott took every care that the lad should not be warned by discovering that he was watched. A few weeks would be enough. No doubt the reports would be favourable and then they should cease. Of course if they were not——

This was the only doubt that disturbed the millionaire: for the rest, he was glad he had come, still more glad that he was returning to the one occupation of his life.

As for Wilfred Straddle, alone in the train on his way up to town, and needing very much indeed

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something to lean on, he planned to seek out that sturdy prop, a friend of his through all his four years at Oxford, his exact antithesis and counterpoise, the grand impecuniosity whom the Gods called Bill, but mortal men William Robinson.

Broad-shouldered, tall, while Wilfred was short, carrying a strong big head covered with dark curly hair, often laughing, nearly always smiling cheerfully, dressed a little too noticeably, and wearing a glance the frankness of which never failed after years of expedients and strange dealings, large in gesture, firm in speech, upstanding in carriage. All that was Bill.

They had met as freshmen at Oxford, and had clicked at once. Who William Robinson was no one knew; who Wilfred Straddle was everyone knew, because he had been at the right kind of school and come up to the right college with all the right whisperings and underground introductions that launch a young man of his modest but secure rank into his college.

The reason they clicked at once was that each fitted fairly into the other, and particularly that Straddle had been desperately shy in those first days, and Robinson, though he had not a penny behind him, was as sure of himself as a mountain rock. Some blamed Straddle for continued acquaintance with his friend, for I cannot deny that Robinson, who had gone to St. Barnabas—hardly

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a first-class college—was soon known to his contemporaries as The Barnabas Bounder, while Straddle (who got to know very few, while Robinson in a month knew dozens) was the least bounderish of men. But Robinson never let Straddle down, and Straddle was, to tell the truth, proud, or at any rate satisfied, to feel that he had Robinson for a background. That friendship would even lead him to lurk into St. Barnabas, a place which the men of Wilfred's distinguished college abhorred and despised—I can't put it stronger than that.

Bill, then, would Wilfred seek in his loneliness.

II

LET us return to the Hedge and the Horse.

It will have reached you by this time that Wilfred Straddle was of the Hedge Club : a Hedger of Hedgers. You will have got that.

It had not yet been put to the test in his sheltered life while Wilfred lived under his mother's roof; but as sure as eggs is eggs, when it came to looking over hedges, there would be trouble for Wilfred Guthrie Straddle. It had been pre-ordained from the beginning of the world. In all the myriad membership of the Hedge Club no man was a more indurated, native, dyed-in-the-wool Hedger than Wilfred Straddle was by every disposition of Fate—and in his case, Fate co-operated heartily with everything in the man's nature.

Wilfred Straddle did not yet know this Hedge-ness of his. Later he was to learn it; though even then he learned it only dimly and imperfectly and under a false name, calling it "Misfortune."

To-day, as he got out of his taxi and rang at the door of William Robinson's rooms in Half Moon Street, his soul was at peace, and the world sufficient for him. He had exactly six hundred and twenty-

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one pounds three shillings and eightpence to his credit at the Piccadilly Branch of the Bank whose local Branch in the old Northumberland town had been his mother's bankers, and his father's, before him. His uncle had sailed just before Lady Day, and the first quarter had been punctually paid in.

"William Robinson living in Half Moon Street?" you say. "But did you not tell me that William Robinson was impecunious? Did you not call him Impecuniosity itself, as though he were the incarnation of that great deity?" Half Moon Street runs out of Piccadilly into the quintessence of Mayfair. The very Rich will tell you with a vile simper how poor Jane cannot afford to take a house for the season and has only got rooms in Half Moon Street. Younger sons, whose elder brothers are too oofy to live and who themselves are well stuffed with it, talk of their rooms in Half Moon Street in a humble, passing voice, as of something not grand and therefore not to be dwelt upon. By all these signs you rightly say: "Half Moon Street is no lodging for the impecunious!"

Yet Bill had rooms there—and permanent rooms, at that. He kept them on from quarter to quarter, and he was never fired. Indeed, it would have been a bold room-letter who could have found the courage to fire Bill. But though there were strange tales, there was never any real occasion for going so far. The account was always settled

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sooner or later, or at any rate, enough of it was paid to carry on; and if the landlord was content, Bill certainly was. Nothing upon earth or sea, nor from mild heaven nor from powerful hell itself, could have shaken Bill.

The mere approach to Bill, as Wilfred Straddle stood outside the door ringing, had put power and virtue into the air which Wilfred Straddle breathed.

Ah! if ever there was a member of the Horse Club, it was William Robinson! No man could tell you how he lived. He could not have told you himself. He kept no accounts. He wrote now and then. He gambled, and had luck. He bought and sold things now and then. He was bold to take a private commission whenever he did another richer man a good turn; he would take a commission from both parties. He told people where to get their clothes and their wine and their top-boots. He discovered little places in the country and hotels abroad. He watched opportunities. He was not above piloting rich Anglo-Saxons through the world of London and accepting their gratitude, even settling beforehand how much the gratitude was to be. He would hang on cheerfully through weeks of howling void during which another would have sunk forever, and at the end of such a passage something would always turn up to put him in funds again—not out of debt of course—would he ever be that?—

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but he never bothered about it! At any rate, in funds; with cash in his pocket and able to pay something more on account, not only for his lodging, but for his clothes and all the rest of it.

His voice was loud and self-satisfied, a voice and manner exactly suited to his stance and to his emphatic clothes. His companions decried him behind his back—and followed him obediently. His heart was as good as his digestion; and—what is the very test of such a man—he could carry his liquor magnificently!

Yes—a Horseman of Horsemen. A true and violent, perfect, archi-typical member of the Horse Club. I am not sure I would not recommend him for the Presidency of that dynamic body. He could have stolen all the horses in all the stables of all the trainers in England, and no one would have said a word. Nor did anyone ask who his father may have been, or even if he had had one at all. This was the man who greeted Wilfred with the heartiness of a south-west wind, and at once produced the necessary syphon and decanter. Wilfred stammered a little.

“No, Bill . . . I’m sorry . . . I’ll explain to you.”

“Too early?” said Bill kindly.

“Oh, no . . . it’s not that! You see, I’ve just promised my uncle . . .’

Bill took it as one of the commoner accidents of



Horse and Hedge.

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life, and as a matter of course. American uncle; very rich; dry; nephew promises and swears off. All right in a day or two.

He mixed his own glass, making it stiff enough, said "Here's brightness!" and gulped it down. Then he pushed Wilfred down into a chair much too low and deep-cushioned, and standing up in front of the fireplace lit a cigar—for he smoked all the time—and began to fire off questions.

Had his friend found rooms? Should they look for rooms? What was he ready to pay?

"I don't know what I ought to pay," said poor Wilfred. "I don't understand these things. You know all about it. What ought I to pay?"

"What have you got?" said Bill, crudely enough.

"About . . . about . . . oh, say about a hundred a month—rather more, you know. I mean . . . about that. A little more . . ."

Bill looked at him with a touch of pity, but very kindly. Then he turned his eyes up to the ceiling, as though he saw figures written thereon, and murmured:

"I see. Something between thirty and forty a week."

"I never thought of it in that way, not by the week," said Wilfred, who did not want to go on with the subject. "And I didn't say as much as that, either."

"Oh, never mind what you said! My dear boy,

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if you take rooms you will have your accounts by the week—unless you take a flat. Don't take a flat."

"Oh, I want to do what's cheapest."

"Very well, it's cheaper to take furnished rooms. Besides which, you can flit, if ever things get too hot. But they won't, with a fellow like you."

"No," said Wilfred, humbly.

"Well, say a fiver a week," said Bill. "That's too much—you can get what you want for four, but better say five. Come along with me. Where's your luggage?"

"I left it at the station."

"Well, when we've chosen rooms to begin with, we'll send for it. Let's go out. First of all, let's lunch. I suggest Birrell's. Not crowded, and getting better every day."

They lunched. They lunched well. It was a pity Wilfred took no wine these days, for Bill chose something really remarkable. He was one of those very few in his class who know what wine is; indeed, he knew many things. The lunch was long and lingering and full, and Wilfred paid.

"Right, my boy!" said Bill, after he had had his second liqueur (which on principle he always made different from the first, for variety is life) and after he had taken a new cigar (not from his own case but from a sort of cupboard on wheels which was rolled in for his special benefit—and

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Wilfred paid for it). Then he, not his host, gave the signal to go.

They went straight off, Bill directing, spiritually and physically. It was like a hound following a scent. It was like a ship steering for a mark. It was like a bird darting overseas. For Bill always knew exactly what he was doing, what he wanted, and where to get it.

Bill marched Wilfred across the Green Park from Birrell's to Westminster, turned down a small street off Buckingham Gate, went straight upstairs in front of his Hedger, leading with the true Horseman's stride, thumped at a door, and when it was opened by an austere old woman, said:

"Mrs. Cramp, I have got someone to take your rooms at last!"

She thanked him quite nicely.

"And I don't know why they should be so difficult to let, Mr. Robinson," she said. "They're good rooms. And everybody knows I look after my gentlemen well. But there's something wrong about the times. It's what they call the slump, Mr. Robinson."

"Yes," said Bill. "They always call it that. However, we won't bother now. It's the price you told me, isn't it?"

✓ "Well, Mr. Robinson, for you . . ."

Bill winked, unbeknown to his friend. He winked what was called in my youth the other eye;

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that is, the eye nearest to Mrs. Cramp and furthest from the Hedger.

“That’s all right,” he said again, meaning, “We’ll split it.”

“You don’t mind five guineas a week?” he asked, turning to Wilfred.

Mrs. Cramp swallowed a gasp.

“N . . . n . . . no,” said poor Wilfred. He did mind. Not that he cared much about money, but after all, Bill himself had spoken about four pounds.

“Very well—five guineas a week,” said Bill heartily.

“Oh, thank you, sir!” said Mrs. Cramp.

Bill had already made up his mind that he was not going to take it out in small amounts, but that the good lady should give him his little lump five weeks ahead when next he saw her, and they should call it square.

“I know this place, Willy,” he said to Straddle. “You couldn’t have a more comfortable bedroom” (he led the way to it), “and the bathroom’s just off it. It’s large. That makes a difference, I think? And your water’s always really hot, isn’t it, Mrs. Cramp? And you look out on to that little garden. I had a friend here for years—gone to South Africa. Heard from him, Mrs. Cramp?”

Mrs. Cramp had not, and stood in awe of Mr. Robinson’s assurance. The last time she had seen

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her former lodger with Mr. Robinson there had been a scene. Mr. Robinson had been told things. He had been asked by Mrs. Cramp to refund his acquaintance's defalcations, and had stoutly refused: "Was he the keeper of these half-bred Colonials?" he had indignantly asked. Mrs. Cramp ought to be grateful to have had her three months' let through him! and Mrs. Cramp had wept.

"Well, that's all right," said Bill. "Suits you, Willy, doesn't it?"

"Yes . . ." said Wilfred, ". . . I suppose so. Oh, it's all right! . . . Shall we go and fetch my things?"

"Oh no, *they*'ll see to that. *You*'ll see to that, won't you, Mrs. Cramp? Got the cloakroom ticket?"

Wilfred handed it over.

"He's left his things at the station. You might get a messenger and a cab. You'll be in to sleep, won't you, Willy? We'll dine together, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, of course," said the Hedge eagerly. I am sorry to say that the Hedge was in his heart of hearts grateful to the Horse. Or the Hedger to the Horseman, if you prefer the full titles.

"Right-o, then!" And Bill stretched his arms comfortably, yawning, showing excellent teeth; said "Ta-ta!" to Mrs. Cramp, who very nearly curtsied, she was so much moved, and went out

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again in front of his friend, not putting on his hat—he had no need to, for he had not taken it off during the interview. He looked at his watch.

“And now, my dear,” he said, “it’s time to drink.”

“Surely they aren’t open yet,” said Wilfred, who, remember, was from Northumberland, and to whom London had been hitherto only an occasional glimpse. Bill laughed merrily but too loudly.

“They’re always open where I come from!” he said.

He hailed a taxi, and told the man to drive to the Pillbox.

“You know the Pillbox?” said Bill as they drove.

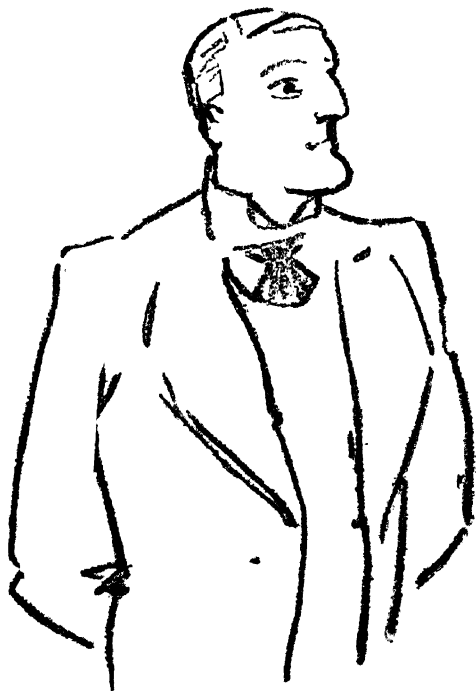
Wilfred shook his head. The name meant nothing to him.

“Oh, well, I’ll see you get put up. I’ll put you up myself. Everybody belongs to the Pillbox. Piggy, for instance.”

“Yes, but then you know everybody and I don’t.”

“Never mind, you will.”

The Pillbox is about two hundred yards off Park Lane. It is one of a number of converted houses in an old mews. Its former owner, from whom Mr. Speider, the founder, had bought the house, was also converted. Three years before his bankruptcy he had followed the present Chorepiscopus



Piggy-for-instance, of the Pill Box Club,
in the very act of knowing everybody.

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Daniel from the established church into the Neon Ekklesiasticon, and the fine private chapel he had built was now the gathering place of the Pills.

As the friends taxied up there from Westminster, side by side, in silence, Bill revolved in his mind how much that old screw Cunnington would let his Corot go for, and how much he himself could get another man to offer for it, and whether it would be safer to buy in his own name (without money) or make the introduction and take the commission. He would have particular pleasure in chiselling Cunnington, for of all the men of lineage and great wealth whom Bill knew—and he knew too many—he hated old Cunnington the most, though he was not a man much given to hatred. But old Cunnington was one of those who had most made him feel the social gulf between them. Bill had a good thick skin, but on one or two occasions old Cunnington had got through it. Therefore would Bill be indeed delighted to get that Corot too cheap; and after all old Cunnington was a fool. He, Bill, could get Joseph to run the picture down to old Cunnington, and then they would go shares.

Such thoughts illuminated the immortal soul of Bill as they bowled past the Palace up Constitution Hill, and through the merry-go-round into Park Lane. But his companion's thoughts were other.

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Wilfred was wondering how on earth he should face that brilliant world where Bill knocked about like a bull in a china shop, breaking things plentifully and never hurting himself at all.

Plenty of people knew the name of Guthrie. Many had heard the name of John Scott. Many more were coming to hear it every day, for John Scott's last visit to England had got into the papers, and the men who wrote Society Columns (as they are so beautifully called) in the newspapers had made him into a story. Since the last Sunday papers John Scott's name had printed itself on to the heart of half a dozen mothers in Mayfair with daughters to marry, and half a hundred men about town who wanted to borrow money. And every one of the social paragraphists (as they are so beautifully called) had dragged in Wilfred's name alongside his uncle's. No one had actually printed the word "heir," but they printed a good deal else; for instance (casually) that John Scott had never married: (chattingly) that John Scott had had only one sister, a Mrs. Straddle, and that her son was the only son—and so on—all the little intimacies which make our Press the dignified thing it is, a model to all Europe. One of these authorities even said that Wilfred Straddle could drink his bottle and a half like a man; that he had seen him do it. And another said he was a Dark Horse. No less than three had begun with the words "I ran across

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Wilfred Straddle in the Park," and had got into trouble with their masters for the coincidence.

Wilfred, as the taxi sped up north, was only vaguely aware of these things. He had bought one such paper that very day and had been annoyed. His uncle, he was glad to know, never bothered about English papers at all. They told him nothing of what he wanted to know while he was in England, and he could get all he wanted to know daily by telephone from across the Atlantic.

Wilfred Straddle was still in a fog of surmise as to what the plunge would be like when he got to know all these new people (he was dreadfully sure that Bill would thrust him into the turmoil of them, and yet he was half looking forward to the new experience) when the taxi stopped outside the Pillbox in the mews not far from Park Lane.

They got out. Wilfred paid the cab, and they went in.

He found himself in a room of a sort he had never seen before. It was long, rather narrow, but as high as two stories of an ordinary house. Where the ceiling of the first floor would have come there was a balcony running half-way round, reached by a fine carved open staircase in dark wood. The whole place was panelled, and great timbers made up the roof. It was so cunningly done (by Orpingtons, who are the best in Europe at that sort of thing) that one might have taken it for a medieval

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hall of some sort. It was the old chapel, converted again, and housing a long bar.

At the end of this main room a door stood open, through which Straddle could see tables set out. He presumed there were card-rooms also somewhere beyond, and he was right. But this first main room, which was so striking to the eye, was used for the main purpose of a main room in such places as the Pillbox; that is, for drinking.

You might have thought, therefore, that Bill and Willy would have begun by taking a drink. But against this there was a good reason, which was that for the moment Bill had hardly any money on him and very much wanted to keep what little he had. Until Willy should be elected it would be Bill who would have had to stand the drinks. Moreover, he told Willy in a very low tone which no one could hear, that the etiquette of the Pillbox only allowed strangers to be brought in when they were in the very act of election, and that it was not the rule of the place that they should ask for anything or pay anything until that formality had been gone through.

Now election of any Gentleman or Lady to the Pillbox is curiously simple, considering the wealth of some few, the standing of many, and the varied record of many more, and the startling names of others. There is only one rule: that men candidates shall be able and likely to spend money or

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bring in those who can, and that the ladies shall be all of one kind. Membership is therefore coveted and brings some little distinction with it. The police know it to their advantage in peace and war, for in peace they levy tribute and when they raid it they get promotion. Also, between times, in plain clothes, drink. Therefore, I say, the police adore the Pillbox and so do the Chorus, the Bloods, Receivers, and other corporations who form its membership.

The routine runs thus. A member proposes the name of some man or lady, to the gentleman who looks after the place—he is not the owner, he is only the jackal of the owner: that owner being Mr. Speider, whom no one sees, though he has a room somewhere about the place. But the jackal, a worthy Englishman of the name of Worksop, takes all reasonable responsibility. It is a bit of a strain, and has given him a curious habit of shifting his eye rapidly from side to side without moving his head. That is his look-out, not yours and mine, so you shall hear no more of him, except to learn that Bill in less than half a minute had told Mr. Worksop, in too low a tone for anyone to hear them, the particulars of Wilfred's claims to the only kind of greatness people care for. And Mr. Worksop, who knew that Bill knew everybody, clinched at once. Wilfred did not yet know it, but he went out of that room after those very brief moments

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legally a member of the Pillbox, duly elected according to the statutes.

“And now,” said Bill, when they were in the street again together under the evening darkness, “let’s dine. They’ll send you your membership card to-morrow or the day after. I think they’ll elect you. I’m sure they will. Let’s have a quick one or two before we dress. I’ll come with you, and when you are dressed, we can come back to my place, and then we’ll go and dine.”

And all came to pass even as the prophet had said. The destined prey from the Hedge Club, who was so soon to be a member of another Club (no less a one than the Pillbox), drove back to Westminster, found his things, took his bath and dressed, chatting to Bill in the next room all the time, and Bill all the time smoking cheerfully one of the cigars with which he had filled his case “on the nod” as he left the Pillbox. Then they drove back to Half Moon Street, where Bill dressed—and lord! how much more superbly than Wilfred! How sharply cut was that white waistcoat, and how striking were the studs that took the place of buttons! And how even more striking was the *lapis lazuli* in the middle of the shirt.

It was Bill, of course, who decided where they should go. It was to be Garrod’s this time—going off a little but still none the worse for being half-empty. And after that they would go and see the

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Cat's Whiskers. And all those things they did, and all those things were paid for, not by Bill. And when all those things were accomplished Willy dropped Bill at Half Moon Street and went on to Westminster and sleep. The first day of his new life had been spent, not inexpensively—a great deal more than a fiver, but not quite ten.

III

THE Blackmans are real. They are a real family. They have really been wealthy and have really owned land for nearly two hundred years. The first Blackman was a City merchant who married the Lord Mayor's daughter and settled down before late middle life to be a wealthy squire in Norfolk, all among the turnips.

The second Blackman, sitting for his private borough, a gloomy little hole called Merriden—a Baronet, of course—ended up in the Peerage. The third Blackman, duly sitting where his father had sat as Lord Merriden, was a member of the Younger Pitt's first administration, and the earldom was a consolation prize when he was kicked out of the same for quite startling incompetence. The fourth Blackman, who had been in the Army as a young man, did nothing except add a good deal to what he already had. The fifth and sixth Blackmans potted in and out of the Victorian governments, took Colonial Governorships, and Directorships, and every other sort of ship. Then there were two brothers without children, and then came the present Lord Merriden, a well-preserved

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man well on in middle life. He had sat in Parliament, of course, for various constituencies which the family had been given after the sad sacrifice of Merriden in one of the Reform Bills, and then, on succeeding, lived the useful life of a country gentleman, still among the turnips: an exceedingly good shot.

The young therefore revered him and called him "Nigger" behind his back. His contemporaries and those only slightly junior to him liked him thoroughly and called him "Nigger" to his face—when they knew him well enough. He liked it. He had the intelligence to perceive that it was a pun upon the name of Blackman, and he was proud of that descent. Further, he had the face that went with it, a thin nose with a hook to it and a narrow chin. He has been rather hard hit by post-war taxes and by having to insure against the Death Duties.

So much for him. I am not so much concerned with him, here, as with his wife, Lady Merriden, and she, of course, was a Bandley.

Having said that, you will think perhaps that I am going to talk about Lady Merriden. Not at all. Not yet. We must switch off across to the Lodiham (pronounced Lotham)—of Lodiham in the South. The Lodiham are even more real than the Blackmans. There was a Lodiham who talked and thought in French in the middle of the fifteenth

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century, and who lived at Lodiham well out of the carnage. No one can tell you who came before him, but he certainly was there at Lodiham during the Wars of the Roses, and his descendants are therefore proud to say that they have been at Lodiham for several centuries more than they really have; though they have been there long enough, Heaven knows. It is a true descent, not quite from father to son, but always at least from father-in-law to son-in-law, and I am glad to say that they have done well for themselves. They have even had the pride to give their own name to the title, so that the title and the name are the same.

Oddly enough, in spite of being a great deal older than the Merridens, they are really richer, which is saying a good deal: though they have been rather hard hit by post-war taxes and having to insure against the Death Duties. Also, they are one step up. The Lodiham to-day is a little older than the Blackman of to-day. They know each other well enough and their wives know each other better still; for there is, of course, a Lady, or, as colonials would say, a Marchioness of, Lodiham.

I should add that both ladies have marriageable daughters. Lady Lodiham has two; they will have quite comfortable portions, but nothing elephantine. Lady Merriden has one daughter.

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She, I am sorry to say, will not have so much, because old Nigger is rooted and fixed in his determination to leave his son all that can be left in decency. She will not starve, poor girl, but she will do well to marry well, for time passes. Her mother has had to fight for her like a tiger.

Now that you know about these ladies we can fire away. You will find them walking gracefully enough, these two well-set-up elderly ladies—at any rate, our fathers would have called them elderly, and our fathers were truth-tellers compared with us—they were walking, I say, gracefully enough, thinking themselves a pair of goddesses, one towing a little dog, the other not. They were getting up an appetite for lunch, and Lady Merriden the far side of the team, was murmuring with downcast eyes:

“Millions, my dear! Literally millions!”

“You got that from Robinson,” said Lady Lodiham, arguing with her fingers.

“I think it’s true enough,” sighed her companion.

The thing that the Lady Merriden thought true enough was not one of the ancient doctrines of the Christian faith, nor any piece of scandal upon her own sex, but the prospects of Wilfred Straddle.

“But the man’s such a bounder!” sighed her companion, allowing some expression to break for a moment the studied nullity of her face. “I can’t

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make out why the old Duchess is always having him down at St. Bennet's."

It was not poor dear Wilfred whom she called a bounder; no one could have called him that; it was Bill. For Bill had been the informant of her companion. Bill had spread the news of Wilfred and the John Scott millions.

"I don't see what Bill's being a bounder has got to do with telling the truth. No one lies like a gentleman. Most bounders I know tell the truth, when I come to think of it. Look at the Dago."

"Yes, he tells the truth, poor dear. But then, he's a foreigner."

"Bill has been telling the truth now: as for his always being at St. Bennet's, that's Antigua."

"She's old enough to know better," said Lady Lodiham. "The Duchess is well over seventy. Antigua must be quite thirty-seven."

"Yes, it's an odd taste of Antigua's. But those things don't matter nowadays. Look at Booboo and her Sheik! Besides which, they've got to do what Antigua tells them at St. Bennet's—especially the old woman. Antigua's ridden her mother for years and the Duke's gaga."

"All right—suppose this Robinson fellow of Antigua's is telling you the truth. What does it come to?"

"It's not only Bill," insisted Lady Merriden, with the emphasis on Bill. "There was a man over

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from the States the other day. He's right in the thick of things down-town there."

"What do you mean by 'down-town'?"

"I don't know. It stands for business somehow. He knows all the people who corner or merge or whatever it is. He had all sorts of stories about this old Guthrie. It's quite certain that Wilfred Straddle, whom Bill brought to lunch at my house the other day, is his nephew, and not only that, but the only kindred he's got. His mother was a Guthrie, you know."

"I didn't know," said the Marchioness unenthusiastically.

"He has *Millions*," announced the Countess decisively, halting dead in her sauntering to solemnise the revelation.

"Who?"—the Marchioness was startled, and stopped dead also. "Not that young fellow Straddle?"

"No, no! The Uncle. Millions!"

"Dollars?"

"No. Pounds."

"I don't believe it. At least, I'd like to see them. People are always saying those things."

"After all, people in places like Wall Street or Down Town, or whatever it is, know about this sort of thing, just as they do here in the City."

Lady Merriden was right again. She had the better judgment of the two. When it came to a

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race between these two for the big stakes, *her* starting price would be short odds.

“You must bring him round to see me.”

Lady Merriden nodded. “I will. When?”

She stopped again, opened her small bag (in really good taste), brought out a tiny book, and continued: “Tuesday, tea?”

“Yum,” said Lady Lodiham, nodding.

And thus by words passing where we ourselves are not, our lives are moulded; for through that little conversation in the Park was Wilfred Straddle launched upon his wobbly way.

I think he should have been grateful to the Barnabas Bounder for the excitements that were to follow. We ought to be grateful, surely, for the downs as well as the ups. Both are movement; and all movement is fun. And Wilfred Straddle, like Ulysses, was to know many places and men, many adventures, and like Tristran, was to know, if not all joy and all sorrow, at any rate fair wads of each; for the rich mob was to mark him for its own, then, fickle as mobs are fickle, to cast him aside. You shall hear all about that, if God spares my life and reason to finish this book, and gives you the strength to read it.

IV

JOHN SCOTT'S informer—perhaps it would be more polite to say informant—had as strong a sense of duty as John Scott himself. What is more important, his sense of duty was almost as strongly attached to the getting of money as was that of John Scott himself. Therefore did this informant, whom we will call for the moment Mr. Willis, though it is only the last of the fifteen or sixteen names which he has adopted, after the modern mutable fashion, travel most assiduously day after day following the tracks of the blameless Wilfred, which were generally also the tracks of the less blameless but more solid William Robinson, and by the fast boat each week he wrote his report to New York, registering same as per orders.

In the first week there was not very much to tell. Wilfred Straddle had apparently become a member of the Pillbox. Mr. Willis, using his powerful police protection (remember, he had been recruited by the very best of the Private Agencies) became in his turn, not a member of, but a waiter at, the Pillbox.

So far there had been no rows. The informer



Mr. Willis using his powerful Police Protection.

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reported that Mr. Straddle—who was called in his correspondence “The Young Gentleman”—a just but vague appellation—drank no more than the rest, did not dance, and had not played cards—though it is true he did once toss for drinks.

So far so good. What Mr. Willis did not say, because he did not think it important, was that the Gentleman had only drunk soft drinks, though all around him were drinking hard drinks, like fishes, and we all know that fishes will have hard drinks or none.

When John Scott got that letter he sighed. He did not sigh bitterly, but he sighed sadly.

He had thought as much! After all, it was hardly to be expected that the young man could keep such a promise as that while he was moving about among other young men. And yet it planted a seed of contempt for Wilfred in the old money-lender’s closed mind. He was not used to seeing men do other than villainy or speaking other than falsehoods. He took that for granted of all the human race. But there had been something ingenuous, and, as it were, unnaturally *young* about his nephew which seemed to be part of his whole character; for ineptitude goes with innocence, though hardly with positive virtue.

John Scott sighed, I say, at getting this first epistle, but he left it at that.

Nevertheless the seed, being planted, grew. He

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cared not passionately for anything except figures—the figures of his accounts and their increase. There had never been any strong activity in his mind since early youth, save for The Game, and The Game for him was to lie in wait, to choose the right victim, to calculate the right odds (and he was hardly ever wrong), and then at the right moment, to strike. In those days, as they passed in New York, when the weather jumps about from arctic to balmy and then to arctic again, he had plenty of The Game to occupy him. Two big strokes to his credit within five days after the first letter had reached him.

The second letter had a little more meat in it. It seemed that Wilfred Guthrie Straddle was going into the world. Mr. Willis had watched him from the other side of the street going into Lodiham House. He had been driven up there in Lady Merriden's car. Mr. Willis was secure of these facts. He had got them from the chauffeur for half a crown (which appeared as five shillings in the accounts; and when you think of the difference between the value of money in New York and in London, that was fair enough).

Mr. Willis further reported that the Gentleman had gone twice in the week to another house, one which is not called Merriden House, for it is only hired, but is the house where the Merridens live in London. Wilfred had gone there to lunch, and

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four days later he had dined there. Mr. Willis had not been able to get the entry into the house, there had not been time, but one of the men serving assured him that the Young Gentleman had taken all that was offered him, as far as he knew. And why not? Also the Young Gentleman had gone twice to the play. Off went that second letter. It received in acknowledgment the stipulated payment, but no addition thereto.

Then Mr. Willis got into the Hotel Cræsus one night. Under the usual police protection he had been given a nice little table close to one of the big pillars near the door. He had seen the Young Gentleman surrounded by plenty of gaiety; at that table Mr. Willis saw one, and he thought at least two, of the ladies in the chorus of the play where he had already spotted the Gentleman. They were certainly all enjoying themselves, particularly the Young Gentleman's friend, Mr. Robinson. And, as for half a dozen people there appeared in procession quite ten bottles of champagne, in freezing pails (of the sort that leave the wine tepid), Mr. Willis thought he was justified in saying that they had been going it something awful, but he lied when he said that the Young Gentleman drank with the best of them.

That same evening there had been a scuffle, and someone fell downstairs. It was not poor Wilfred. Mr. Willis could not see who it was, because there

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was a crowd between him and the disturbance, but he thought that it probably might be the Young Gentleman; so it went down to the Young Gentleman's credit.

The acknowledgment of *that* letter carried with it an extra order for one pound sterling (\$4.94 at the current exchange), which Mr. Willis pouched with no little satisfaction. He had now discovered what drew gate-money, and in his next letter he let himself go.

They were on into May, and the season had fairly begun. The Young Gentleman was everywhere—that last bit of news was fairly true. What was less true—less and less true with each succeeding letter—was the description of riotous living on the part of the Young Gentleman.

One particularly vivid passage drew an extra order for forty shillings, and a postscript asking for particular details. In the next week (which was the middle of May) Mr. Willis had not the good fortune to be present in person at the big bachelor dinner which was given to young Bobby Curll in condolence on his coming marriage, but Mr. Willis could tell well enough what had happened, without being actually present, for the fun was enormous and the casualties remarkable. He counted seven helped out, two actually carried out to cabs, and a multitude getting into cabs with more or less difficulty. It had been a night: and

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Mr. Willis loitering in the street outside, made no doubt at all that one of the casualties had been the Young Gentleman. The thing was thoroughly described, and should be worth at least an extra tip of three quid. He even hoped for five.

To his surprise, what he got was a sharp cable on which he could draw his week's stipend and no more, and with it came the too peremptory information that nothing more would be required of him.

John Scott was having enough of it. The young fellow was a wastrel. He was worse than a wastrel, he was a liar. He was worse than a liar, because during these very weeks he had written twice in dutiful tones to his patron and uncle assuring him that the pledge had been kept: saying he would not dwell upon that, because it was not really important—it was no sacrifice; telling John Scott cheerfully enough how he passed his life in London now that he was getting to know people; giving unimportant information such as that he never could get to play billiards properly, and that, although everybody played bridge and he had tried to learn, cards bored him. He also gave information on the weather. He told John Scott where his rooms were in Westminster, he spoke of that ancient and renowned club Doulton's which he had got into at once by a special favour under Rule 6. He sincerely hoped his uncle would soon

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be coming over again. And so on: but in all this recital he had made one bad mistake, he said nothing of the Pillbox.

I can hardly blame him. After all, the Pillbox was hardly a club, and his uncle would never understand *what* it was. If John Scott had heard of it at all he would only have an idea of something rowdy and get a false impression.

All that while, mind you, young Straddle had never touched any drink stronger than a tomato cocktail: what is more remarkable, had never wanted to. Blessed are they who can keep their word without a struggle! At least, blessed, I suppose, in heaven. But not on this earth. For doing your duty on this earth in any form, from punctuality to patriotism, only brings disaster.

John Scott had briefly answered his nephew's letters. The lack of any affection in these answers, the lack of even interest, the young man took for granted; for in the eyes of the young the old are already half dead and certainly stuffed with straw. But even as he wrote those brief answers, that part of John Scott's isolated soul which had half-awakened under the effect of kinship, had seared over again and left him more tightly closed in than ever. The man had wrestled in prayer to discover whether the young hypocrite and ingrate and ne'er-do-weel should be warned. He had received advice from Heaven that warning at such

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long range would be wasted. He had **thought** deeply and anxiously as to whether his duty to his Maker demanded that the allowance should be cut down to a pittance. But his nightly chapter of the Bible having come round to the destruction of Sodom or Nineveh or what not, and the promise that the city should be spared if it held even a handful of just men, made him hold his hand.

Not often was John Scott in two minds. He did not waver once in a hundred times after thinking out any problem, large or small. But now he was pulled contrariwise. More and more did it seem to him his duty to cast the hopeless fellow off for ever. It was only feeding the fires of hell to continue his support. Why should he not condemn the castaway for ever and leave him to cadge and starve? Then again, some text in the Good Book would check his determination.

John Scott had fallen into a permanent mood of smouldering anger. The heat was growing dangerous, but did not burst into flame, and the absence of further ill news after he had shut down the disappointed Mr. Willis lulled him to delay. It is always easier, even for Calvinists, to do nothing.

Yet one day when a letter had come from Wilfred particularly anodyne and palely virtuous, John Scott had stood on the point of action. He had actually drafted a letter to his agents in London and another to Wilfred himself, telling of his

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anger and fixing a time-limit after which the allowance should cease. But even in so critical a moment he stumbled upon a text that condemns the judging of any man unheard. He redrafted his letter into another form. In this new draft he suggested that Wilfred should come and see him in New York. There the painful thing should be thrashed out and some decision taken, but at least it could not be a reproach against him that he had cut the young fellow off without a plea.

That letter was never posted. The date was never filled in. For Fate, throwing her weight about at random, upset his apple-cart and dragged the unfortunate Puritan back to England—and to unexpected things. For what Fate did was this:

There is at the Pillbox, as everybody knows, a function, not infrequently recurring but irregular in date, known as Ladies' Night. The ladies who adorn these functions are the sort for whom such functions are designed, the friends and guests of those other ladies who are a permanent furniture of the Pillbox.

Willy Straddle hated the prospect of such things. He was tired even of sitting up late and dining at nine in the houses of the rich people who had begun to take him up; he was horrified at the prospect of a true Bohemian hurly-burly, racketing from eleven till four, in the teeth of the Law.

But he yielded. Bill was going, of course, and

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what Bill wanted, went. So Wilfred found himself that fatal midnight in the glare and noise of the Pillbox and suffering increasing agony as the fun surged higher. Every man is bored who looks on at the overdrinking of others, himself dead sober. Most men who have some experience of reasonable company are bored by the gutter, and excruciatingly so by the gutter queens going it blind.

Willy, before it was half-past two, was longing to get away, dodging about aimlessly on the edges of a whirlpool of dancing and swaying figures; but, in part from loyalty, in part from hesitation, he would not leave Bill—for it was one of those many nights on which Bill was penniless.

He had borrowed the usual fiver—it had gone like a paper bag in a blast furnace—and manful as he was in meeting all challenges from the Demon, Bill was showing signs of excess. He was grown mottled and sweaty, and he stumbled in his speech. He had come up unsteadily to Willy for new supplies, and his condition confirmed the loyalty of the Hedgers—for Hedgers are more often loyal than not. No—Willy could not bear to leave Bill without aid. He saw what would happen. He would have at last to see Bill home. Loyalty demanded it. But loyalty, like every virtue, was going to impose its damnable price.

Then, as he was approaching his friend to per-

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suade him to go off, even as he was trying to get hold of the unsteady figure and pilot it back through the doors, he found himself in the middle of a battle royal.

Someone had said something—or Bill thought they had. There was a smack like a pistol shot, then a violent blow, and a man knocked down against the corner of a table and bleeding like a pig; then sides taken and uproar all round. Willy himself, of all men, found himself lashing out with a clenched fist at the end of his free unwarlike arm, giving and receiving blows. One eye of his was swelling and closing. His coat was torn, his collar had been wrenched off, and there was blood all down his shirt-front.

With the arm that was not fighting he still clutched hold of Bill. But he was stunned and bewildered, for Bill's powerful muscles were at work, in spite of the drink, milling away against several enemies and not a few friends.

On all this uproar came a much louder climax. Men yelling at the doors, the entry of the police, the spies among the dancers slinking out, protests, arrests, struggles, sharp wrestlings, the roar of a big engine and the noise of heavy wheels.

Willy, still lashing out blindly, but torn from his Bill, found himself at last lying back half-conscious in a sort of dark cupboard wherein he was being jolted at top speed through the empty



Someone had said something.

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streets. From other corners of that same vehicle, corners as dark as his own, partitioned off like his own, came groans, sudden violent oaths, and one shrill voice shrieking monotonously "Let me out!"—until it was suddenly silenced.

The drive did not last five minutes. The police stations are conveniently near at hand to those points in London which require them most. He spent the last hour of darkness hardly knowing whether he was in this world or not, dazed, bewildered, passing from a stunned sleep to a stunned half-wakefulness on a hard plank bed.

With the morning came the commonplace ending of affairs like these. Boys would be boys. The worthy magistrate, who was almost too old to be true, was content with fines. Bill, fully recovered, not only gave, as was his custom, a name other than his own, but saw to it, knowing all the ropes, that there should be nothing in the papers. For his activities on that great occasion he was piously and fully rewarded, I am glad to say, by Mr. Speider. Mr. Speider found ways and means of cancelling all consequences: and the Pillbox, the scene of the battle, returned within twenty-four hours to its accustomed round, of young bloods, receivers, special ladies, touts' spies, nobblers and all the rest.

Not a word in any of the papers. It is one of the finest of our national traditions, is this selection

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between what may be told in print to the uncouth masses, and what may not; and such of the Pillboxians as had to be protected (though only a small minority) were enough to save the Pillboxian toughs and jail-birds and sharpers and the rest who, but for their wealthier young companions, would certainly have been juggled.

Not a word in the papers. Not in *our* papers, at least. But in New York, plenty of words.

One of the brightest of those who report the glories of our half of the English-speaking life to the cousins beyond the Atlantic had got his story off. *He* knew what they wanted in New York with the coffee and rolls and cereals—and he fed it them good and hot.

V

YOU may be getting tired of people with titles and lineage and wealth, particularly as you know even better than I do (and that is saying a good deal) that these three things, wealth and lineage and titles, are not in England directly connected one with another.

You may think that the poor hard-driven writer of this book is a mere boob for making his titled women rich women into the bargain, and giving their husbands at any rate some long descent. To which I answer that it is my business to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And in the case of my Lady Merriden, and still more in the case of my Lady Lodiham (pronounced Lotham), the thing is as true as Gospel.

Now by way of refreshing you with a new type, let me bring in something which is titled indeed, but on a different set of rails. Let me talk to you about Joan Sable.

To begin with, Joan Sable has no title, but her mother has, or at any rate had. For her mother—a woman of some energy, bad judgment, and rather sour temper—is called Lady Penelope Caryll.

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If Joan was called Sable, why was her mother called Caryll? Lady Penelope Sable had borne to Henry Sable, Esquire (now long deceased), one child only, and that a daughter, and had christened her Joan. Lady Penelope's marriage had been a love-match of the most grossly romantic sort. You would not believe it to see her now, but it is astonishing what twenty-odd years will do.

Lady Penelope Sable, Redford by birth, had of her own, by way of fortune, nothing. She was the only sister of an only brother, and that brother, Lord Redford, had, as is so often the case, a good deal less than nothing. He and his father had broken the entail between them. The Bank had idiotically given him credit in spite of that. I very much doubt whether the insurances when he passes from this world to eternal glory will meet the bill. For, unbeknownst to the Bank, he has borrowed lavishly in other directions.

Lady Penelope, having thus discovered in a short fifty months the full value and meaning of a romantic marriage with a younger son who had been a barber's block, good-natured, and of her own sort and set, put her helm over and took life immediately from another angle.

Within six months (little Joan not yet able to talk) she had married Mr. Lewis Caryll, a man with a big house in Portland Place.

She knew all about him. She had fully informed

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herself upon him. He was a certain Louis Bramovitz, or Brahm, who, before being Louis, had been Leo, and before being Leo had been Ludwig, and before being Ludwig had been something else. He had made his stuff rapidly, before the Flood. He had looked about him for a reasonable name to carry on with when he left the City and went West. His research discovered that Caryll was an ancient Sussex name, gone under in fine dramatic fashion long ago. He piously reclaimed it from oblivion, and wore it proudly before the world. He was twenty-five years older than Lady Penelope. He had made her an excellent husband. They had no children—which was just as well—and then, a year or two before Joan came out, he was gathered to his fathers (pedlars from Glosz, in Bessarabia—if that's the way to spell it).

Lady Penelope was left the house in Cumberland Place, a sufficiently large income, and this one child, on whom her stepfather had settled a small income for maintenance, or rather, pin-money—three hundred a year, solid, in Gilt-Edged.

Now, three hundred a year may sound nothing to you—in which case you are lucky. It certainly seemed nothing to Lady Penelope, in spite of her early experiences. But it is all but free of tax: it gives you, even after you have paid your little tax, six pounds a week, and six pounds a week will feed and clothe and lodge a young woman (or an old one

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fort hat matter) until the next crash in our currency—for after that happens I cannot guarantee anything.

Lady Penelope's own experiences in her youth, and her rapidly acquired experience of the world at large, had made her determined on one thing—that Joan should marry well: by which she meant reasonably good companionship and an unreasonable amount of money.

She had ample wherewith to run Joan as long as they lived together; but she was not eager for a string of years to be spent at home with a daughter turning into an old maid and always at her elbow. Still, so long as Joan was under her roof she should have all a young woman could possibly want. Only Lady Penelope was certainly not going to diminish her own income. She wanted every penny of it. She knew, indeed, that if Joan's future husband was too firm (and she rather dreaded that) he might insist on settlements. She would have to fight it. She might have to give way. But she would give way as little as possible. And anyhow, the great thing was to get Joan off her hands in the fashion scheduled.

But Joan Sable had developed early in her teens a character of the sort called pig-headed, or inflexible, according to the mood of the baptizer. At any rate, call it a good or a bad name, it was the strength that digs its forehoofs in and will not budge. Now, at twenty-one, she always knew

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exactly what she wanted. What she did not want she did not care for in the least, but what she did want she wanted with all her heart and all her soul and all her strength—and got it. She did not owe this to her father; the iron had jumped two generations. She got it from a grandmother from whom she had also got too long a face, too strong a chin, too masculine a mouth, set in a straight line, and fine dark tangled hair.

Now Lady Penelope had long ago discovered that whatever else she could do, she could not marry Joan off. Joan would marry herself, where she herself wanted to, or not at all. No one would do that for her, nor any other thing of any importance whatsoever. And Joan was quite capable of going off and living on her three hundred a year, with two small rooms in one of the new rabbit warrens, if her mother pushed her too far; and her mother was well aware of that danger, and lived in some dread of it.

So much for Joan, whom I now ask you to meet in her mother's drawing-room, giving tea to half a dozen people not a week after the great Pillbox drama, of which, being of the governing classes, she had heard full details, but of which the papers had said not a word—on this side of the Atlantic.

They were all talking, of course, of the Pillbox. And talking of the Battle of the Pillbox, they touched upon Willy and Bill.

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Matheson was saying that Bill had behaved very well: by which he meant that Bill had got out of it with great skill and courage. A jolly young man whom Joan called Bimbo, a great crony of hers, spoke with some authority, because he was a Pillboxian himself, although he had not been thrown out or lagged upon the famous night, simply because he had not been there. However, he had been back since and had heard all about it. He did not seem so keen on Bill as Matheson was, but he spoke very well of Willy.

"Straddle really did behave well," he said. "He stuck to Bill and did all he could to get him away. It was through Bill he got into that bad turn-up at the end. Bill rallied round, of course, and saw to Willy next morning. He only lost touch with him by accident during the scuffle."

Bimbo ventured the opinion that it was all the finer of Willy to have stuck to his friend, and to have been wounded in the battle, because he himself never touched anything.

"How do you mean, Bimbo?" said Joan.

"Well, he's dined at this house," said Bimbo, "more than once. Didn't you notice that he never touches anything?"

"No, I didn't," said Joan. "I don't notice these things except when they touch too much, and then it's disgusting."

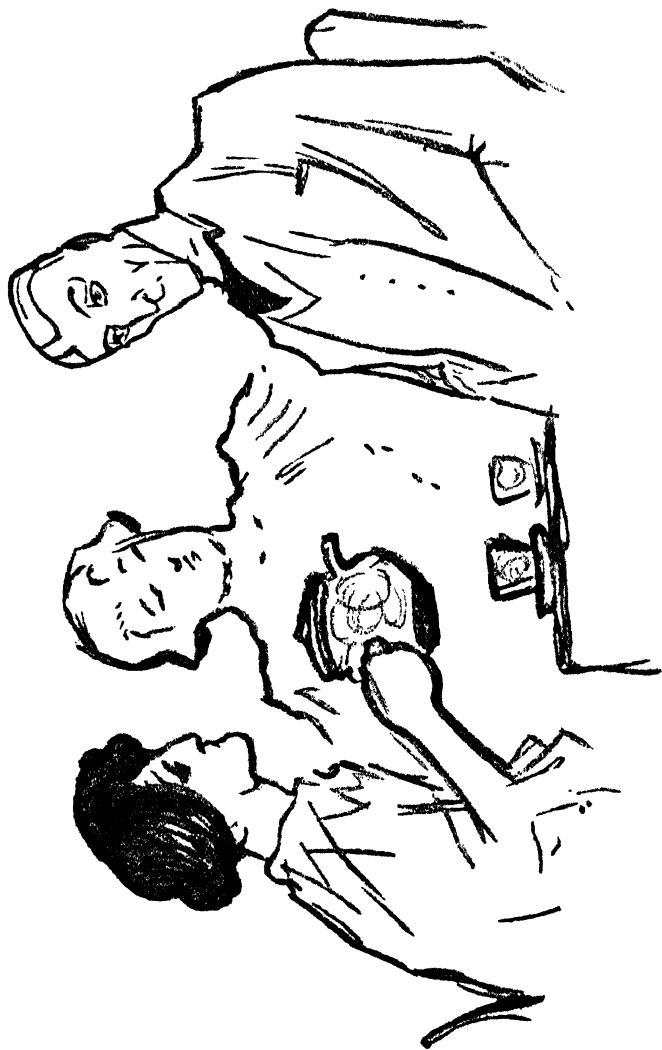
Mrs. Matheson, the Patroness and paymistress and

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creator of the Modern Maternity League, said that Willy was a hard-boiled egg. There he was, with plenty of money, yet as mean as Shylock! Rolling in it, with that fabulous uncle of his, and yet packing himself into a stuffy pair of rooms in a back street in Westminster. It is true that when Mrs. Matheson had asked Wilfred to come and hear her speak at the M.M.L. his eyes had betrayed terror, and he had edged off; thereby making an enemy; for she had meant to touch him for fifty, and still more to rope him into her gang. But she needn't have been so spiteful.

A Man from the American Embassy, who had said nothing for some time, spoke up now on Willy's side. He did not believe John Scott was giving his nephew any too much. John Scott was not the man to do that. He was not the man to think that young fellows should have big allowances. If anyone was a hard-boiled egg in the business, it was John Scott himself and not poor Willy Straddle. The American took some time to explain that he liked Willy Straddle, and all the men agreed warmly. So Mrs. Matheson of the M.M.L. got more vicious than ever, laying her ears right back and preparing to lash out with both heels.

Lady Penelope was more enthusiastic. She spoke of Willy with warm affection as though she had met him at least three times, instead of only twice.



. . . and a man from the American Embassy who had said nothing. . . .

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Joan said nothing, but she was taking it all in. She was discovering something interesting about this colourless young fellow who had sat next to her once and opposite her once in that same house of her mother's, but of whom she had noticed hitherto only that he was well-bred but a good deal too shy.

Then Bimbo introduced some real news: quite false, like nearly all such rumours.

“Old Guthrie has made over a big wad of it to Willy to escape Death Duties over here. Not all of it, but all the English stuff.” There wasn't any English stuff, but they were none the wiser. After all, every American millionaire who knew England would have the sense to lock his stuff up here, wouldn't he? England was the only safe place left in the world.

Mrs. Matheson said it would do the lad no good, and the Man from the American Embassy turned right about and praised John Scott's shrewdness. If he had acted with *that* motive it was just like him.

Whereupon there fell a silence upon them all as they meditated in their several ways on Mammon: all except Joan, who still meditated on Wilfred—and after that they began to break up.

It was nearly seven, and Lady Penelope wanted to talk to Joan before they dressed.

“Joan,” she began, when they were alone together at last. “Joan, my dear child”—an unusual form of address, and too solemn. But

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Joan was not looking her way. Joan was looking steadily out into Portland Place.

“No, Mamma,” she said, “it’s no good.”

She did not say it undutifully. She never made scenes.

“But you were glad to hear them speaking well of him, Joan—you know you were,” Lady Penelope said—gently but reproachfully; and even, for a woman of her character, a little timidly. She was chary of battling with Joan. For she knew who would win.

“Yes, Mamma. You know I like him well enough. I like all my friends,” she added, “even when they are only acquaintances. But I never saw anything in him.”

“Everybody else does,” snapped her mother sharply.

“No, they don’t, Mamma,” answered the younger generation, with the courtesy for which it is famous. “They believe he is going to have all that money, and that’s all they are thinking of. But *I* won’t have anything to say to that.”

“My dear, you don’t *mind* the money?”

“Of course not! That’s not the point. The point is, I am not going to be set on to money like a terrier.”

“Well,” sighed Lady Penelope, “there’s no necessity, and there’s no hurry. But you ought to be reasonable, Joan.”

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“Reasonable?” shouted Joan, turning round. “Why, he hasn’t even come within a hundred miles of saying anything! I don’t think it has crossed his mind—why should it? It certainly hasn’t crossed mine—and if you want it to, I won’t!”

“I won’t” is a strong phrase, and Joan was glad to have used it. She used it again, but more emphatically.

“I won’t,” she said. “I won’t! I won’t! I won’t!”

And that was that.

* * * * *

What had happened to John Scott Guthrie over there in New York was this. He had for all those last days after he had stopped the letters from his informant, meditated profoundly upon the moral problem before him as ever any great leader in an issue of war whereon should hang the glory or death of a nation. For to John Scott moral issues were of that magnitude. They savoured of eternity—and the fortunes of the Guthrie blood, too, for that matter, were of a similar magnitude. He owed it to his Creator to cease provisioning folly and waste and bad faith and sin. He owed it to his blood to continue to support a Guthrie; but his first compulsion was the more intense. The latter grew weaker as he meditated evening after evening upon what decision he should make.



Joan won't, she won't, she won't.

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To those who do not understand such moods it will read like insanity, but to those who do understand such moods, having seen them in others or even perhaps experienced them within the depths of their own souls, it will be explicable enough. These Servants of the Most High become one with what they serve. They act as the agents of the immutable decrees of God, and become, in their own selves, an active part of destiny.

Yet had the balance not yet kicked the beam; yet was the thing still by some small margin unconcluded, though nearly concluded, when there struck and exploded in the very inmost of his being a huge shell. It was a column in his morning paper next day, a vulgar flaring paragraph of gossip, which roared out in headlines the whole abomination of the Pillbox affair.

LONDON SOCIALITES HELD FOR RAZZLE

BLUE BLOOD STAINS FINE LINEN PURPLE

COLLEGE BOYS AND BROADS

JOHN SCOTT'S BABY PASSES

NIGHT IN CELLS

HE LOOKED ON THE WINE WHEN IT WAS RED

SO WAS HIS NOSE

BUT HIS EYE WAS OF SABLE HUE

CLUBMEN AND THE KADI

“DON'T LET UNCLE KNOW”

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Below the column opened in breezy style:

Young Wilfred G. Straddle—the middle name's Guthrie—heir to the Guthrie Millions and John Scott's sister's boy, was in a fracas this morning bright an' early. As two was striking from the old Church tower the famous Pill Box Club was raided by London's police. . . . Old man Guthrie had a sister, etc.

He nerved himself to read it through to the end: the toughs, the Young Bloods, the ladies—their names and occupations—but only one name stood out in flames: the name "Guthrie."

John Scott was a man who could hardly be said to read the papers save for their financial telegrams, and even these but rarely, for he had better information than that. But the paper was put beside his breakfast every morning. He could not miss the headlines, and his eyes could not miss in those odious headlines his very own name, searing his eyes.

In every other occasion of his life John Scott had thought out his problem as rapidly as full judgment would allow, and having thought it out, had decided. In this one only did he hesitate, and now that the final blow had fallen he did not so much hesitate.

All through that morning during his office hours he moved through his daily work stunned, yet he accomplished it. Then the first of his acts was to look up the week's sailings for England. There was

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a fairly fast German boat three days hence that touched at Southampton. He had his secretary take a reservation under the name of Malcolm and cable to the Superb in London and keep a suite.

That night he prayed at his bedside, as he always did—but not for guidance. He needed no more.

There stood the plain commandment that the sinner must not be judged unheard; he must be judged face to face. John Scott was off to do justice.

Then, as always, before attempting sleep (and sleep would always come to him, even on such a night as this, and even at his age) he opened his Bible, and read his chapter. He had reached Numbers XXVI, and he ploughed on. The words passed before him mechanically, verse after verse.

The noble and sonorous English, the very Voice of Omnipotence and Eternity, sank into his soul. Yet for the first time in his life did he not complete the chapter that night. He had come to the climax, the thirty-ninth verse in all its majesty: “The children of Upham were the Uphamites, and the children of Shufham were the Shufhamites.” He could read no further. He shut the book reverently, as if it were the Tabernacle of the Sacrament—it was the only Sacrament he knew.

He bowed his head down upon his clasped hands; then with an effort he rose, and lay down for the night.

* * * * *

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During that same day, even while the unsquared Press of New York had given tongue, Bill, in London, had, as we know, squared the Press.

By the way, it is possible that not all of you hundreds of thousands who are reading this random chronicle will have intimate acquaintance with the way in which the Press is squared. I owe you an apology: I mean I should have said the way in which things are kept out of the papers. It is an interesting and peculiar procedure and well worth the acquaintance of us all, because we are all citizens, and nearly all of us readers of newspapers. It is always pleasant to know how one is governed.

It was very early the next morning—only half-past eight—with the Magistrates' courts not yet open. The prisoners, out of their cells, were still at the police station.

In the little inner room at the Pillbox, the private den of Mr. Worksop, discreetly vacated at that hour, William Robinson sat back in a low lounge chair with his feet well up on a higher one, and at his elbow on a neat little oak table stood a complicated and excellent drink. In his mouth was the eternal cigar. He had gone home in the interval, got a couple of hours' sleep (which was all he wanted), refreshed himself with a bath, put on morning clothes, and was as splendid as ever.

On the other side of the little oak table, sunk into another low lounge chair, also sipping a similar but



The silently smiling Prosser.

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simpler drink, also with his feet up on a higher chair, but with his legs not cocked at quite so confident an angle as Robinson's, sat Harry Prosser, the man whom everybody uses—old Purling's secretary and all that. Dolly's brother too, by the way, and for that matter, Stellworth's cousin—but only a poor relation. A useful one, however, and all over the place. Such men are early risers, and Harry had got Bill Robinson's telephone call.

So there you have the scene laid for the great constitutional issue, the great example of our governing machinery, and the rest of it. Prosser on one side of the table and Robinson on the other, each with his drink.

Prosser was looking at his watch at the moment when we break in to overlook the couple thus. He was finishing his glass, and saying :

“So Sir John thinks it had better not get into the papers?”

“That's right,” said Bill. He jumped up and stood over the amused Prosser. “I rang him up half an hour ago, and explained things. What with young Garry being there and all that. And it isn't only young Garry having been there, but that Wooley girl, the one they call Jay: the Muzzy sister. You remember Sir John and the Wooley girl? At first he began cursing and swearing at being rung up, but of course, when the old boy heard *that* he woke up and tumbled over himself.”

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“Of course,” said Harry, now on his feet also and picking up his hat. “I’ll get round to him and settle it.”

With that he was gone, and the thing was accomplished. And that, my children, is the way in which we are governed. And a very good way too. So down with all dictators.

Bill, royally immaculate, without a bruise, had the morning before him to do his work, and did it well. After he had settled with Prosser he had to close sundry other mouths, and then he went off to the Court.

He had on him the price of freedom (though no one knows whence he had got it), the wherewithal for Wilfred’s fine; he had stood by while the Beak read poor Willy a lecture under the paternal eye of his policeman. Bill had taken that hero and his black eye home to Westminster and put him safely to bed, making a private appointment for later in the week, for Friday—it would be the 29th June. Till then Wilfred had better lie low, and make no public appearances.

Wilfred’s letters were sent on from Doulton’s Club, such as did not reach him directly at his lodgings. He had slept from exhaustion, but in the afternoon had taken a cup of tea from the hands of Mrs. Cramp, and now marked, with his one working eye, the big pile of letters on his bed.

There was the usual increasing batch of invita-



. . . that hero, and his black eye. . . .

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tions, and one dated the morning of the 22nd, that pleasing formal slip from the Bank to tell him that the second five hundred pounds had been paid in.

He was greatly relieved. That first quarter had been a heavy one. He had had no idea what a lot living in London would cost—life as he had lived it. Then he had made himself comfortable with certain additions to the furniture of his lodgings, and there had been subscriptions and entrance fees not only to Doulton's Club, but to that other one which everybody told him he must join though he needn't go near it, and into which he had come so smartly by favour and under Rule 6.

There had been lots of clothes, of course, for which, on Bill's advice, he had paid cash to Bill's tailor.

It was just living: not only his living, but the living of others. There had also been that rather expensive process, entertaining; and one night, forced to play, he had lost a packet.

Yes, he was glad to hear of that new five hundred. There was very little left of the old one, and by the time he had met immediate bills he would not have a balance of much more than three hundred left. However, with that one could carry on.

The season would soon be ending. Picking and choosing among the hospitalities offered him for the summer, he might spend a good deal of it on somebody's boat, and then at this or that country house.

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He might even go abroad—which he had heard vaguely (and wrongly) was a way to save. Bill would tell him all about that. He waited patiently alone, curing his eye. The doctor alone was ten guineas and an expert painter at the beginning was five, and there were frills. He was glad when the day came round on which he was to meet Bill again for the first time since the great Pillbox night and the subsequent morning in which his friend had tended him.

He rang up to find if Bill would be free for lunch. Finding he was, he called. Bill greeted him warmly.

“Where shall we lunch?” asked Bill.

Wilfred, who was beginning to get a little anxious about his balance, and knew by this time where the expense of the lunch would fall, hesitated.

“I’ll take you to Parrot’s,” said Bill cheerily. “You’ve never been there, and you ought to try it. You’re my guest this time, you know?”

“Oh . . . I say . . .” protested Wilfred, with a sudden inward joy.

“Well, it’s high time, isn’t it?”

In his heart Wilfred agreed. He murmured something.

“Come along, we’ll be off,” said the other.

Certainly they lunched very well, and as they did so Bill was glad to hear from his guest all the news about his coming movements. He coached

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him on the various country houses he was to visit; how to deal with each; passed good rapid judgments not only on the various hostesses, but on their various daughters, warning Wilfred specially carefully against Melisande (what a name!) and also against the one they called Jackie. The first he said was poisonous, the second only lousy—but both dangerous. However, he had praised Cherry, and was impartial on the disputed matter of the Cake Walker. Lots of go, and good company, but given to borrowing. All this Wilfred followed with the eagerness of an explorer who would be forearmed against the terrors of the jungle.

When they brought the coffee Bill changed the conversation. Without altering his voice he asked Willy whether he could let him have two hundred pounds: a straight, well-delivered shot, and received as it was delivered: that is, without emphasis. Yet Wilfred could not overcome a second or two's delay. When he spoke, it was in the tone of a man who wishes he had time to entrench.

“You know, Bill,” he began slowly, “of course it's only just past quarterday.” (Yes, Bill knew that in his own great soul.) “But I haven't got the full amount left, you know. . . . I've had to pay a lot out, you know. . . . Setting up and things.”

“Yes, of course,” the other answered with pleasant soothing sympathy. “Naturally! Still! I'll tell you what it's for and you'll understand. I've

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been put on to the Kleindrifft Deeps. I got it from outside. It's money for picking up, and we'll go fifty-fifty.'

All this was Greek to Wilfred.

"I don't understand," he said. To which Bill's natural answer was "You're not smoking," and he passed up his case.

Wilfred was a little afraid of the strength of the cigars. There was no end to Bill's nicotine-resistance, but he doubted his own. "Thank you," he said, as he took one, without confidence.

"I'll explain," went on Bill, with his elbows on the table, and giving his own cigar a fine great pull, worthy of the occasion. "They're at three pounds one and sixpence to three pounds two and six. Roughly. There was a deal yesterday as high as three and three. The latest prices when I looked at the tape yesterday were back again a shilling or so. Now yesterday afternoon they got their crushing report, and I had the luck to hear it. Do you know what they'll go to when it comes out?"

"I don't quite understand," said Wilfred again.

"Surely," said Bill patiently, "it's quite simple? You can buy one of these shares now for three pounds—or just over. Do you know what they will go to when the public gets the crushing report? It comes out the day after to-morrow. They'll jump to five at least."

"What's that mean?" said Wilfred.

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"It means, old boy, that for every three we risk we get anything over five. I don't know why I say 'risk'."

Here Wilfred said a very daring thing, but he said it modestly. "How do you mean, Bill—we?"

"Why," said Robinson, more cheerfully than ever. "We shall stand in together, of course. I told you. Didn't you hear me say fifty-fifty? Of course I'm not going to take your money and leave you out of it. I only want the two hundred to make Lock and Lock feel comfortable when I send it to them. I don't suppose they want cash, but it'll look well for a first time. We shall have our pile all right. Put it at three, four and six at most for the buying, and sell at five or over. They'll have got the two hundred just as a guarantee of good faith, and they'll be owing us close on another two before next Friday at the latest. I shan't be greedy. I shall tell them to sell when it touches five-ten, if you like."

"You mean," said Wilfred Straddle, to whom all this was utterly unfamiliar, "that I will get my two hundred back and we shall share two hundred more? Nearly a hundred profit extra for myself by Saturday?"

Bill grunted, and nodded.

"It sounds all right," said Wilfred.

"It *is* all right," said Bill.

"But you see, if I don't get it back *certainly*, I'm

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in a hole. I've promised to go up to Norfolk for the first of September, and I have got to live till then, you know. The Merridens have asked me for the opening."

"The birds?" superciliously. "The birds, my boy? Weeks to think of that! I tell you it'll be *now*—Friday at latest, and probably Thursday—the moment they touch five-ten."

"Oh!" said Wilfred, and heaved a deep sigh.

"You can give it me here if you like. Have you got your cheque-book with you?" continued Bill pleasantly. "If not, I'll go back to your rooms with you. I ought to let them have it by messenger to-day. You never know who may hear of those crushings. I've not got too much in the bank myself—you probably know that. But when I've paid yours in I shan't mind sending Lock and Lock my cheque by messenger."

Reluctantly, slowly, but inevitably, Wilfred brought out a thin cheque-book and his fountain-pen, and handed over the slip of paper. Bill waved it in the air—not in triumph, but to dry it—folded it and popped it into his watch pocket.

"Thanks!" he said simply. "It will be sweet enough for both of us!"

Do not judge Bill too harshly. There are many to be hard on Horses, though few to tackle them. He *did* mean to go through with that flutter, and he *had* had news of the crushing report. He was

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all ready to write his note to Lock and Lock (for it was after three) and to send the cheque to them—not to his bank. But before writing that note in his rooms alone, he stopped at Rayners to look up the closing price on the tape. Kleindriffs had jumped already! They had closed at 105/--106/-.

Bill was startled into a low whistle. He left the note unwritten and kept the cheque in his watch pocket.

Next day, a little after ten o'clock, Wilfred (still in his dressing-gown) was visited by his friend, who blew in as full of life and strength as ever, to announce that Kleindriff Deeps must have leaked out. They had gone over five already, he said, and he had had to buy at 108/-.

"It'll mean waiting. But they're bound to go to seven pounds if we wait."

At the end of the day they stood at £4. 12s. 0d., and Bill broke the news.

"It's only natural after a sudden jump like that," he said. "We shall have to wait till they rally."

"Ye . . . es," said Wilfred. He was beginning to learn the first letters in the alphabet of high finance. "Ye . . . es. . . . But I do hope they'll go up again—*really* soon. . . . I can't afford to be out of that money, Bill, I really can't. Not just now."

"Oh Lord!" said Bill. "I tell you there's weeks before you, and it can't take more than a few days." He took his cigar out of his mouth, stretched his

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arms, yawned, and said, "So long—I've got to be off. I'm going down to old Cuttle's, in Hampshire. Some damned cricket or other, I expect. Old Cuttle's mad on pure nineteen-hundred."

"You'll be back soon?" said Wilfred anxiously.

"Yes, of course—Monday, I hope." In a surprised voice: "What are you doing Monday?"

"Monday I'm dining at the Carylls'."

"You're always dining there," said Bill. "Mind you, there's nothing against that girl. . . ."

"You needn't bring her in," said Wilfred.

"No? All I meant to say was that she's all right."

"Yes," said Wilfred. "She is. I like her."

"You're right!" said Bill. "Well, I must be off."

And he was off: he, the Horse, in his fullness—leaving the Hedge empty.



“Well! I must be off.” And he was off.

VI

IT is a terrible thing to mark the gradual loss of innocence—even the first steps therein. I am sorry to say that Wilfred Straddle, the very next morning, before the Stock Exchange opened, was at the Club, first looking at the full list of prices in the *Financial News*, and then wandering to the tape.

Why had he doubted Bill? He felt ashamed of himself. There it was in black and white—Kleindrift Deeps were stirring in their sleep. There it was—108/- : but later 106/-, then 103/9, 104/3, 104/6, 104/-, 104/9—then suddenly before the end of the day a drop to 95/-, and then a last price—90/-! Now for the tape.

What would Bill have thought if he had been there! Bill? He was far away in Hampshire with the Cuttlefish. And as for Wilfred's cheque, it was going safely through the mill.

Bill had not paid it into his account, had he? No! If he had done so his overdraft would have got its claws into it, dragging it to its lair and eating it up.

No! No! What Bill had done with it was

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simpler than that. He had endorsed it and sold it to Mr. Worktop, who was useful in that line and did it for a very small commission. He had got rid of that cheque the evening of the day he got it. After all, it is better to have cash in one's pocket than anywhere else. He had to pay off a few clamorous duns, he still had a nice wad of about £80 odd in his kick as he trundled down to Hampshire—in another man's car.

* * * * *

Monday, nearly all day Monday was, I am sorry to say, occupied by Wilfred Straddle in nervous excursions to the tape—and he got more and more troubled. Kleindriffts popped up and down like a cork in rough water. He remembered the price which Bill said he had bought at: 108/-. It once looked as though they were going below 90/-. They rallied again—but they never got to 100/-; the last price was 95/-—again! It was a point that seemed to attract them like a magnet. . . . If they stuck there it was a dead loss.

He drank, in his anxiety, no less than two tomato cocktails with a sinking spirit, and wandered off, an aimless, melancholy soul, across the Green Park, to wallow in hot water, to dress for dinner, and to try and forget the troubles of this world in the company of Lady Penelope Caryll, Joan, and probably half a dozen others.

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Before dressing he rang up Bill twice, but Bill had not yet got back. When he was dressed, and just as he was going to his cab, he rang up again and was vastly relieved to hear the familiar voice.

"Yes. . . . What is it? I'm just back. Yes, I know you've been telephoning."

"You know, Bill, they haven't got back to five again."

"Who hasn't got back to five again?" said Bill.

"Kleindrif Deep's."

"Oh!" A long pause. "Oh, yes! . . . I remember. . . . Oh . . . haven't they? You're right. I looked at them when I got up, they were ninety-something. Never mind! It's only a question of a day or two."

"But you said at first they were bound to go to seven. That would be 140/-!"

A pause at the other end of the wire.

"Did I say that? Oh, of course . . . yes, I remember I did . . . yes, seven. They're *bound* to go to Seven, my dear. Well, so long. Ring me up again to-morrow, and I'll know more about it."

At Lady Penelope's there was enough go about the dinner to help Wilfred to forget his little anxieties. And it rested his spirit to find himself put next to Joan. It was good of Joan to have allowed it. But the truth is, she was not without

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curiosity, and was coming to have a certain friendly feeling for the poor boy, getting stronger through the declaration she had made to her mother and the resolution she had made within herself. Her conversation was earnest and simple. It was a series of questions as to what work he was doing, and suggestions as to what work he might do, and a certain amount of frank expression that a man of his age ought to be doing something.

Then, after dinner, she got at him again, and Lady Penelope was pleased to see how much they were together. She had had plenty of experience. She knew what an easy friendship of this kind might mean in the end.

And as for Joan, she also had got away with something—for Willy had solemnly promised her that he would work. He could not tell her *what* work. How could he? Not knowing what work was? But he promised sincerely. There floated through his mind a vision of himself seated in a good armchair at a large Victorian table-desk in a luxurious City boardroom and signing things. It took no more form than that. But he went away better contented with himself; more of a man.

The next day and the next his anxieties returned. They had cause to return. From Bill's flat he got the news over the telephone that Bill had again been called suddenly away; they did not know

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where; nothing was to be forwarded for a day or two.

Wilfred waited that day or two and several days more, still watching Kleindrift Deeps, which now had got over their little dissipation and were plodding along steadily round about 90/-. Then they dropped a shilling or two below; hiccoughed; pulled themselves together and began settling round 90/-—and a good solid price too for the rubbish, but not sufficient for Wilfred.

So far he not only saw himself losing some forty pounds sooner or later, but having to meet bills in the interval, and his sinking balance at the bank was beginning to take on that wizened appearance which comes from lack of proper food and sleep.

A day or two after all this came a note from Bill, not over-comforting, written rapidly on Pillbox paper. All it said was that he was only passing through London, not sleeping. He was dreadfully sorry that Kleindrift Deeps were still sticky, but of course it would be idiotic to sell; they were bound to go to seven and over in a few days. It was only a question of the small investor finding out what had happened. They were sticky, that was all. But they were bound to take wings—little wings, anyhow, and soar. Would Wilfred come round and dine with him that night; they could either dine at Bill's flat or go out somewhere. He had got to

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leave town again to-morrow for another few days—but he did want to see him.

Wilfred was willing enough. It was better to talk about the thing face to face, besides which, it was only fair that Bill should pay for that evening, after the mischances into which he had led his friend.

The dinner was excellent, for Bill was generous when he had money in his pockets, and he had plenty left. He had been driven down to Old Cuttlefish's free, and driven back free, and he had done rather well at cards out of his host. He had had to pay another dun, but there was more than fifty left in Bill's hands of Willy's original two hundred, so they went to the Paradise and Bill paid, and talked so cheerfully of stocks and rising markets that poor Wilfred was the better for some hours.

* * * * *

It was now over a fortnight since the Battle of Pillbox. Wilfred had been shy of showing his face there, but Bill insisted, and took him round on one certain and memorable and fateful evening. There they got into a group that were going off to make a night of it. Once more was Wilfred swept in. He found himself one of a group of the girls and the boys of the village tooling off in a string of taxis for the Superbe.

There was nothing very violent about the

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evening. It was just one of your suppers at the Superbe—and your suppers at the Superbe are ordinary if expensive affairs. It was old Abe, the bookie, who was paying. The company was not of the choicest, nor the quietest. It was rowdy, but not scandalously rowdy—still, it was rowdy enough to cause a complaint to go to the management: a discreet complaint from one of the more touchy guests at a neighbouring table. The manager had discreetly come to say a word or two in a low polite voice to the bookie's table.

The bookie answered with much less discretion. More than one man rose to his feet, voices rose, the women pushed back their chairs, there was the makings of a bad quarrel.

Someone threw a glass. It slivered against the wall. There was a hubbub, people getting up to call for order. One of the bottles of champagne upset upon the table, and another was whirling like a club in the hands of some young fool or other.

While this was at its height, things turning nasty, Wilfred, blaming himself for his nerves, could have sworn that he saw a ghost.

In the midst of the din there had moved at the back of the room, striding, rather bent, towards the door, what was for all the world the double of John Scott Guthrie of New York! Whatever it was, wraith or double, it was gone.

The row was appeased—money appeased it, and

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Wilfred had had to contribute, heavy at heart. All night he woke fitfully, and saw again that vision or ghost of his uncle. Whether it were real or wraith, Wilfred learned in the morning. A telegram was waiting for him on his breakfast table:

“Meet me Superbe Suite Sixteen to-day eleven-thirty.”

VII

AT eleven-thirty on the morrow morning, eleven-thirty to the second, Wilfred Guthrie Straddle was on the mat.

John Scott did not rise from his chair beyond the table. He nodded to his nephew and bade him draw up opposite. The young man did so:

“But, Uncle,” he began, “I didn’t know you were on this side—you might have let me know! Won’t you come to . . .”

John Scott interrupted him with an upraised hand. At his side was a small pile of documents neatly docketed and arranged. Before him a sheet of paper on which he had written some title as though for notes.

“I had no need to warn ye,” he said in a voice like a trap shutting down. “But I’ll have to hear ye. It’s for that I’ve come. I’ll not keep ye long, but I’ll hear ye. I saw what passed last night.”

“But, Uncle . . .”

For answer John Scott Guthrie gave no word. Then he pushed across the table the newspaper cutting he had docketed at the top of the pile.

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There shouted on it the American headlines of the Pillbox affair. Then the dark old man gave tongue.

“Will ye read that?” said John Scott.

Wilfred answered with the wrong words, of course.

“I was told they had kept it out of the papers,” he said.

“Then ye were told wrong. . . . Will ye read this?” he added, and pushed over the first of Mr. Willis’s letters, or rather, a typewritten copy thereof; the originals were locked in the small safe where John Scott Guthrie kept his chief documents. There was no name typed below the deplorable stuff, with its base, florid, cockney terms. John Scott did not choose that his nephew should know what agent he had used.

Wilfred read the thing slowly, and when he had done John Scott pushed over a second letter.

“Will ye read that?” he said.

Wilfred read the second letter, more rapidly than the first, with increasing disgust and increasing revolt in his soul.

“I don’t know what it’s all about, Uncle,” he said. “I don’t know what it means. I don’t know why you are treating me like this. You have come over all this way without telling me, and now you spring all this on me. I don’t understand what it’s about.”

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“Will ye read that?” said John Scott Guthrie, pushing over a third letter.

Wilfred Straddle had barely the stomach to manage the first lines:

“HONOURED SIR,

Since I last wrote, on the Monday last it was, I seen the young gentleman—at it worse than ever. At the Cræsus, it was, and I’ll tell you faithful what transpired. . . .”

Wilfred suddenly stood up, unbidden. A full flush had risen to his face. He remembered that night at the Cræsus weeks ago, the intolerable boredom of the women getting drunk; Bill exhilarated at the beginning and quarrelsome at the end, and the man who had fallen downstairs when Bill pushed him.

“I don’t want to read any more, Uncle John,” he said.

“Mebbe ye do not,” and John Scott pushed over a fourth letter.

If Wilfred Straddle had done the wrong thing at the beginning, he now did the ultra-wrong thing (as your Hedger always does) at the end. He exploded.

“It’s a pack of lies!” he shouted, standing squarely and looking almost fierce and half courageous.

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“Ye deny that ye were in that drunken rabble that night?”

“No, I don’t. But . . .”

John Scott put up a hand again.

“Do ye deny that ye were at any of these haunts my informant tells me of, or in any of that company?”

Then, as the increasingly angry young man was beginning to interrupt, his uncle brought his hand down violently on the table, and cried, “Do ye deny *that*? Were ye or were ye not in *that*?” Were ye or were ye not under arrest . . . in the *cells*—you—a *Guthrie*?”

Straddle’s face was black.

“My name is Straddle,” he said, “and I’ll answer you nothing. You wouldn’t believe me if I did.”

“Can ye deny it? Any of it?” repeated John Scott.

“I’ll answer you nothing,” shrieked out Wilfred, still standing and now putting his hands in his trouser pockets by way of assurance. He was burning inwardly. He had been called to see his uncle without warning, without explanation; treated to silence and contempt, and then found that he had been the victim of spies, and was standing there now, humiliated, the plaything of a lunatic—but of a lunatic from whom he derived his only livelihood.

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"I'll answer you nothing!" he repeated.

"Wilfred Guthrie," said John Scott in the same even and hard tone with which he had begun the interview. "Ye have chosen to take this line with me. It was what I had envisaged. Now sit ye down. Sit ye down again, and I'll put matters before ye."

Wilfred Straddle was already wilting; he began hesitatingly. . . .

"I never touch anything, Uncle John. I promised you I wouldn't, and I don't."

"Make matters no worse. Confess if ye will, orr be silent. Now listen to me, I say, and I'll put matters before ye. When ye leave this room—and I'll not keep ye long—ye shall see me no more. Ye'll have to go out and seek your bread, as many a better man has done before, and less of a liar and less of a fool. It may be your salvation. But ye'll see me no more, nor hear from me or of mine, Wilfred Guthrie. Ye have been weighed and found wanting."

"Uncle . . ." began Wilfred.

"We'll waste no more words," said John Scott. He got up and opened the door.

"Uncle," said Wilfred hesitatingly again, as he moved towards it.

"We'll waste no more words," repeated John Scott. And the victim went out.

VIII

I NOW switch you off, to your no small discomfort—but that can't be helped. We abandon our main business to run off on a side track. We will consider the works of four distinguished men of science, two of them our German cousins, two others of our own glorious Island breed.

You will see in a moment why I am about to digress on these lights of the learned world. If I didn't, you would never understand the last adventure of John Scott.

The two German authorities in question are Professor Hirsch, for the moment resident in Vienna, and the eminent exile Professor Mann, for the moment resident, I am glad to say, in Cambridge on a large salary provided for him by his sympathizers at our expense.

Hirsch and Mann are names so closely associated to the scientific ear that even the lay public has grown familiar with them and with their more than famous work *Über Alterschwäche nrsachen und processus lebenswendige untersuchung*, translated into English by that very eminent English-born colleague of theirs, William Asche (formerly



Herr Professor Hirsch, formerly of Berlin, for
the moment resident in Vienna.

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of Bonn), under the title "The Causes and Advance of Old Age."

It is the glory of Hirsch that after pursuing with incredible patience and labour for half a lifetime the most minute researches upon senile decay, or rather Hylosis, and its effects upon the human frame, he was able to tabulate these results in a complete form and to draw conclusions which have revolutionized our knowledge of human life.

But even Hirsch's triumph would not have been complete but for the support brought to it by the brilliant deductions of Mann.

It is greatly to the honour of these twin masters that there was never any jealousy between them. Each had early recognized the genius of the other, and from the first days of their collaboration in Berlin they had worked in double harness so harmoniously that the style and manner of the one cannot be distinguished from the style and manner of the other in the combined production. Hirsch had excelled particularly in research, experiment, and tabulation; Mann rather in bold theory—a master of hypothesis, whom the examination of the actual world by his colleague confirmed over and over again. Between them these two men and their joint creation "Uber, etc." have transformed our conception of the life cycle—physiological, morphological, biological, ontological, parabological and deuterological.



Herr Professor Mann, formerly of Berlin, for
the moment resident in Cambridge.

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Briefly, Hirsch first proved that muscular action *suffers deterioration on and after some point between the fifty-fifth and the seventy-fifth year.*

A mass of statistics, gathered from every climate and every race by the superhuman industry of Hirsch, prove that decline of this kind appears in the species *Homo Sapiens* from the fifth to the seventh decade* (later in the Elephant, earlier in the Dog).

As Lord Whittleborough put it in his Memorial Lecture at Oxford last June, "Hirsch has proved that the average man would seem to show loss of agility in the late sixties."

This is not to say, of course, that all men go groggy at so early an age. I myself know one old buck who is still riding to hounds like a circus monkey, though he was seventy-three last December.

This is not to say that some of our less fortunate brothers do not begin to show signs of wear and tear earlier. Hirsch himself has tabulated cases of young men, well nourished and amply provided with every opportunity, who suffered from incurable fatigue even before they had left the University.

It would be most unscientific to generalize without taking note of these exceptions. But "Hirsch's law" is now indisputable. In the

* See my own work, "The Decades of Decay." *Lift and Gatherum*, 21s.

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average man, as seventy approaches, decline in the rapidity of his jerks and kicks and general galumphishness becomes marked.

To this revolutionary discovery, Mann added the one thing that permitted a complete synthesis.

In a host of experiments, each minutely checked and amply repeated under all conditions, he showed that it was precisely in these years, the end of the sixth decade, that Hylosis began to appear in the Moronic gland. There was not one case—out of thousands—in which senility was not exactly accompanied by hylomorphism of the Moronic gland.

The Moronic gland and its “fibrous degeneration” in old age had been known of course *empirically* long before Mann’s day. The Greeks described it in detail, and Galen is verbose on the matter. But it was the glory of Mann that he put what had been for so many centuries a mere affirmation into synthetic and rigorously scientific form.

Combine Hirsch and Mann—in their immortal work they *are* combined—and all is light! We know (*a*) the Cause and (*b*) the Processes of Old Age. We know when to expect it and why.

Some in the first enthusiasm of this new and dazzling knowledge hoped to postpone the approach of the “Dread Reaper” (to borrow the Bishop of Shoreham’s fine phrase) by secotomy of the Moronic gland: but every operation has hitherto proved fatal.

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You have stuck out this digression so manfully that I am inclined to let you off the rest. But duty is duty. Stick to it, lads! I see land! A little while and we shall be at rest—so here goes.

Even the epoch-making discoveries of Hirsch and Mann would not be what they are but for the application to them of conclusions reached by those two practical Englishmen, Mr. Malcolm of St. Dunstan's, and his younger colleague, Lotsch, Professor of Biological Statics in the sister University.

Here, as in the case of the two famous Germans, an older and a younger man collaborated, though perhaps in less intimate association than was the case with our Teutonic cousins.

Mr. Malcolm (often erroneously appearing with the title of "Professor" in the papers) summarized, comparatively late in life, the general trend of innumerable essays and addresses under the title "*Fixation of Habit under the Effect of Repetition.*" He established on a firm basis never before reached, though often half seen in flashes by his predecessors, the great truth that *the human organism tends by repetition to make of acts normally conscious something hardly conscious at all.*

"*Habitudo*"—his name for this process—he proved to be fixed by continual repetition. His most famous experiment was that conducted upon a criminal patriotically lent him by the Home Office.

But the clinching of the whole affair was



Mr. (not Professor) Malcolm, the epoch maker.

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Arthur William Lotsch's unforgettable article in *Nature*, appearing by a wonderful coincidence simultaneously with the publication of Malcolm's immortal work.

Lotsch then proved—and proved forever—that the formation of habit by repetition was a function of longevity. He demonstrated by the most rigorous methods of proof, which not one of the violent attacks on the novelty of the idea has been able to overthrow, that habits carried on over a greater number of years will be more firmly fixed than those formed in a lesser number of years—and that those actions which are performed daily or hourly will take firmer root than those actions that are only occasional.

I think I have said enough (and probably more than enough) to show what mighty advances in human knowledge were effected by these four men. And we may surely boast that such advance was a triumph, if not of our own beloved country alone, at least of the Nordic race unaided. No Latin, Mongol, let alone any Negroid Alpine or Arctic type, has added anything appreciable to the foundations thus laid.

So far so good. Perhaps in your disgust you have already thrown away this book, saying that it was not to read stuff of this kind that you were at the trouble of borrowing it. Wait a moment. You shall see where it all comes in.



Lotsch, *tout court*.

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John Scott Guthrie, let me remind you, was just over sixty-six. To put it in more exact and scientific terms, he was in his sixty-seventh year. You see the point? He had passed what Hirsch calls the average point of flexion (*torquementum*) and Mann, more picturesquely, "*Entscheidungszustand*," "the decisive point." John Scott had reached what Malcolm calls in his own newly-coined word "fixation"; the stage which Lotsch describes in his racy English as "crusted."

In very early youth, before he had gone to America, while he was still resident in his own blessed Lowlands, John Scott Guthrie had, of course, walked, bicycled and ridden to the *left*, as is there the law. Though it is true that early impressions are the strongest and the most lasting, over forty years of residence in the United States had formed a new "*Habitus-stratum*" deeper and harder than the old. John Scott Guthrie now inevitably tended to think of traffic as keeping to the *right* side of the road. He should, of course, when he visited his native land, have recalled the anomaly of our traffic, and looked up-street to the right before stepping off the kerb. But these visits to England had been very rare, and meanwhile the fatal process of fibral hylosis in the Moronic gland had appeared.

Therefore it was that John Scott Guthrie, on the morning after that interview with his nephew,

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stepping off the pavement to cross the street, looking up left instead of right, was, as the reporter well put it, "literally swept off his feet." Yes, the word "literally" for once applies. He was swept off his feet and on to the bonnet of an advancing lorry.

A crowd gathered, the ambulance was summoned. One policeman began making notes, another began looking through John Scott's pockets for a possible address, and discovered an envelope addressed to the victim at the Superbe. The ambulance was directed to St. Lazarus's Hospital, a long way off, and notice was sent to the Superbe just at hand.

Wilfred Straddle, having long pondered upon his fortunes of the previous day, walked that same morning slowly but without resolution towards his uncle's hotel, intending a reconciliation. There he heard the news, and whirled off at once for St. Lazarus's.

The hotel had done the right thing; they had seen that the millionaire had a room in hospital suitable to his wealth, and that the poor unconscious form was not condemned to the discomforts and publicity which are rightly the lot of the poor. There was a bowl of flowers before the window, there were two trained nurses in attendance, and Wilfred found the doctor still present.

The doctor took the young man aside on hearing

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that he was a relative—the only relative—and told him the truth at once. John Scott would not speak again. In all probability he would know nothing again of the world around him. They could but await his passing.

Nor had they to wait long. In the first hours of the warm summer dusk John Scott Guthrie achieved the end of his being, having lain motionless but a few hours, and neither seeing nor knowing anything more.

Wilfred Straddle was spurred to some activity in the midst of his bewilderment. He made all arrangements with the hospital authorities; he rang up his uncle's agents, Worms and Handler (the only names in London that he knew to have any connection with the dead man), so that funds might be forthcoming for all to be done in the right order. Sealed instructions left with the agents were opened. The body was to be cremated, and it was particularly desired that the "religious service following on my death shall be conducted by a duly appointed Minister of the Presbyterian Church."

Wilfred attended that service as chief mourner. The sermon, though rather long by our southern standards, was not without eloquence, still less without learning, for the Rev. Thomas Clantaggart is one of the great scholars of our time, and taciturn at table, voluble at worship. He preached on the



On the laying-up of treasures in Heaven.

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laying up of treasures in heaven, and spoke of the sterling virtues and achievements of the deceased in a fashion which proved his industry. He had spent nearly the whole of the day before collecting the relevant facts from Guthrie's bank in London, from his agents, from Wilfred, and—which shows the thoroughness of the man—from the staff of the Superb.

Then, when all was over and Wilfred had added to his embarrassments by purchasing with cash a suit of mourning (from the same tailor, of course, as had created the Robinson splendours), he be-thought him of his situation.

With Wilfred Straddle the art of thinking had not been reduced to precise rules. Rather did his mind walk slowly round and round, as in Spain you may see the donkeys walking the threshing floors.

First it rose before him that with his uncle dead the allowance might very well cease. Then his mind moved on, to the point that there would somewhere be a will, *from which he was excluded*. Then after no little meditation his mind moved yet another step, to the point that he must inform himself more definitely on these things. At last his mind came to the final points. He must assure himself what his resources were and make such provision as he could for the appalling future.

Having done this round, his mind went off

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again on the second lap, repeating all the points in their order, ending up with the necessity of finding out exactly what resources he had and what could be done for the appalling future.

Then Wilfred's mind started out again on the third lap, and had already begun on a fourth when he came to a half-formed conclusion. He got up and went through the money in his pocket-book, and a little change. The counterfoil of his cheque-book still marked over forty pounds—to be exact, forty-three pounds, four shillings and sevenpence—say, roughly, with the cash on him, fifty all told. He had only cashed one cheque, and that at the Bank for himself since the luncheon at Parrott's and that uncomfortable loan of two hundred. Well, he would get that two hundred back sooner or later—sooner rather than later, he hoped—at least, he presumed he would get it fairly soon. Perhaps there would be a profit. Robinson had said he thought so. Call it three-fifty. With this fifty in hand, that made about four hundred. He could carry on for a quarter. He would have room to turn round: but he must think what he could do next.

By way of action he sauntered off to his club. There he found a surprisingly large number of letters waiting for him. There must have been over twenty. He hardly knew that he had already acquired so large an acquaintance.

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Nor had he. For some of these letters came from people he had not met, but who for some reason or other desired to meet him. There were notes from people he did know. There was a strong, kind, sympathetic word from Bill, hoping to see him when he returned; it was written from some big place down in Sussex, and Bill would not be back till after Goodwood.

There was a charming, well-worded, sympathetic note from Lady Merriden. Lady Penelope had written a charming, kind, sympathetic note, very well-worded. And there was a well-worded, charming, sympathetic note from Lady Lodiham. There was rather a long letter on the sad news from Mrs. Matheson; not a few of its words were underlined, and the whole breathed deep and real feeling, kind, sympathetic and very well-worded. There was a letter which touched him very much from one of the old Guthrie servants who was now a pensioner elsewhere. He remembered John Scott as a lad and grieved. The pensioner wished Master Wilfred every joy and all good fortune and hoped it found him as it left the writer. One correspondent excused herself. She had never met Mr. Straddle, but she was so intimate a friend of his friends that she always felt as though she knew him. Another, of what some call the opposite sex, also excused himself for approaching Mr. Straddle without introduction, and also for

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asking an urgent loan of fifty pounds. So they went on. There was one short note, from Fanny Blackman, Lady Merriden's daughter. It was ill-written, awkward, conventional condolence of the worst sort, and ill-spelt. She had copied it from one she had read in a novel. That had provided the style. The spelling was her own, and the type of emotion was common to both.

The last was from Joan.

Wilfred read it three times, and the tears came into his eyes. It was like a letter from a sister. Certainly, he thought, Joan understood how much he had felt the shock and the change and the whole bewildering affair. She ended by saying that he was not to be troubled; he must in these days keep himself to himself; but if ever he wanted a quiet talk with someone whom he knew would value his presence, he had only to ring her up and come round and see her.

His post the next day was even larger. For one thing, there was a mass of circulars from firms who wanted to sell him things, the sort of things that rich men buy. There were yachts, there were mansions, there were desirable residences (more than one was bijou), and there were park-like grounds. There was even jewellery, and there were extraordinary bargains in rare wines. He could have got the remainder of a pipe, at the equivalent of 150/- a dozen—which was dirt cheap;

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and some old brandy out of the Balliton sale, at just under four pounds a bottle—it was really throwing the stuff away! There was Tokay, from what had been the Imperial reserve. Appeals and subscriptions had also begun to come filtering in. There were at least half a dozen of these from various sources and for various objects, only one of which meant anything to him. It was the one from the M.M.L.—the Modern Maternity League, Mrs Matheson's stunt, which he and Joan had laughed at under the title of "Middle-Class Mothers."

She had sent yet another letter of her own, typewritten this time, suggesting an annual subscription of twenty guineas.

The next day, the news of old Guthrie's death and Willy's presumed good fortune having spread further, there was a Flood: Three times as many circulars, a number of belated letters of condolence, and (something quite novel in his life) a mass of Press cuttings, with a covering letter to say that if he would take them he might remit a cheque for five pounds, which would cover (at a special rate) everything in which his name should appear for a year from date.

Five pounds! Five pounds! When he had to look at every penny! But he read those Press cuttings carefully. It took him more than half an hour.

The people who do the gossip work, the Social

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Columns, had got on to him. "Mr. Wilfred Straddle was seen here," "Mr. Wilfred Straddle was seen there," "A man who fully appreciates the charm of old Westminster, is Mr. Wilfred Straddle. He is, of course, the nephew of the late John Scott Guthrie, of London and New York."

There were two or three dozen reports of the funeral service, and, what did strike him as odd, one careful description of the clothes he wore there, as though he had been a young girl presented at Court or an old Hag at a Function.

One of the more offensive of these fellows—and that is saying a good deal—took a shot at John Scott's fortune, what it "was rumoured to be"; said in so many words that Wilfred would collar the lot after the American Death Duties were paid.

Willy pondered. That five pounds for Press cuttings was like drawing five teeth, but he dared not let things be said about him right and left without his knowing what they were. It looked as though it was going to be as bad for him as being a cinema star or a murderer or any other of our great popular figures. With a heavy heart he signed that cheque and posted it. He was right in the limelight. He was for it. He had no choice.

The five-pound sacrifice reminded him suddenly of the next thing he had to do. He rang up Worms and Handler, got an immediate appointment with them, and went to discover the worst.



Messrs. Worms and Handler registering courtesy
with reserve.

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He was received with courtesy, but with reserve. They had little to tell him, and what they had to tell him was easily told. The allowance, of course, had ceased with the old man's death (here followed a brief passage from Worms, to the accompaniment of sympathetic sighs from Handler, upon the tragedy. . . . They could ill afford to lose such a man. . . . Shaking of heads). Whether they would have instructions from New York to continue it they could not say till they had a letter; it might be so. On the other hand, it might not.

Worms with his fine legal brain put this very clearly:

(1) By one hypothesis instructions might have been left whereby the allowance should be continued, in which case they would have great pleasure in continuing to pay it.

(2) On the other hand, if no such instructions had been left by the deceased, why, then, of course, there would be no payment at the September quarter, or at any succeeding time.

Handler, with his bluff British common sense, put it more tersely. "They had had no instructions from the deceased." That was what *he* added for Wilfred's information.

Worms and Handler concurred that all would now be in the hands of the late Mr. Guthrie's American lawyers. Would they give Wilfred the name of the American lawyers? Yes, certainly.

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Those gentlemen had already been fully advised by cable. Mr. Guthrie's American lawyers had cabled that they were writing fully on the whole situation. The letter was coming on the *Hoover*. She would reach Plymouth on the 17th or 18th July. If Wilfred would call on the 20th, they could certainly put him in possession of the whole position so far as it had been communicated to them.

Wilfred felt as he walked out of that ancient office as though not only John Scott were dead, but the whole world also, except himself. He had never felt so utterly alone. Even Bill would not be back till after Goodwood—whenever that was.

His mourning forbade him to go out as yet; he did not know the custom in these things, but he was certain it was still too early.

In his intense need for companionship he rang up Joan. She was out. She was dining in, and whoever answered the telephone did not think there would be anybody dining with her ladyship that night. He left word that he would ring again, and mournfully strolled back to Doulton's Club. He had nothing else to do, and when he got there probably the most useful thing he could do and the most depressing would be to make another calculation of his remaining means.

At the Club he found that a man had been waiting for him nearly two and a half hours: a

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man from the *Howl*, a newspaper of vigour. He took the man from the *Howl* into a little room where they hide away strangers at Douulton's, and asked him nervously what he could do for him. The man from the *Howl* brought out a little notebook and proceeded to interview him. How to defend himself Wilfred had no idea. But when he had got rid of the fellow a page came to tell him that somebody had just rung up from that very lively weekly, the *Klaxon*. *They* also wanted an appointment for an interview. He put them off as best he could, though with diffidence. This kind of thing would go on, he feared, for a very long time; perhaps for as long as he lived.

That same evening they delivered to him at Douulton's an almost incomprehensible cable from New York, telling him that he would be called upon by the representative of something or other, and for what purposes he could not tell. He groaned as he thought it must be yet another of these interviewers. He looked at his watch and saw that it was time to ring up Joan again; got her, and was told to come round immediately after dinner. She did not think there would be anybody there except her mother, and he could see her alone.

That after-dinner talk with Joan Sable was the first relief his mind had known for all those days. The *full* relief of letting at least one other human

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being know how black the future was he could not enjoy. He certainly did not know Joan well enough to talk about affairs so intimate; besides which, she would not want to hear them. But he could at least hold a sympathetic ear.

Lady Penelope received him with unaccustomed warmth—he wondered why—and thought it must be an illusion due to the contrast between this first human contact and the long days of loneliness since his uncle's death. She soon went up to her room to write, and left him alone with her daughter.

Joan greeted him earnestly.

"Wilfred," she said (for they were on these terms), "will you take some advice from me?"

"Anything you tell me," said Wilfred submissively.

"I want you to earn something."

Poor Wilfred groaned inwardly, and indeed very slightly outwardly—enough for her to think she had heard a protest.

"Yes, Willy, I mean what I say. I'm sure I'm right. Later on they'll make you do all sorts of things; they always do with people like you. They won't let you alone. But meantime if only you earn some money of your own, you don't know what a difference it will make to you. Work is much more necessary for you men that are to have millions than it is for anyone else. It won't

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matter to you, of course, what money you get. But you must do some kind of work."

"What kind?" said Wilfred despairingly.

"Well," (hopefully), "you might write. Anyone can write!"

"I haven't an idea how it's done. Anyhow, I can't begin just yet. Also, I've got to let a decent interval pass, you know."

That last remark started Joan off on another line of the many that were passing through her head.

"Look here, Wilfred, there's another thing I want to tell you. Don't let it be too long before you see your friends again. Begin going about."

"I don't know anything about these things," said Wilfred miserably. "How long ought I to allow?"

"Well, you have come and seen me and mother already."

"Yes, but you're different," said Wilfred.

"Yes—we are," answered Joan, looking up at him fully and slowly.

"Thank you, dear!" said Wilfred. He was getting on.

There was too long a pause; then she said:

"You must go round to the Merridens next week. They'll be gone in a day or two. If you don't go you'll miss them. And then after that you ought to see the Lodiham's. They were speaking about you only the other day, Loulou especially.

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And then you should see the old Duchess. It would only be polite, after you have twice failed to go to her house."

"I don't really know her," said Wilfred.

"You never will if you shirk her kindness . . . for she *is* kind, you know."

"I don't much want to see any of these people, Joan," he suddenly blurted out. "I want to be where I can feel—— Oh! feel I'm . . . well—*home*."

"I'll tell you what it is, Wilfred, it's your money that's weighing you down. You haven't got any of it in the bank yet, I suppose, but you know it's coming and no doubt they will be letting you have all you want in the meantime. And when that sort of thing happens to people I notice they always get melancholy. Cad Grayson was like that after he won the Calcutta Sweep last year. Perhaps you can't imagine Cad Grayson melancholy, any more than you can imagine a braying jackass so. Still" (nodding) "I assure you he *was*. When he got that lump of stuff he was Gloomy Gus for days."

"No, that's not it," murmured Wilfred. "Only, I'm lonely."

"Money makes people feel lonely," said Joan decidedly. "And you know, Wilfred, I am afraid it keeps them lonely. There are just two kinds of people in these affairs—there are those who are all over a man because he's got millions or is going

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to get them, and there are those who, just because he's so rich, sheer off."

"Which do you belong to, Joan?"

"I don't belong to either. I am not going to drop any friend of mine because he's rich. But there is one thing I shall never do, Wilfred," and she looked up at him squarely, "I shall never marry for money. Never! I know what it means. I've seen too much of it. And there's something odious in. . . Well, that's enough of that! To go back to what I was saying—you've got to earn. Now look here, when you've seen these people I told you to see—you must see them, in common courtesy—they're expecting you. Behave well to them—well, when you've seen them, come and see me again. Come and see me before Cowes. We are going to Cowes. Are you?"

"Cowes?" said Wilfred vaguely.

"Yes, Cowes—yachts."

"Oh no, I don't know anything about those things."

"They'll force you to have one soon, Willy." She half laughed. "When you get it, consult me over the fittings. I am good at colour schemes. And look here, Willy, you'd better go now, it's getting late. Don't wait for Mamma to come down."

He got up to go. She gave him her parting word.

"And look here, Willy, when you ring me up

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again and come to see me, before we go away, I shall have a subject ready for you, and I am going to see that you do that article. You *must* work, Willy. You *must* earn some money. It does make such a difference!"

"What—money?" said Wilfred.

"No—work," said Joan.

"Oh," said Wilfred. And to that he added: "Good-night."

He went home through the Green Park to Westminster feeling less miserable. At one moment he actually whistled. It had been very superficial and futile, but he had found a friend, and he ran over his calculations that night sadly enough, but not so sadly as those few days ago.

His living expenses, his sundry expenses special to the experience through which he had just passed, had put him back a fearful lot; and the next day Mrs. Cramp's bill would be due! There flashed through his mind the thought that perhaps there might come a day when he might get a week behind with that payment on which he was so scrupulously punctual. There might come a day when there would be no such rooms for him and no such payments possible, and as he thought of it he shuddered.

He wondered what those other men his poor uncle had talked about, "better men than himself," had done when they had been thrown upon the

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world? He could not conceive! What *does* a man do when he is thrown upon the world?

Joan had said "Write." But then Joan was not thinking of writing for a living. She was thinking of the tonic of work, or self-respect, or something.

Well, it was no good brooding. He must first wait till he knew exactly how he stood, and the documents from America would be here soon.

IX

THE documents from America had come. Worms and Handler gave Wilfred Straddle the gist of them, and so far as he was concerned the gist was meagre enough. The late Mr. John Scott Guthrie's lawyers in New York had no instructions to convey to Messrs. Worms and Handler, the late Mr. Guthrie's London agents, with regard to Mr. Wilfred Guthrie Straddle. They enclosed a letter for him from themselves, which perhaps they would be courteous enough to hand or to forward to Mr. Wilfred Straddle—and that was all there was to it.

Wilfred Guthrie Straddle abstractedly picked up the envelope with the American imprint, thanked Mr. Worms and Mr. Handler, put the envelope in his pocket, and went out. There was nothing more to be done.

What Worms and Handler did not tell Wilfred was that in the letter they had received was a paragraph of some significance to himself, but it was not one of their duties to pass this on. *The American lawyer could not be certain whether there was a will.* John Scott Guthrie had isolated himself

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beyond the ordinary degree even of money-dealers. He was almost an eccentric in the matter.

What they did know was the uncle's intentions, generally expressed by Mr. John Scott Guthrie shortly before he left New York for the last time. He had run over with them the schedule of his property, which they kept; he had marked with some care the various dispositions which he proposed to make of that property—all of it to public or corporate work in some form. Such and such property for the use of certain Presbyterian bodies in Great Britain and the United States; so much for certain missionary societies; so much for the founding of a Chair of Dogmatic Tautology; and half a dozen other great bequests which he had in mind. Between them these covered all the investments and real estate of which they had any knowledge.

He had left with them, before starting, a note as to his Bank balance—not very much, seeing the scale of his transactions. Of any other available wealth they had no particulars, and they didn't believe there was any. At a rough estimate, the estate might realise something over thirteen and under fifteen million dollars. Particulars would follow later. But anyhow, all the property of which they had any knowledge was accounted for—and no nephew was mentioned as a residuary legatee. Mr. Guthrie had spoken of no personal heir.

It seemed almost incredible that a man in such

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a position should not have left behind him a will; but none had been discovered. New and more rigorous search would be instituted, and he would let them know the result.

Handler on reading this looked at Worms, and Worms looked at Handler. Then Handler said:

“Well—what about our friend?”

Worms shook his head. “There’s no knowing,” he said. “One has to wait in these matters,” and for the moment they talked of something else.

Wilfred meanwhile had slowly drawn out of his pocket that other letter from his uncle’s American lawyer, the enclosure addressed to himself. He walked across the Temple towards the Embankment and stood looking over the stone coping on to the river. He opened the letter, and read that every search was being made for a will, which his uncle surely must have left, but that none had been discovered. They thought it their duty to tell Mr. Straddle of the conversation their client had had with them before leaving for England. He had gone over with them the lists of all his properties, suggesting various dispositions of the same in the event of his death, but Mr. Wilfred Guthrie Straddle’s name had not been mentioned.

That told Wilfred nothing new; none the less, it emphasized the gloom now settled on his mind. His future was black as pitch.

* * * * *

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Wilfred did as he had been told. He called on the old Duchess, and was delighted to find her out. He was in no mood for knowing new people. He called on Lady Merriden, and was thrown into two moods when he found her; wishing that she had been out, but consoled by the sight of her fine car at the door and the appearance of herself all dressed up for glory.

“Come with me,” she said; “you’re looking hurried and worried about something, and I don’t wonder, my dear boy, after all you’ve been through. . . . He must have been a wonderful man! . . . I’ve got a good half-hour to spare, and we’ll tell Davis to take us out into the air for a bit. Would that suit you?”

Yes, it would suit Wilfred, he said, lying and with despair more firmly fixed in his heart than ever. He listened to the wise talk of his hostess, to her sympathy, to her advice.

She talked first, of course, about his late bereavement, repeated her praises of John Scott Guthrie, was disconsolate at never having had the opportunity of meeting him—but he was hardly ever over on this side, was he? If he was like Wilfred’s dear mother, whom she had met once at Balgorrie years ago, he must have been a wonderful personality. *She* had been a wonderful personality. Lady Merriden was sure that great wealth in such hands as John Scott’s had done nothing but good.

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She was sure it would go on doing good. Then she began telling him that she was so much older than he that she presumed on their *great* friendship. Did he mind? No, Wilfred would not mind; he was staring straight in front of him in his misery.

“You yourself, my dear boy, must follow in his steps. You are no spendthrift, and I honour you for your care of what is, after all, only a stewardship. We should always think of possessions as a stewardship, shouldn’t we?”

Wilfred said we should.

“And the worst of life in London is the temptation to spend money on things that give one no pleasure, but are rather an encumbrance. Now, for instance, take this car. We *have* to have it; but there’s no reason why a young man like you, still a bachelor, should keep a car in London. It’s an absolutely futile expense. Of course, if you *have* to get one, you must do as we have done and get a Rolls. But *you* won’t need one in London. In the country, of course—when you have settled on where you will be in the country—you can have as many as you like. You can’t have too many cars in the country—in reason. But in London I do think a young unmarried man keeping a car is mere waste. You can save literally hundreds a year by hiring when you want to, and taking cabs for your short runs; and you are just the sort



Lady Merriden pointing out that wealth is only a stewardship.

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of character that would do good with all the money that you will save. Of course, when you marry it will be different." And she beamed on him, with the brightest smile she had yet given him.

"Yes," said Wilfred miserably. "I suppose it will be different then."

"And remember, Wilfred," she said, by way of saying good-bye (he was becoming Wilfred to everybody now), "you are coming to us for the First of September in Norfolk. Come for the week-end—come on the Saturday—the First's on a Monday this year, I think. Charles tells me there are plenty of birds."

By this time they had come round again nearly to where they had started out, and she told him rather playfully that he must be off. So off he went. And in his mind he revolved, as he wandered towards that pestilently solemn and eternal Doulton's, what it would be like if or when he was married.

What do you do if you are married and haven't got a bean? A profound subject of meditation, causing him to pause in the midst of the pavement and make a little circle with his stick on the ground.

Then he sighed slightly, as he always did when this wretchedly recurrent agony of misery came upon him, and went up the steps to his Club, reflecting as he did so with some relief that he

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was free of this place for months to come; of this one, and the others. Even free of the Pillbox, though he had no great anxiety to be often seen at the Pillbox nowadays.

* * * * *

Lady Lodiham had sent for her elder daughter Loulou. She had had the good luck to catch her, for Loulou was not too often in the house. And Loulou had had the bad luck to be caught. She met her mother in no genial mood. Indeed, were she a young lady for whom I felt a less profound respect, I should say that she was surly and cantankerous. But Lady Lodiham was firm.

“Louise, I’ve got something to say to you.”

“Oh yes——” sinking into a corner of the sofa and lighting her tenth cigarette since tea. “What is it?”

“You know young Wilfred Straddle?”

“And how?”

“My dear, I don’t want to bore you, and I won’t say too much about it, but you know what I think of it. I am asking him to dinner next Monday. I chose the day carefully. A good many of them will be gone by then, you know, and he won’t mind not meeting them. Now I shall put him next to you.”

Loulou was as nearly angry as she could be in the fatigue of the end of the Season.

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“Christ! How perfectly putrid!” she said.

“My dear, don’t talk like a child,” answered her mother with energy. “Do think of what you are saying!”

“Mamma, everybody thinks him putrid. Even the Toothless Hag does, and God knows she’s not dainty.”

“You must *not* call the Duchess by that name, Louise!”

“Everybody does.”

“Well, not in my house.”

“Very well, Mamma, but it’s true. She is a Toothless Hag; and even she can’t stick him. She got almost lively the other day when she told me she had had the good luck to miss him when he called.”

“You know what I said to you before,” continued Lady Lodiham.

“Yes, but it’s really very tiresome. Of course, if it’s got to be, it’s got to be.”

“It lies entirely with you, Louise. One can see that he’s thinking of you.”

“God knows I’m thinking of him,” answered the younger lady. “I can’t stop thinking of him. It’s an obsession. It’s a nightmare.”

“There’s everything in his favour, Louise. Everything. I believe he’s virtuous. . . .”

“WHAT!!”

“Yes, you will find that counts. You don’t

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seem to understand that yet, but you will find it counts. And then—what is very important with men in *his* situation—he really does understand money. I suppose it's been tied up. I don't know. But anyone can see he's careful of it."

"Curse him!" said Loulou.

"Well, there it is," concluded the hard-working parent. "He'll be sitting next to you, and you must do your best. There isn't any time to lose, dear. Remember who's going to tackle him between Goodwood and Cowes."

"I don't want to know," said Loulou. Her mother nodded mysteriously.

"Don't you be too sure. Remember, there isn't too much time!"

"Wretched lump of putty!" said Loulou, and lolloped off without further argument.

Lady Lodiham sat down at once to write her note. She apologized *so* deeply for suggesting such a thing *so* early after his great bereavement, but *could* dear Wilfred dine with them quite simply? There would be nobody there next Monday. She would be *really* grateful. She longed to see him. "We all do," she said, the phrase covering her husband (who had only seen Wilfred once for part of a minute), herself, and particularly Loulou. "We all do," and the "all" was underlined, and she was his affectionately, Emily Lodiham.

On the Monday evening Loulou was in her place,

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and I must say she did her best. It was a poor best. Wilfred and she obviously did not click, and there were whole gaps in which poor Straddle could not think of anything to say, and poor Louise found herself saying the same things twice over. But she did make some kind of conversation. One message she had to convey to him, and she conveyed it.

“You know, Wilfred, the old Duchess *does* want to see you so much. She was *miserable* at missing you when you called. The moment she heard you were coming here to-night she told me to tell you *particularly* you must not be angry at her not writing. But *do go*.”

“I *have* called,” said Wilfred stubbornly.

“Yes, I know. I’ve just told you how miserable it made her. . . . I mean, to have missed you.”

X

THE Goodwood Cup had been won—by Sir Siegmund's Rumpelstiltskin—and lost by the whole string of also-rans.

Straddle had been dragged down to it. He was proud of himself at having sturdily resisted very violent pressure to bet. Joan had praised him for standing out like that. If she had not done so, he might have given way. It was just as well, for there were now only six weeks or so before the fatal First of September. The race between his remaining few pounds and Remorseless Time would be closer than many a horse had run that day.

At Goodwood were Lady Merriden and her crowd. There were thousands of others there as well, but she concerns us more. She was brooding in her heart over the march stolen upon her by Emily Lodiham. She had spoken of it in low tones to her husband, but he was indifferent to such news. His book had gone to pieces, and other matters concerned him not at all.

She spotted Wilfred with determination in his face, and Joan by his side. She greeted them both—him the more warmly. She asked him there and

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then whether they couldn't see him before he left London.

Couldn't he come and dine? Quite in a small way. They would be in Town just for two days before going on to Cowes. Only just two days. She did hope he could come!

Wilfred could. His heart sank as he said it—the whole thing was so horribly out of keeping with what was gnawing at his heart. He saw before him, in letters of fire, the figure of the shrinking balance, and that fire did not warm him, it froze the current of his blood. However, it was a free meal, anyhow, and the taxi there and back would not come to as much as a lonely dinner at Doulton's would come to.

On the eve of the day appointed Lady Merriden arranged for a quiet word with her daughter Fanny. Fanny was not in a happy mood. When she heard that Wilfred was to sit next to her, her mood got a little worse.

"Oh, really, I do think you might. . . ."

"No, my dear," said her mother kindly but strongly, "it's the one and only opportunity till he comes to us for the First."

"Oh, but Mamma, he's impossible!"

"When you know a little more about the world, my dear," said her mother, "you will find that a *good* husband is never impossible."

"I think it's the other way about."

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“Then you think wrong, my dear. And he *is* good—thoroughly good.”

She was answered by a gentle groan.

“Yes, my dear child, but that counts. And what is more rare in young men of that position, he is *really* careful about his money. Do you know, he put nothing on any horse the other day?”

“More fool he,” said the innocent prospective bride. “If he’d followed me and put his shirt on Rumpelstiltskin, he’d have been so loaded the back axle would have broken.”

But Fanny Blackman did not put up a fight. She made a better partner for him at dinner than had Loulou. She told him brightly all about Rumpelstiltskin, and how people had been sure that he would be pulled by his owner Piffle (her name, as you know, and that of all her set for Sir Siegmund); but how Guffy like a darling had squared the jockey. She did not drown Wilfred in technical terms. She made it all quite clear in words of one syllable, and she even got him faintly amused at the picture of the double cross.

The hunt was up; the pack was in full cry, and Wilfred hard pressed: two virgins unleashed already and a mob of them in the offing. So far had things proceeded, when London began to go away.

London had all gone away. All except Wilfred. He was now alone in the heartless city.

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He had waited in vain for Bill. Bill for some reason had not been able to turn up. Wilfred was certain that there was no question of Bill's trying to avoid *him*, but he *was* disappointed. Bill had written apologetically. Bill would be back by the end of August without fail, but he had had to go straight from Goodwood to Cowes, because he had met a man who wanted him to go cruising, and he could not be coming back at once, in fact, probably not till the end of the month. Anything sent to his rooms would be forwarded. He added a postscript in his firm clear handwriting: "Good luck! I'm sorry we can't sell yet. You will have seen that they are still sticking round about four to four-ten; they were ninety-one this morning. But that's only the holidays. When things begin to move, they'll begin to rocket." And he closed with the affectionate word: "Ta."

Day after day Wilfred watched the steady lowering of his remaining funds. He had had to put off Mrs. Cramp twice. She had grumbled and was beginning to alarm him.

By August 20th he was desperate. He had only ten days left, at the end of which he was to go through what he had seen called in dull and ancient books "a round of country house visits."

How in Gehenna was it to be done? He had not learned much guile, poor fellow! But he knew a little more of the world than he had done those few

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months ago when he had first come up to London. He knew there were such things as overdrafts. He had, too, a misty idea of how they were arranged. After all, the Bank had known his family for years. Surely the name of Guthrie would be enough? Enough for a very small advance—say one hundred. He dared not leave London without first soothing Mrs. Cramp.

In his anxiety he reached the Bank as it opened the next morning. An error. They are more mellow in the early afternoon, and more at leisure after the big doors are shut.

The Manager had not come yet. Wilfred was asked to wait in an anteroom, and he waited and waited and waited.

When the great key-man appeared Wilfred was again indiscreet. He leapt to his feet, eagerly, with anxious demand and trembling hope in every muscle of his too expressive face. The Manager nodded. "Want to see me?" he said pleasantly. "Just a moment!" and passed into his little private room.

Wilfred waited and waited and waited. While he waited a slip of paper had been given to the Manager, on which was written the amount of Wilfred's remaining balance. Four pounds five shillings and two pence. Then he rang his bell and sent for Mr. Wilfred Guthrie Straddle.

You, my unseen reader, who know little of banks

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and banking, may think that in this title, "Wilfred Guthrie Straddle," Guthrie was the operative word. Wrong—wrong again. The operative word was Straddle. And other operative words in the background, unspoken, were the words Worms and Handler.

It is the duty of a Bank Manager to find out all he can. He does so. All his colleagues do so. The great card index system, with its cross references, and the mutual support between bank and bank in the big Monopoly, would surprise you. Perhaps you have never heard it talked about. You certainly have never seen it printed.

Wilfred entered, in such a mood that he hardly knew where he was. The Manager greeted him with a smile even more kindly than that with which he had greeted him as he passed through to his private room.

"Well, Mr. Straddle, what can I do for you? Is it a question of investment? Do you want advice?"

"Well—no sir—not just now. . . . Perhaps later in the year I shall come to you about that. . . . There may be something important later in the year, and I'm sure you would be invaluable to me. For the moment I have only come to ask you whether I can . . . whether you . . . whether we . . . might arrange for . . . for a small overdraft?"

The Manager looked kinder than ever.

"Nothing of consequence," Wilfred hurried on.

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“A hundred pounds, or something of that sort. I have got a little short for carrying on till quarter-day, and I’ve got to go to a few places. I am going to . . .”

But the great names froze upon his lips, for he was interrupted by a decisive gesture and still more decisive word.

“I am afraid, Mr. Straddle. . . . *Hardly*, you know! No! I am afraid not! *Hardly!*”

“I could get a guarantee. . . . I’m sure I could,” stammered poor Wilfred hesitatingly.

“Well, when you’ve got it we can have a look at it. But as things are at present, Mr. Straddle, hardly I think—*hardly*. Eh?” The last word was like the bleating of a decided sheep. An Adamantine sheep. A Mede and a Persian of a sheep. But a still smiling sheep; and the Manager’s hands were thrust straight before him, palm outwards, deprecating, to indicate the Manager’s real and friendly regret.

There was a long pause, during which Wilfred still sat on in that chair. The all-important figure opposite him did not exactly say “Get out!” but he looked so quite overwhelmingly kind that even Wilfred understood.

“Very well, sir,” he said, rising. “Very well. I’m sorry it couldn’t be done. I must just let the bills run, that’s all.”

“Yes,” said the Manager kindly, “that’s right! Let them run!”



Hardly . . .

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Nor did he get up to open the door for Wilfred. He even forgot to say "Good morning." The door was softly closed upon that sacred inner room and upon Wilfred Guthrie Straddle's first experience in the machinery of Bank Credit.

All men need support, the Hedge and the Horse as well. Yes! Even the Horse; only people don't guess it, for he keeps his supports to himself. The Horse is not expansive in affection.

In his agony Wilfred wrote to Joan and asked if he might come down to Lady Penelope's place. Hertfordshire was next door to London. He could afford the journey and the ten shillings in tips—he could perhaps just afford it. It would be near the knuckle. He would once more, and at a mortal risk, scrap his week-end payment to Mrs. Cramp. He would let it run, as the Manager had advised. But it was going to be a close thing.

At the same time he sent a most urgent telegram to Robinson, begging the man at Robinson's flat to forward it to wherever his master might be. The telegram was most urgent—it was a matter of life and death. It ended: "Communicate at once. Vital. Wilfred." And then he went off to Lady Penelope's.

Joan was more than kind to him. He had obeyed her at Goodwood, and one of the fifteen hundred and sixty-two ways of pleasing women is to do what they tell you. Another is to do the opposite—but all that's a long story and I can't go into it.

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Anyhow, Joan had been pleased, and she was more drawn to him than ever. Her security helped her. It was not as if there had been any danger of his falling in love, and if he did, she wouldn't have him. She was fixed on that. She was not going to be chucked into the marriage market. Even if her mother had never spoken she would have been determined. As it was, she was doubly determined. But she had received Wilfred kindly, and in proof of her affection she dragged him to her private room in the middle of the next morning and sat him down to write.

"Now, Wilfred, you know I told you you had to do some work. You *must* earn some money. If you don't, you'll go all to pieces. I have seen it happen to dozens like you."

"Are there dozens like me?" said Wilfred in a mixture of pique and despair. He thought that there was no one else so void of money and at the same time visiting country houses. (If he had only known!) "Are there so many like me?"

"Well, there aren't many who are just rolling in it as you are, or just going to be, with all the stuff ready to hand while they're waiting. But there are plenty who've more than is good for them, and you're one. The remedy is WORK. You've got to *work*, Wilfred! You know you've got to! Now, then, sit down here while I am with you and begin something."



Incalculable value of WORK ! Sheer WORK !

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He sat down, took up the pen, looked into the air with his mind and his face a blank, save for that permanent sadness which now would not leave him.

“What am I to write, Joan?” he asked.

“The article, you ass.”

“I have never done such a thing in my life.”

“Then begin now.”

“On what—and who for?”

“Never mind who for. I’ll find someone to take it, double quick. Only just you write it.”

“Yes, but what about?”

“You said that before. On anything.”

“That’s not much use,” said Wilfred.

“Write about America. That’s the kind of thing they’d want to hear from you.”

“But I’ve never been there.”

“What’s that got to do with it? Lots of people have written about Abyssinia who have never been there: strongly in favour, too. Write something in favour of America. They’ve all heard of you and your American money.”

“Well, what am I to say?”

Joan began to be annoyed. She was not the less fond of him for his helplessness, but he really must pull himself together. She came round from where she had been standing behind his chair and drove him. She sat down squarely on the edge of the table, and said:

“Look here! I’ll dictate, and start you off.”

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He was profoundly grateful, and scribbled away as best he could to keep up with her creative genius. She fixed on the title "Our American Cousins." It was not very original, nor was it true, but she had the sense to know that familiar falsehood is the stuff to give the troops.

" 'I have often wondered. . . .' " she began at top speed.

"Wait a minute—not so fast," said Wilfred, his pen racing across the paper.

" 'I—have—often—wondered—why Englishmen and Americans ' (Curse them!) No!—don't write *down* Curse them, you boob!—it was only a relief— 'why Englishmen and Americans have not joined together long ago to govern the world. There can never be war between them. That is one of the few certain things of our time. They are the only two great nations not actually under one government. . . .' "

"Not so quick, Joan. *Please!*—Joan, you're a wonder!"

" . . . 'not actually under one government,' " pattered on Joan, " 'who are as united in spirit as though they were. They are much the mightiest' —no, wait a bit, that won't work, will it? They can't both be the mightiest. . . .' "

"No, but they might each be the mightiest," said Wilfred. He was getting quite interested.

"No: if they were each, they would be both."

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“Both isn’t each.”

“Oh damn! Who cares! ‘Each the mightiest, anyhow, ‘of those working under Divine Providence’—capital D capital P, idiot—‘for the betterment of a world which without them would be without hope.’”

“Hold up a moment . . .” the pen raced over the paper. “Yes, now I’ve got it down . . . ‘without hope.’ Joan, you’re a marvel!”

Joan thought so herself. They were almost the same words that she had found in a magazine nearly ten years old at the dentist’s. She had had to read it because there was nothing else. As that was only yesterday she still retained a good deal of it.

“‘Let it be remembered’,” she went on, “‘that we are the only nation who have fairly and honestly faced our obligations to the United States.’”

“Yes, that’s true. I’ve heard that said before,” said Wilfred.

“Don’t interrupt . . . ‘to the United States. As we always have and always shall to every creditor. We can boast that we are a people who do not go back upon our word.’”

There she stuck. She knew there was something about the Philippines, but she’d be cursed if she could remember what it was.

Never mind! She would go on about something else—and she did, gaily. She went on about the

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beauty of the American women who had appeared in the London Season, and about the American men (more vague) and about the enormous size of the country. And a lot about bison, which brutes (poor girl) she believed to roam free over the vast spaces of the Far West.

It took them about three-quarters of an hour, and when it was finished they were both very proud of it.

"I can't thank you enough, dear," said Wilfred humbly.

"Well, I'm glad we've got it done," she answered in triumph. "Now, just take down this letter, and get them both typewritten, and send it to Layton—he's the man who runs 'Features' in the *Howl*—De la Guarrenne's paper. Dirty old beast!—Guarrenne, I mean, not poor Layton."

She dictated the letter.

"Dear Mr. Layton, I have never had the pleasure of meeting you, but when I determined to put down on paper thoughts that occurred to me about possible co-operation between the United States and ourselves, it occurred to me that one of Lord de la Guarrenne's papers, preferably the *Howl*, which you conduct so admirably, would be the best medium through which I could reach the public. I wonder whether you could find any use for it?"

"There!" puffed Joan. "Now put your name to *that*, and they'll eat it."

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"I don't know why they should," said Wilfred

"I do! He counts as a Yank, you know."

"Who? Layton?"

"No, you donkey. De la Guarrenne. Some people say he was born in Chicago. It's quite certain he sold matches in the street there. But it really doesn't matter. Anything you write now, especially on that subject, they'll lap up and swallow."

And so, two days later it went off, nicely typewritten, and Joan saw to it that he kept a copy.

In the early afternoon of the third day the News-Feature Editor, semi-autocrat of the *Howl*, wage slave (but well-kept wage slave) of Lord de la Guarrenne, discovered that document and marvelled at it. It must be taken to his chief. By good luck his chief was there: specially come down to the office to boost the suicide of his friend the Crown Prince. It was a scoop, a private scoop, and he was in a genial mood.

"Well? whad d'yer want?" was his greeting.

"I've got something for you here, Lord de la Guarrenne, which I think you ought to know about. It's an article in favour of an Anglo-American understanding—and do you know who it's by?"

"I should!" said the millionaire, tickled to death at being asked if he knew who it was by, when it was obvious that he couldn't know anything about it. Then Layton pronounced the great word.

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“It’s by that young fellow Wilfred Guthrie Straddle,” he said. “Wilfred *Guthrie* Straddle.”

Lord de la Guarrenne was an expansive man. He slapped his thigh. He answered so loudly as almost to shout. The word he used was “Bully!”—a commonplace word, but then Lord de la Guarrenne had a commonplace mind.

“Lemme see!” he said. “Sid yer down and lemme see!”

He glanced through the thing, and then chucked it back to the seated menial, jumped up and looked over Layton’s shoulder as that Editor began to read the stuff for himself. He had only read the covering letter so far.

“See yere for yerself, Layton,” he said, “I don’t understand these things. But if it’s from that guy Straddle, it goes. They’ve gotten him taped in American bettern than they hev here.”

“It won’t do as it is,” said Layton.

“Well, get it fixed somehows. Just wire him that yer using it to-day.”

“Wouldn’t it come in better when the Anglo-Saxon Glory Festival is on? With Mrs. McGregor and her Angels in September?”

“Mebbe,” said the master, a little disappointed. “Anyways, clinch.”

Therefore it was that Wilfred and Joan heard to their great joy before the end of the week that the beginning of a literary career had been founded for



“ Lemme see ! Sid yer down, and lemme see ! ”

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the less agile of the two minds, by the aid of the more agile. Their mutual joy was so great that she very nearly kissed him. She thought better of it in the nick of time: caught it, as you may say. It was just as well, for, incredible as it may seem, in the emotion of the moment, Wilfred had almost kissed *her*.

But after he had left her, other thoughts came—or, as Mr. Layton would have said, supervened.

No doubt he would get five pounds, or even ten; after all, his name was well known. But they would not pay him till it was printed, and they would not pay at all until the great Anglo-Saxon festival, probably the day after the Albert Hall Meeting when the Angels would be there. And that was a long way off. A dreadful long way off. A long wait through September. And meanwhile there was now something well under three pounds between him and the Pit.

But there was a ray of hope. There was a telegram from Sluys, the new harbour in Belgium, awaiting him at his rooms:—

Am at Sluys on board *Semiramis* Stuffy
says would be glad to see you. Come along.

BILL.

He would nerve himself for one more anguished interview with Mrs. Cramp and then make Sluys. There would be hardly anything left when he got

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there, but once there he really could press Bill, and Bill would have to provide. He was sure that Bill could provide. It was necessary. It was life and death. He could not chuck the Merridens and the Lodihamms and all that world. There was a vague but strong idea at the back of his head that people like that help one to float. Besides, companionship supported him, even when it was only acquaintance.

He looked up the trains, sent off an answering telegram saying he would arrive at Sluys by the next afternoon's boat. He even looked up the *Semiramis* in Lloyd's Yacht Register to find out who Stuffy was.

Yes, Wilfred was getting on! Only a few weeks ago he would never have thought of doing that. He would not even have heard of Lloyd's Register. Stuffy was presumably the owner of the *Semiramis*, and if that were so, then Stuffy was Eddie Coles himself—a man too rich for this world. And Wilfred Straddle noted the tonnage of the *Semiramis*. She was the size of a liner! Bill seemed to be in clover. Whether he would be in funds or not was another matter. Anyhow, if you haven't got money, go where money is.

He worked it all out; he had a scene of torture with Mrs. Cramp, and on the next day he was met on the quay at Sluys by Bill, and around Bill a posse from the *Semiramis*.

XI

BILL was dressed for the part. It is an obligation for men who know nothing of the sea. He had on the short jacket and a peaked cap covered with a sort of white thing, and a slight suggestion of spread at the end of his trousers, and (believe it or not!) mess boots without buttons.

Stuffy was got up twin, and so were the five or six other men in the gang; and there were two women. They had all turned out to meet the steamer. Evidently a good deal was thought of Wilfred, though Wilfred could not imagine why. His own mood was not exalted.

But no matter. There they all came flocking round, and it was all to the good. But he felt a little shy and awkward when he made out in the distance the gigantic form of the *Semiramis*.

Bill introduced the two women first. And of the two women, much the more aged was given precedence.

“You know Lady Antigua?” he said.

“I know her mother,” said Wilfred awkwardly.

“Of course you do,” said Bill. “I forgot. The Duchess was telling me how much she was

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hoping you would call again before they left for St. Bennett's. They must have gone by this time."

Lady Antigua acknowledged the introduction in a fashion neither cordial nor distant. They all went off and got on board the *Semiramis*, saluted by attendant slaves. Poor Wilfred, at his wits' end for haste, begged Bill to come aside.

"Look here, Bill, I must see you! I really must! You don't know how urgent it is!"

"Nothing's ever as urgent as that," said Bill. "There's plenty of time. What's your hurry?"

They were pacing up and down the deck together, alone. Wilfred looked over his shoulder. There was no one near.

"Look here, Bill," he said, in a low voice. "You know how it is. I'm absolutely on my uppers. You must let me have that two hundred somehow."

Bill stopped, put his hands in his pockets. He looked first at the sky, then at the harbour water, and then shook his head.

"No, Willy, I know more about these things than you do." (Which was true.) "It would be madness to sell now. They actually sagged to 82/- yesterday."

"Oh God, Bill"—Wilfred would have shrieked if he dared. "I've hardly got *change*! I haven't even got my ticket home. And I've got to meet my lodgings again, and then I've got to go and see all these people!"

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“You’re not going to the Duke’s till the week after next,” said Bill.

“Yes, but I have got to get to the Merridens first.”

“Can’t you chuck ’em?”

“I daren’t. Really I don’t know which way to turn!”

Bill pondered. “Come down to my cabin,” he said. “We needn’t bother about the others for a bit.”

When they got to the cabin Bill sat down at his ease, made Wilfred do the same, and rang sharply for drinks.

“I could find you something when we get back to London,” said Bill. “Just to tide over . . . what would you want?”

“Well, Bill, there are those three houses, and a shoot and some little bills and the railway journeys. I couldn’t do with under twenty-five, and that’ll run me pretty close.”

Bill pondered again. “I think I could do it if you don’t mind starting for England again by the night boat to-night, with me,” he said.

“I will do anything,” said the desperate Wilfred. “You see, I can’t touch anything until they are certain what has happened about my uncle’s property.”

“Ye-es!” answered Bill slowly and meditatively. He also was thinking about that uncle.

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It was a pity he could not be sure how that dead uncle stood on the matter of legacies. However, it was worse for Wilfred, and Bill, like all men of his kidney, had a good heart. He was sure he would be able to refund that two hundred pretty soon. Anyhow, he would get Wilfred back to London by the night boat, and put him in some kind of funds the next morning. Twenty-five pounds was not an impossible sum, and he be-thought him of a way.

The immediate trouble was the fare for the night boat to England. Bill had been cleaned out at the tables—all but about a hundred Belgian francs or so, and Wilfred had less than a pound's worth of English change.

But in this dire extreme of ill, Ulysses was Ulysses still.

It was incumbent upon William to keep the flag of the Horse Club flying, and, as one of the greatest of horses—a Giant Horse, say twenty-five hands—he was determined to be worthy of his membership.

“Look here, Wilfred, you let me lead you to the others. Go and talk to Antigua. She's a little stiff—so are her joints—but she won't bite you. When I've thought things out I'll come and call you.”

He led Wilfred away, as a man might be led to execution, and Stuffy and Buffy and Guffy and all

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the others, not excluding Polly and Dolly, a fine vacuous company, and Lady Antigua in the midst, received Wilfred amid cocktails, seeing to it that he had one himself. Wilfred asked if it might be tomato, and their well-bred guffaws were the first bit of liveliness they had had that day. Even Stuff showed amusement, in spite of his wealth.

Then Wilfred thought he would not have any cocktail; and there he sat, in great agony, a victim. They hardly said another word to him. He awaited Bill's return.

Bill, pacing up and down the two or three yards of his cabin, was thinking hard.

The problem was this: two young Englishmen, one a Hedge, the other a Horse—the Horse splendidly dressed, the Hedge dressed by the same tailor, but alas!—more negligent—anyhow, both giving a false atmosphere of wealth—had to reach London by the next morning without paying their fares.

There are many ways in which men can cross the North Sea without paying, from getting stowed away to getting extradited. There is also sneaking on board, getting into a fight, when she has started, being put in irons and delivered to torturers on landing—but that only gets you as far as Dover, and it involves much delay. Bill had a far better solution in mind.

He had been put for the moment into Darham's

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cabin—young Darham, the attaché at Brussels. In two or three days three of the others were going away and he would have one of their cabins, and Darham, who was coming back, would get his own. That he was in Darham's room gave him an idea. He opened the drawers of the writing desk. He was not disappointed. In one of them was a letter, open but still in its envelope, and on the envelope was written:

To/ The Hon. Charles Darham,
 The British Embassy,
 Brussels.

He searched further. In the corner of another drawer were two or three visiting-cards lying loose: "Mr. Charles Darham, British Embassy, Brussels," nicely printed in English, and in the corner, "Boodle's."

"Boodle's?" murmured Mr. Robinson to himself. "Boodle's will mean nothing to them!" Then to his great joy he came to a card much more to the purpose. Darham's name was in English, but under it (after the continental fashion, occasionally used among diplomats) were the qualifications: "Attaché Honoraire à l'Ambassade de Sa Majesté Britannique à Bruxelles," etc.

That was more like it! He took a specimen of each card. Then he wrote on the impressive *Semiramis* notepaper with the Royal Yacht Squad-

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ron heading a few brief words in French addressed to the Station Master at Sluys. He had the thing now all fixed; all greased; all made to open and shut. He felt proud of himself, and he had a right to be.

Then he rejoined the cocktailers, took Stuffy aside and said:

“Stuffy, something has happened. You see how worried this friend of mine, Wilfred Straddle, is? He’s appealed to me to help him in a really difficult matter—connected with old Guthrie’s death, you know—and I must go with him by the night boat to London. I’ll be back to-morrow evening. You must excuse his dressing for dinner to-night. As you see, he’s brought no luggage with him. It’s very urgent.”

Stuffy quite understood. That is, Stuffy understood nothing at all about it, but was sure that Bill was right—Bill always was.

“Can I have the cutter?” asked Bill.

“Of course!” said Stuffy.

“Right!” said Bill, and calling to Wilfred, “Come along with me—I’ve got to go ashore.”

They still had an hour before dinner. Bill went straight to the offices of the Steamboat Company and sent in his letter. He was not kept waiting a moment. He was ushered in with profound bows, introducing Wilfred as his secretary. In the most charming and the most decisive manner

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he explained his business. There was imperative need for him to travel to London by the night boat. It had to be done in complete secrecy. He presented his card—the one printed in French. He trusted that M. the Controller would understand the nature of the affair. Complete secrecy—or shall we say privacy?—was the essential. M. the Controller could quite understand. If M. the Honourable Attaché would wait a moment he would have the passes made out and all the other papers that would make things comfortable. He would reserve two cabins, of course.

When Bill had been given the slips, he thanked M. the Controller with that mixture of courtesy and reserve which distinguishes your man of high breeding, especially when he is dealing with international affairs. Then they went back on board and dined, and William Robinson was full of life, and poor Wilfred Straddle of death. As for Lady Antigua, she began by being something between the two, but Bill at her side, vivacious, loquacious, pertinacious, made her begin to be gracious. Wine helped a little—him certainly, her probably—but it helped not poor Wilfred, who was a man of his word, and touched not a drop—at which Stuffy was really concerned, and even asked if there was any ginger-beer aboard, and found to his delight that there was: for Stuffy was a good host, though Wilfred already seemed to him for

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all those Yankee Guthrie millions an animal from the wilds.

"Willy," said Bill, before they parted each for his cabin. "You've got ample for what we need?"

"What will that be?"

"Oh, tipping the steward, and some coffee in the morning, and I rather *think* they may ask us to pay for the places in the Pullman—I don't know the rule about it with official passes. Anyhow, ten shillings ought to cover it."

"Yes," said Wilfred. "I told you I've got change for a pound."

"Well, I shall have a little more than that when I've changed the Belgian money on me. We'll be all right."

"But what are you going to do when we get to London," said Wilfred, staring.

"You'll see!" said Bill. And such is Horse magic that the Hedger was content.

When they got out at Victoria they put their very light luggage into the cloak room, and Bill said: "We must walk in the Park a bit. The man I'm going to see won't be there till ten o'clock—better say half-past ten. Don't come with me. Wait at the Club. I'll be back by eleven."

Wilfred, with rather less than five shillings in his pocket (the rest had gone in tips to the steward and in breakfast) waited at the Club. While the Hedge waited, vacuous, alarmed, the Horse acted.

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He found his tailor, as he had expected, at half-past ten, greeted him most genially, looked at his patterns, asked for one or two of those he liked best to be sent to him c/o Stuffy on board S.Y. *Semiramis*, R.Y.S., in Ostend Harbour—he was going back there that day, he would be in London again within a week, and he would then have chosen his pattern and would get measured.

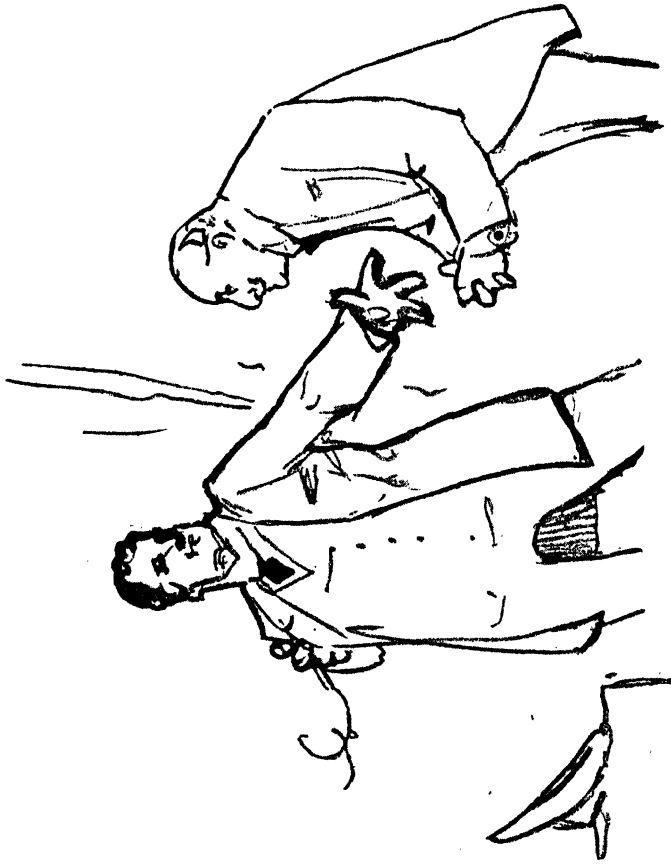
“Oh, by the way, can you let me have thirty pounds—I don’t care how. Tens, if you like.”

“Certainly, Mr. Robinson. Certainly, sir, with the greatest pleasure, sir.”

“I ought to go round to the Bank, but it’s a hell of a way off, and I’m so fussed just these few hours in London.”

“Don’t mention it, sir, I shall be only too pleased.”

And so he was, for, as is customary in such transactions, that thirty pounds would appear as fifty pounds worth of goods. As to who might be behind Bill, this excellent outfitter, himself a man of solid wealth, had no idea. What he *did* know was that Bill knew everybody and brought him custom, and, what is more, that at irregular intervals his bills got paid. Not in full, of course, your fashionable tailor sees to that. He prefers to leave something to keep the account open. But he was sufficiently paid. He was sure that he was running no real risk. Nor was he, as you will discover.



Three tens.

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It was just eleven when Bill came to the Club, fuller of happy life than ever, and handed two of the three ten-pound notes to Wilfred.

"It's all I could do, my dear boy. I hope that'll be enough."

"Oh dear!" cried Wilfred. "You know, I thought twenty-five. . . ."

"Yes. Still, that'll be enough."

"I would have liked to have paid Mrs. Cramp something before starting."

"Oh, treat the old dear to a breeze. Give her the nod. Say you'll be back in a fortnight, and that it will be all *right*."

"She's rather clamouring for arrears already," said Wilfred. "I couldn't have settled it all, of course, but I would have liked to have. . . ."

"Well, my dear boy, I've done my best. I'm sure you'll find it'll be all right. I'll tell you what—I'll stand you lunch before I get the train back to Dover. By the way, didn't you say you were going to the Merridens to shoot? Have you got your guns?"

"Oh Lord, no!" said the unhappy Hedger. "What do they cost?"

"Cost?" said the Horse hurriedly. "Nothing! Come with me. It's only half-past eleven—no, we won't walk, we'll take a cab."

At the greatest of all gunsmiths, in the presence of the very master of gun-smithery (he had, of course, never made a gun himself, but had provided them

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for all the very rich), Bill carried the thing through with a swing.

“Mornin’, Barrington.”

“Good morning, Mr. Robinson, sir,” said the Great Mr. Barrington, with dignity and poise, yet not without a certain deference, for there was evidently another order coming along.

“I’ve brought Mr. Guthrie Straddle round to see you.”

“*Mr. Guthrie* Straddle? I’m proud to make your acquaintance, sir. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Look here, Barrington,” Robinson broke in. “We’re in rather a hurry. No time, of course, to measure or anything of that sort. We’ve got to drive away with them now. He only heard the change of plans this morning.”

“Well, Mr. Robinson, I think we can do that for Mr. Guthrie, I mean Mr. Straddle, all right.”

A slave was despatched, and two very fine instruments of death were laid upon the table before them. Bill took up the first, weighing it in his left hand, taking the butt in his right, winking one eye down the double barrels with precision.

“I should have liked it a little heavier, but we can’t be choosers, can we?”

As with the first gun, so with the second. “Oh yes, they’ll have to do, Mr. Barrington. Really, it’s very kind of you.”

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“There’s no time to put the initials on the case, sir, I suppose?”

“No, I’m afraid not. Can you get them round to Mr. Straddle’s rooms—wait—better, to his Club?”

Mr. Barrington knew which Club, I need hardly say. It was his business to know these things.

He bowed. “They shall be at Doulton’s at once,” he said.

The two patrons of gunsmithery strolled out together.

“What have I let myself in for?” said Wilfred, hardly above an agonized whisper.

“Oh, I don’t know! Sixty pounds, perhaps?—Hardly more. You see, he didn’t make them for you. You really took them off his hands. He ought to be grateful.”

As it was said, so it was done. The Horse went off full of oats—and beans—the Hedger rang up Worms and Handler, to ask if there was any news. There was no news. What is more, he only got that information from a clerk, after a long wait and (as he could not help thinking) a certain curtness in the reply. Neither Worms nor Handler would deign to receive him in person. All he got was: “Mr. Worms says there’s nothing further to communicate,” and then the thing rang off.

Wilfred sat gloomily through the afternoon, hardly daring to face the coming interview with Mrs. Cramp; looked up his train for the morrow,

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wrote a note to Lady Merriden; had dinner to give himself courage, bitterly regretted the three-and-sixpence the meal demanded, and then went off home.

He dared not face Mrs. Cramp that night, in spite of his dinner. He could not but believe that she had heard rumours. He had his breakfast next day in an atmosphere of hostility in the lady who ruled his still unpaid-for roof. Then he approached the necessity of further delay, further postponement; and, as he had feared, there was a tense quarter of an hour.

He begged her to wait just these few days more. "I have really got to go to these people, Mrs. Cramp, and I shall be back in a fortnight, and it'll be all right then. It really will."

She hoped it might be. She indicated that she doubted it. She would have been glad of something on account, and she said so. He barely carried it off, and his bag as well, to Liverpool Street, picking up his guns on the way.

In the train, the nearer he got to Merriden, the more he dreaded the great wealth which he was now invading. He would have been more worried if he had known what had been going on at Merriden House during the hours of that morning when Bill had seen his tailor and the famous gunsmith had been so generous.

Mr. Holder, the man who ran the Head Office

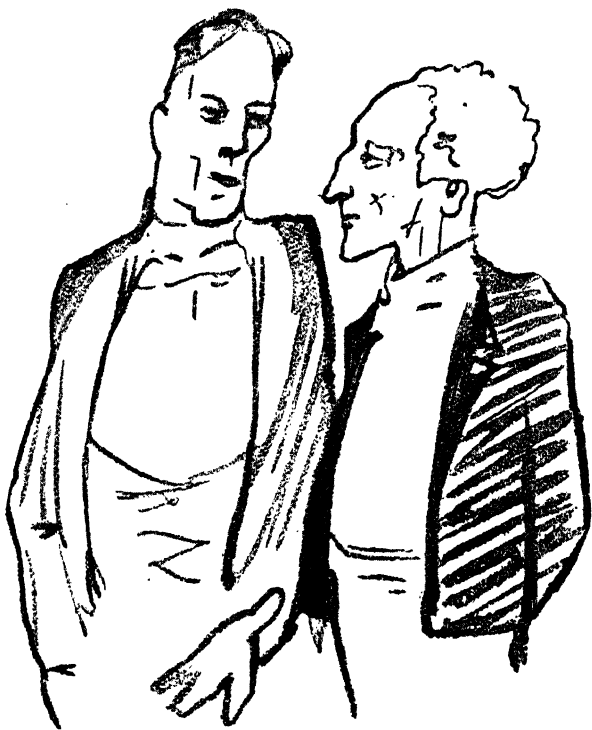
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for the four National Coalition Governments which have become, I am glad to say, traditional in England, had been asked down to Merriden for a Purpose. The Head Office did not mean to let the Guthrie millions knock about in the void. They must be used for the service of the State.

With Mr. Holder had been asked (and had reluctantly consented to come) Lord Fakenham, the banker to the fourth National Coalition Government, its candidatures, its campaigns, the activities of its public life. It had long ago been decided that the Party names Anarchist and Socialist should be continued—the Socialists the inheritors of the old Conservatives, in the days before the Flood, the Anarchists carrying on the tradition of the solid old Labour Party. Men were attached to those labels, and it would be difficult to organize voting without them; but it was a great saving of energy and of money and a simplification of all the machinery to have them managed from one office.

The same sensible compromise had now been reached with regard to the Government Party funds. The two Party funds were kept separate, but they had a common Treasurer. Hence Lord Fakenham. And Lord Fakenham and Mr. Holder were there at Merriden waiting for their prey.

“Before you meet him, I want to warn you of one thing, Fakenham,” (Mr. Holder was saying).
“He’s a hard-boiled egg!”



Mr. Holder, Lord Fakenham and the Hard-boiled Egg.

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"I've heard as much," said Lord Fakenham.

"Stingy?" went on Holder. "My word! Sell his grandmother if he had one!"

"One of his grandmothers was a Guthrie," said Fakenham.

"She was, and the other was a Straddle. D'ye know, with all that American stuff behind him, he lives in a beastly little *bouge* in Westminster. What's worse, he won't drink a drop of anything."

"Perhaps that's his stomach," said Lord Fakenham, who had himself been on the moderate side since his sixtieth year—and a subsequent attack.

"No, it's just avarice. Sheer rusty close-fisted avarice, and he's not thirty! From what I hear of the fellow, he's a stinker. However, he'll do for Ratsholme. He's just the man for the suburbs."

"Who will give the subscriptions and things?"

"You'll have to do that with the Party funds," said Holder.

Lord Fakenham did not like it.

"Well, you'll *have* to," Holder insisted. "You won't get a penny out of him. I shouldn't wonder if he made you buy him a season ticket."

"Ratsholme's only four miles from Cannon Street!" complained Lord Fakenham bitterly.

"My dear fellow, he'll make you pay for *everything*. He'll leave his cab standing at your door and make the Office pay for that. I tell you he's

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a tight wad. You couldn't get it out of him with a screw."

"Can he talk?" asked Fakenham.

"I shouldn't think so. . . . What does that matter?"

"No. You're right. Anybody does."

"Well, they've heard about John Scott Guthrie at Ratsholme, and I'll rub it in when I introduce him. That's all they'll want. They'll think he's going to spill millions on 'em. They can live on faith."

And so was Wilfred's fate decided—he all unknowing.

But his hostess was even kinder to him than she had been in the past. His hostess's daughter Fanny played up. He had a strange feeling that the other guests in the considerable house—full that had been summoned to Merriden for that week-end treated him with a sort of deference—why, he could not imagine!

One loud woman talked to him about America. What did he know of America? A woman next him, of whom he was rather more frightened, talked to him about English politics (help!)—he might have guessed why, but alas! he knew too little of the world.

There was one man present, at least twenty years older than himself, who drew up his chair and his glass and began a whole conversation—

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which started with the startling assumption that Wilfred Guthrie Straddle was going to stand for Parliament.

“Have you thought any more about that proposal, that letter, from the Head Office?” asked Mr. Holder.

“What letter?” said Wilfred.

“Oh, haven’t you had it? You’ll get it tomorrow. Perhaps they sent it to the wrong address.”

Wilfred Straddle had not the courage to deny. He didn’t know whether he was standing on his head or on his heels. What was all this about standing for Parliament? Mr. Holder gave him no respite. He reeled home the line. Wilfred was told he would find the constituency cheaper than most, and, being in London, there were really no travelling expenses to speak of. Rats-holme were not the sort of people who wanted much if one was on the Socialist side—as he understood Wilfred was going to be. The Anarchists, of course, wanted more palaver. But he was sure Wilfred knew all about that. When would he like the date for the first meeting? Wilfred said that any date would suit him—“At least,” he hurriedly added, thinking of the visits ahead, “any date after the seventh of September.”

“Right—let’s say the eighth.”

Mr. Holder snapped it down in a little memo-

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random book. "Shall I count on you for the eighth?"

Wilfred made the appointment, wondering in his heart whether by the 8th September next he might not have fled—always supposing that on the 8th he had the money wherewith to flee.

So that was settled and the fish was hooked. The young millionaire was to call at the Head Office on September 8th and go down with Mr. Holder to Ratsholme to be introduced to the Constituency.

The next day, Sunday, was full of walking and talking with Holder, and for the rest, that curious air of unceasing interest in himself which Wilfred was beginning to feel oppressive but not to understand.

His host, the Nigger, spoke to him as genially as he could. It was not saying much. Lord Merriden couldn't act as well as a man of his position should. He painfully made brief and disdainful conversation about Wilfred's shooting, and the thought of that ordeal drove everything else out of the young man's head.

Well (thought the Hedge), he had to go through with it! He had engaged himself to it, and he was more frightened of backing out than of going on. He would trust to Luck. After all, he had handled a gun once or twice in his life in a small

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way. He had potted rabbits over the neighbours' fields in Northumberland.

Wilfred had heard that at these big places (and Merriden was as big as Olympia and quite as ugly) they had men called loaders, who passed up your gun to you and head keepers who levied heavy blackmail. Perhaps he would get through it all right. Things always seem worse in anticipation. He knew the attitudes and gestures of a big shoot; he had seen them in pictures. One swung the gun round, following the bird. That was what one did.

XII

ON the field of action Wilfred found himself at the end of the line, beyond his host. Lord Merriden had placed him there where he could do least harm. In this his prudent host had, like most prudent people, tempted Fate.

The great moment had come. Men have to face these things. Sometimes it is death, sometimes marriage, sometimes public exposure and disgrace. This time it was merely shooting at poor little birds by a man who had but the vaguest idea of how it was done—and that in the presence of people enormously rich; himself (had they only known it!) disgustingly poor.

They were lined up. They solemnly moved across the roots, their slaves in attendance. Lord Merriden (poor darling!) was fairly certain he was safe—besides which, a man as rich as Straddle must have shot somewhere, somehow, damn it! Only he never seemed to have heard of it. Anyway, it was his wife's plan and he had nothing more to say.

There is not only a tide in the affairs of men, there is also a little devil. And the little devil had

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arranged for a covey of birds to rise right under poor Wilfred's feet. It went off like an alarm clock, startling him out of his senses. The very noise fired him to manly effort, and he blazed away.

His first blaze away was direct. For, note you, the partridge being disturbed, makes off with extreme rapidity in a bee-line from that which has disturbed it, and takes no high flight. What was hit, if anything, among the whirring mass of brown wings, is of no moment. Some say they saw a few feathers falling. My point is that at this critical moment Wilfred remembered how your true sportsman, according to the pictures, swings his gun from left to right, following along the line of birds. He was plumb certain that was the thing to do.

The second barrel was already between 11° and 12° NE. by E. of the now distant covey, when its fatal missiles were delivered, and delivered, alas! into the person of Lord Merriden—Nigger to his friends (and behind his back to half the world), but to Wilfred an awful host.

The victim leaped into the air with a fearful shriek, both feet together (how difficult a feat for feet!), his gun thrown to the Gods, his voice of anguish escaping from a throat unused to expressing acute stingo or indeed any other emotion. But Lord Merriden's larynx did him credit now. He made a noise like a wounded elephant, or (as one



... a spot known to this day as "The Earl's Leap."
(*Norfolk*, by J. K. Wugge, in the "Home Land of Empire" series:
Blithers & Mone, 7s. 6d.)

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moulder of Empire there present put it) "Like a stopped buffalo, my boy! For all the world like a buffalo I bowled over on the Quagaree in the year 'twenty-four! No kid!"

The armed gentry were disturbed in their entertainment—or ought I to call it their occupation?—The Line (as the Marshals of the Empire said in reporting their battles) fluctuated. Then it halted.

The occasion needed a great word, and Wilfred said it.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Wilfred.

"So you ought to be!" howled his anguished host, clutching at the nearest human being, though but a serf, and roaring "So you ought to be! you filthy little swine!"

"Peppered?" said the nearest sportsman cheerfully, running up through the roots. Away from head to head went the news. "Somebody got Nigger all right!" It was chaos and a turmoil. They were leading the victim away, and miserable, draggled-tailed, after him went Wilfred, bending at the knees. He knew that he must say something more, and he did.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said again. And then to emphasize his repentance: "I'm awfully sorry."

There was no reply, save the mutterings and groaning oaths of a strong man stung up good but not yet wholly disabled.

"Got my breeches? Oh, lord—more'n that!"

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Got my right arm—curse him! All round the elbow! Little swine!”

Far off beyond the hedge, motors and fair women waited, and to them was the stricken man borne—borne, and borne away. Towards that line, as his host disappeared, waddled Wilfred, through roots and roots and roots, his gun tucked disconsolately under his arm. He had read somewhere that one must not point it at random—though it was now unloaded, innocent of any power for evil. It had done its work.

Lord Merriden had read books as well as Wilfred, and he knew the rôle of the perfect host, even of the perfect host peppered—in many parts of his person, including the right elbow, the least interesting and the least developed area of his peppered person.

“Tell them to go on,” he said savagely. “Don’t mind me!” And with the splendid courtesy of English gentlemen they went on and didn’t mind him. They continued their attempted massacre of partridges at intervals further and further withdrawn, and as the distant shots proceeded, loving hands lifted the wounded peer into his wife’s car.

Wilfred Guthrie Straddle, you might imagine, would be condemned to hobble home alone. Not so. Fanny Blackman remembered her duty. She was there in her little two-seater, and she harboured

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the poor culprit. She had got over her first reactions. She would do her duty—God knows how she hated it!

He got in beside her, diffident, still apologizing, blundering with his gun, which a serf took from him in what he thought a surly manner (and he was right), and off they drove.

“Don’t take this too much to heart, Wilfred,” she said. “It’s happened before. It’s bound to happen. It’s always happening. You know Father himself potted Lord Gunston only last year. How we all laughed! You mustn’t take it tragically.”

“I wish I had shot myself,” said Wilfred.

I was going to say that if Fanny Blackman had not been driving she would have patted him with her hand. But the truth is that though she was driving, she did pat him with her hand, the gallant modern nymph (and both gallant and modern are the right words); steered away with her right hand and massaged his shoulder with her left.

“Don’t give Father another thought!” she said.

It was easy for her to talk like that and make light of shot-corns under another’s skin. Not so her sire! For the skin was his. All the way home, a matter of about a mile and a half (for they had begun with the forty-acre), Lord Merriden expressed—with astonishing vigour for one who had never attempted the descriptive use of the English tongue—his opinion of stinking little out-

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siders who tried to shoot; bloody little pests whom his wife would bring to Merriden; wasters and counter-jumpers and sundry other animals of the baser menagerie.

Wisely Lady Merriden, sitting in the motor beside her anguished lord, forbore to interrupt his eloquence. She knew that the artist must be rid of his repressions before constructive work can begin.

Tenderly was her spouse put to bed—with a careful little meal, and the right bottle, properly cooled.

She would not herself go downstairs. She made her daughter act as hostess that evening, that dreadful Monday, and Fanny Blackman rose to the occasion all flash and gaiety. They drank so much that before the end of the dinner half a dozen of them had made the same joke three times on what had happened. Even the criminal, sitting so glum at first, began to take heart.

For some reason or other they seemed to have forgiven him. Fanny had certainly forgiven him. Even his hostess came down for a moment to lean over his chair and give him a message from the victim upstairs. She told him he had been forgiven even there—which was a lie.

Then, when the men were alone, there was any amount of further laughter and even back-slapping of Wilfred, who marvelled at the geniality of this

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new rich world into which he had moved, so indifferent to the pain and danger of others. His spirits gradually recovered and were wholly at ease when Fanny herself, taking him aside for a another vivacious talk, gave him every cause to forget his discomfiture.

Early next afternoon Lady Merriden, having sent her daughter to take a good long walk through the park with the young guest who had wounded her mate, sat down opposite that mate to soothe and sympathize and iron things out.

If she could not do it, no one could. After all, she had had nearly thirty years at it, and the Nigger was easy game. She had never failed yet; not even on that long past day when he discovered to his horror that she had dropped fifteen hundred in a little flutter in Malay Spices—by the order of her banker, who had himself financed 'em, and sold out at top. Yes, Lady Merriden tackled Lord Merriden the right way round, and succeeded. Otherwise, why be a woman?

Her refrain was the same throughout, though put in fifteen different ways. It always came back to the same thing. He must not interfere with Fanny's best chance. After all, it couldn't be undone, and what was it? Anybody might be peppered. Anybody might pepper him. Peppering and being peppered was the lot of shooting men in this sad world. It had happened before. It

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happened every day. She wisely refrained from reminding him of Lord Gunston, but she was woman enough to say things which made him think about Lord Gunston, and he, poor simple old boy, could not help saying:

“I know what you’re driving at! That was altogether different. The bloody fool got out of the line without anybody knowing. He was asking for it!”

“Old who?” said his wife blankly.

“Old Gunston,” said the earl.

“Oh yes, I remember. Yes, that was *quite* different. . . . But to come back to the point. You really mustn’t bear a grudge. The boy meant no harm, and he’s so miserable; it would break your heart to see him.”

“No, it wouldn’t,” snarled Merriden.

“It would if you *saw* him. I can’t tell you what he thinks of you!”

“You know what I think of *him*!”

“And do think of Fanny, my dear! *Do* think of Fanny!”

She drew rings round him over and over again until he was wholly at her mercy.

The day after the morrow he even managed to get downstairs to say good-bye to the half-murderer of his right elbow and other more expansive parts. He had, I say, often read in books how hosts should behave, and he behaved



Lord Merriden forgives.

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as the books would have him do: in which he behaved as we all behave. For the books command our lives. He shook hands with the culprit, not genially, but anyhow with *savoir-faire*, a term he was proud to remember. And Wilfred and his luggage, including the two lethal weapons in their leather case (how much more debt!) whirled off in the car to the station. Wilfred for the old Duke and St. Bennet's.

For the old Duchess was the second invitation. The second station in his *via dolorosa*. The second agony in his Round of Country House Visits.

He hoped to God there would be no shooting this time, and God heard his prayer. There was not any. There had been a big shoot at the opening, before he came. There was to be another a week hence. He filled the interval. They apologized to him for his missing such sport, but he was agreeable enough. He feared lest rumours of what had happened at Merriden should have reached the Abbey.

He was right. They had reached it. But the old Duke didn't care, and still less did the old Duchess. The party he struck was very small anyhow, and no one but his host and hostess had heard, and they had already forgotten it. After all, why should they care what happened to the Nigger?

What made all the difference to Wilfred when

The Hedge and the Horse

he arrived at the huge mid-nineteenth-century barracks strangely called an Abbey was that in its resonant depths Bill was there, well able, with his presence and address, to rouse the echoes of those enormous Victorian ceilings and those abominable sham-Gothic vaults which they called The Cloisters.

Bill had brought two or three of the *Semiramis* argosy with him, persuading them, or the Duke or the Duchess, God knows how! Bill could do most things, and Lady Antigua had certainly been his accomplice in that plan.

She was the only daughter and almost the hostess, for the old Duchess was not called the Toothless Hag for nothing. As for Lady Antigua's father, he took what was coming to him, as the very aged nearly always do. But she herself was in that height of resolution and annealed and armoured life which belongs to us humans round about the fortieth year, when we have known all that life has got to give, greatly regret we have not had it, and are desperately determining still to snatch it if we can.

She had disdained opportunity. She had been too great for those who might have approached her. She was now in a mood to approach others. And she was right. Therefore it was that Bill was here, at her side. The *Semiramis* had cemented their acquaintance. Cemented is the wrong word. It had grafted their acquaintance, and their ac-

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quaintance was beginning to bud. Her acquaintance was. And Bill was her acquaintance, perhaps likely to last.

Wilfred, learning, slowly (alas!) the habits of this new world into which he had been thrown, had taken care to come late; not so late as to bore them or be bullied by them before they dispersed for the dinner masquerade.

And Bill made everything easy for Wilfred on his arrival. To see Bill in his expansive power bringing Wilfred up to the old Duke, and still more to the old Duchess, was a period piece. It was youth presenting homage to age; it was a manly young Mercury introducing Antinöus, newly deified to the Elder Gods.

And so with all the other introductions. Lady Antigua struck the only reticent note, but even she was reasonably gracious to Wilfred. She might have made up her mind about Bill, but she was suspicious of Bill's friends—and with good cause. There was always the name, Guthrie, of course, and the Guthrie legend, and the holy smell of money; and there had been plenty in the papers about him. But she was so many miles above Yankee fortunes and their heirdoms that she had no cause to be too familiar. What she did was her own look-out and what might belong to her was her own business; Bill was her own look-out and business; but she was not going out of her way to

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please Bill's friends or anything else that did not belong to her.

There was lacking at The Abbey one Worple, the only brother of that only daughter. Lord Worple, the Duke-to-be, was not there. He never was. That silent, restrained and singularly unfruitful man was in the Mediterranean. Thence as winter approached his boat would take him to the West Indies; at the turn of the year he would be at Nassau in the Bahamas. He would not see England again until the last of the cold weather had gone. Such was the part he played in our national life. But Lady Antigua belonged to her home.

Wilfred in that empty mausoleum wondered what he had to do and how to do it. There was to be no shoot. Thank God for that! All except three of the people in the house he had already met on the *Semiramis* for an hour or two; he was half pleased to note them. It made him more shy but less lonely. Lady Antigua had not been unkind in her reserve, and Bill was there; how or why he knew not, except that he was clearly Lady Antigua's friend.

Anyhow, Bill was there, and Bill could always coach him, and he would know what to do. But in the way of money Bill had shot his bolt, Wilfred feared. And that night as he dressed for dinner he counted out his remaining wealth with anxiety

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gnawing at his heart. Of the twenty pounds Bill had provided, but twelve remained.

The Abbey was about half-way from the Merridens to London, so the fare did not trouble him too much. What he had had to leave for his shoot did not worry him either. That was past and over and done with, and could not be recovered. Inside the house at Merriden he had tipped recklessly, as such men do in their worry. But that also was past and gone. What did worry him was the final return to London, after the Lodiham—Mrs. Cramp!

Bill dressed early, and came in to talk to Wilfred in his room.

“We’re going out on the river to-morrow,” he said (for one of the East Anglian rivers ran past the Abbey, expanding into a sort of lake). “That’s about all.” He yawned. “There’s billiards—d’you play?”

“No,” said Wilfred. “At least, so badly that . . .”

“Yes,” answered Bill hurriedly. “Well, you must just mooch about then, that’s all. We’ll go on the river, and then when you want to be off, you can be off. I know the old girl wanted you to come.”

“Which one?” said Wilfred imprudently.

“Oh, the Duchess!” laughed Bill. “But you’re right. You might have meant Antigua. I know she’s glad you came. She said on the boat that

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she knew you were coming. She was intrigued as to why we went to London together. I told her it was Secret Service, and better not to ask."

"Bill," said Wilfred timidly, as he finished dressing and was ready to go down with his friend, "you couldn't manage anything more, could you?"

Bill shook his head. "They're still at 83-84," he said. "But you ought to be all right till we meet in town again. You can't have got through that twenty yet."

"No, but you see. . . . I've got those appointments with the political people."

"What political people?"

"Oh, they've approached me, you know."

"How do you mean—approached you?"

Wilfred was nervous, almost stammering.

"Well, you see, they've got to introduce me to that Constituency. I've got to go to the Head Office when I leave here as I pass through town before going to the Lodihamms, and one of their people is going down with me to speak for me to the Local Committee. I don't know who he is."

Bill put on an amused expression and half whistled.

"Oh, they've nobbled you, have they? Quick work! I hope old Guthrie's stuff turns up in time, or you'll have a narrow squeeze, my boy."

The iron entered into Wilfred's soul, but he said nothing.

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When it came to the expedition on the river the next day (the bad luncheon basket and the insufficient wine and all the rest of it) there was nothing to be said for the day save that it was as bright above as it was dull below. The party went its solemn way, and Wilfred found himself wondering whether he really must put in another forty-eight hours, or whether he could find an opportunity for escape. Anyhow, so long as he stopped it was a saving of money. . . . The moment he got back to London the expenses would begin again, and the remaining margin was getting abominably narrow.

They pulled lazily upstream, Wilfred forward, a fellow called Waldon who had been on the *Semiramis* with them sitting just aft of him, Bill steering and the Lady Antigua at his side—the only two moderately cheerful bodies on board. Waldon's sister lounged over the bows trailing one hand in the water. With the other she held her darling little dog—a Peke. But time must be passed. They would come to the eyot at last. There they would tie up the boat and land, and take their picnic, and then go back.

But the Gods, who are the enemies of boredom, determined to ginger things up, and did it with the vigour of which the Gods have the secret when they put their backs into it.

It was within thirty yards of the eyot, and close

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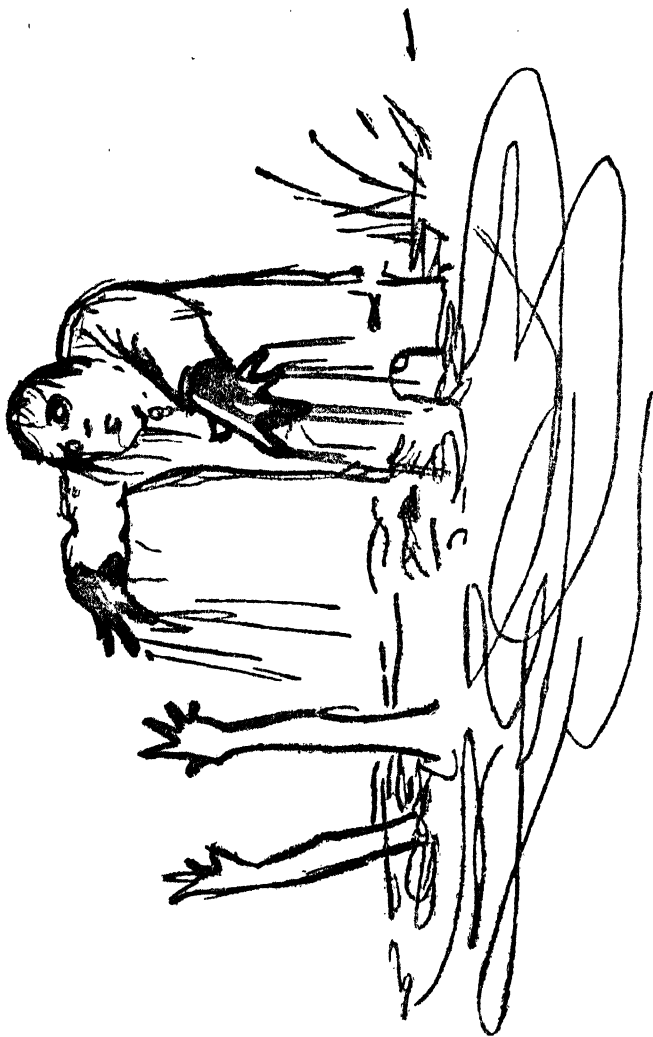
to the muddy reedy shore, that Waldon's sister (an odious girl) gave a startling shriek. Her darling little dog had jumped over the friendly rail, and being a wheezy abomination, had jumped short. She gave a cry of maternal anguish, a thing her years permitted. Her years had made her maternal to this detestable houndlet, which was half yapping, half spouting water, between the boat and the reeds close at hand. She leant out, caught at her baby, and in doing so upset the boat.

Waldon shifted his oar and righted the craft, half filled with water. Miss Waldon, grasping her sweet pet, had the luck to flounder to the bank.

Lady Antigua had less luck. She had gone overboard at the first lurch. The water where she had fallen from the after-end was deepest. Her commotion in the stream was considerable and intense.

For a moment two arms waving wildly above the surface spurred Wilfred to a feat of heroism. Without a thought he sprang over the gunwale. It was shallower at the bows, whence he took off, and he sank to his waist in mud, intent upon rescuing beauty of a certain age; at any rate, a woman. He splashed sideways, drenching head and shoulders, and when he righted himself found himself up to the waist in slime and trying to waddle fruitlessly towards the drowning figure.

As for Waldon, like a sensible man, he sat tight. He played the part of Captain; he stuck to the ship.



A Hedge bungles.

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Not so Bill. Your Horse thinks quickly and practically. He knows just what to do, and he does it. Wilfred the Hedger had done his best, and when Hedgers do their best they also do their worst. Wilfred the Hedger was stuck in the mud with hands impotently dripping and a head like the caricature of a misbegotten young half-baked river god who had been left behind by his brethren.

Not so Bill. Bill was in mid-stream, making with powerful strokes for the reappearing person of the Lady Antigua. That person with one arm he clasped, while with the other he plied a side-stroke after the fashion approved by all the great professionals. He had the advantage of deep water. He had marked in a moment where a dry patch of shore was available, and with the struggling, panic-stricken woman in his arm he made for that patch with all his power.

She continued to struggle.

"Antigua," he said sharply, "lie still! Lie still, I tell you! It's your only chance!"

She hardly heard him in her panic, but she heard what he said next, which was simply this:

"Stop, Antigua! I tell you! *Stop!* If you don't keep still I'll knock you on the head."

Then she obeyed. She had never been so firmly held before in her life, and she had never in her life been commanded. Alas for the human race! Alas for those anthropoids with whom I am myself



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(apologies) connected! Lady Antigua in some confused way was not displeased with the grasp or the command.

Bill landed her, and the thing was done. Waldon praised him with just epithet, brought the nose of the boat into a willow tree and tied it up, went to look after his sister without too much emotion, watched her and poor Wilfred sogging and slouching heavily through the mud towards the bank, and then strolled over, with all the decent self-restraint of the English gentleman towards the remaining two.

“I hope you’re all right, Lady Antigua?” he said languidly.

She was blown, but she had recovered her self-possession. As for Bill, he had saved one woman and left the other alone, which is the expected form on these occasions. He had taken advice from no one and orders from no one. He had done what had to be done. He had saved the most valuable life on board, the only one which had been in the least danger—and the only one of any service to himself.

As for their lunch, they had to do without it, for it was on its way, basket and all, towards the great North Sea (or German Ocean) fifty miles downstream. They must make their way home as best they could, and that best was by way of their craft, from which Bill and Waldon poured

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out the water while Wilfred looked on. September was still warm, they did not suffer too much. They needed a good meal when they reached home, and they got it. And at any rate, the adventure made something for conversation under that deathly roof.

It made something more. It made one of those things that are only made in heaven. Lady Antigua had marked down Bill as we know. Bill, full of that sort of wisdom which knows when it is marked, had also marked down the Lady Antigua. That very evening there was already a sense of possession in the air on either side. Only the next day the old Duchess, having her eyes open, told the old Duke what she had observed, and the old Duke had said:

“You don’t say so? God bless my soul! Who on earth is he? You don’t say so! Antigua and that bounder? Why, she wouldn’t have anything to do with Eustace, and that was years ago—silly girl. Upon my word, what next? However, you know best.”

“It isn’t what I know best,” said the old Duchess, almost groaning. “It’s what I know. Antigua’s made up her mind.”

The next day but three would be the last long day spent by Wilfred at St. Bennet’s. He could not afford to spend a day in London. He was due at the Lodiham’s at once. He must get into town

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early. He had telephoned to Mr. Holder at the Head Office—a thing which he remembered one could do for nothing in these rich houses—and that was all to the good. He had arranged, with many apologies and profound thanks, to leave in the early morning, before anybody was down, except Bill; for Bill was down to see him off, even more cheerful than usual.

“What are you going to do after you’ve done with these politicians?” he asked.

“Oh, well, it’s only to-day,” said Wilfred. “I go on to the Lodihamms to-morrow. I don’t think I shall be there more than a few days.”

“Right,” said Bill. “Then we’ll meet on Thursday. That’ll be the thirteenth. You’ll be in town then?”

A flash of lightning terror passed through Wilfred’s brain. Would he be in town then, he asked himself. Where would he be? What would be left of him by Thursday? There was Mrs. Cramp hanging over him. He didn’t know what expenses there might not be in connection with this odious committee selecting him for Ratsholme. He might have to pay a big fare for the taxi drive to that disgusting suburb—and so on. Still, there were those very few pounds left—it could be done.

“All right, Bill,” he said. “Only we won’t make it too early, because I don’t know when I

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shall get away from the Lodihamms. I'll be round with you by five. By the way, Bill, do you think that by then you could do something more?" (More anxious than ever.) "I do wish you would, Bill! you know it's been waiting a long time!"

Bill gazed at space with a far-away look in his eyes and a smile in the corner of his mouth.

"I shouldn't wonder, Willy," he said. "Perhaps I could—by Thursday. Even if it's still too early to sell out."

And Wilfred in his heart believed, and he was wise to believe, that the Horse would bring it off, somehow or other, where he of the Hedge could bring off nothing at all. But still the future was as blank as a Newfoundland fog.

* * * * *

The Central Office is not a cheerful place, but such courtesy in the Central Office to young millionaires, such flattery and fawning as they show, would make a prison acceptable, and Wilfred Straddle in the depths of despair that he was, met, as he was shown into Mr. Holder's room, the first wave of that balmy political air.

He felt in his heart that it was no good. Relief was no nearer. The very end of all things was at hand. He could not bear to hope that his last true reserve, Bill's two hundred pounds, would ever materialize now, still less the profit originally

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expected on that deal; and even when he had scraped together all that he could, the future was still as dark as could be.

Of what use was all this going from one rich house to another, and all this false atmosphere of millions? And yet he dared not undeceive them!

Of what use was what he was doing this very day—all this pretence of standing for Parliament? Yet he dared not back out. He did not even dare to send some excuse to the Lodihamms for his late arrival. Most of all he dreaded the prospect of explanations with Mrs. Cramp.

A dark cloud had surrounded that austere head when he had looked in at his rooms on his way from the station. At any moment the storm might burst. At any rate she would receive him for that night; but there was no doubt that she was going to issue an ultimatum. He had so often and so confidently promised, and Saturday after Saturday the money had failed to appear. She had security; there was a trifle of furniture he had bought, there was his wardrobe, there were the two guns (he was not sure that there was not some law or other by which you went to prison if you got money on things bought on credit, or the equivalent of money). He shuddered inwardly.

But the reception he was to receive when he stood in the presence of the Central Office incarnate could not but raise his spirits.

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It is in the ordinary course of things that the Central Office should have to handle and pass into Parliament younger sons, people who are their own fathers, colonial adventurers, three-card-men, sixty-per-cent. moneylenders, successful blackmailers, and sundry other raw material for the House of Commons; but a fresh young unexplored millionaire—three millions at least and all for loot—delivered into their hands, is something to write home about, and Mr. Holder was filled with real joy and, what is more important, with real deference. He shook hands warmly with all that prospective wealth; he put all that prospective wealth into a comfortable chair, and then he sprang the great news. The Home Secretary himself was going down with him to Ratsholme!

The Home Secretary had appreciated even more vividly than did Mr. Holder himself what a catch the Central Office had made in Wilfred Straddle. It was Mr. Holder who had landed the fish—all honour to Mr. Holder. Smooth work! But Mr. Holder's pickings would remain the same, whatever happened. There was no commission on young millionaires caught for Parliament; whereas the Home Secretary was still climbing. To make friends early with all that money was a thought delightful to him.

The Home Secretary arrived punctual to the minute. He shook hands with Mr. Holder, he

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was introduced to Mr. Wilfred Guthrie Straddle, approached that youth with such a mixture of deference, courtesy, familiarity, affection, admiration and crude reticence as is only to be found in public life—and poor Wilfred found himself deliberately enjoying this ephemeral phase of greatness. It was bound to pass, and to pass soon. In truth, disaster was already on its way. The Bank knew all about him, for Worms (and Handler) knew all about him. Even Mrs. Cramp sniffed it.

Still, it did raise his heart somewhat to hear the Home Secretary's intelligent appreciation and careful interest in all he said as they bowled along in the very fine car. Wilfred was told what it would mean to the Socialist Party that a man of Mr. Straddle's proved ability and great experience of the world and connections with our cousins overseas should be among them. He was told how highly the Committee in Ratsholme already thought of him; how much more highly they would think of him when they had had the honour of seeing him in the flesh. He was told (in a tone slightly deprecating) what Ratsholme was. He was now to understand that Ratsholme was lucky to get him.

The Committee waited for them in a large private room in the best hotel in Ratsholme—a bad one, in the manner of the villas all round, but the largest of its fellows. They all got up when the

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Home Secretary entered with his prize, and after introductions they all sat down again. Wilfred felt those hands (clammy or warm, decided or limp) meet his own; it was a sort of consecration to the proud eminence of Parliament. He felt like one taking Orders. But, oh Lord! where would it end? There was now but a very few pounds between him and the end. When he got back from Lodiham there would be less: hardly anything.

The Home Secretary rose. You could have sworn that he was speaking from the Front Bench. He was always speaking from the Front Bench when he was on his feet, whether he was on his feet with his head uncovered in a private house or in the Club, or in his bathroom. He had lost the faculty of speaking in any other fashion; and yet he had only been climbing half a dozen years. It was not ten years since, as a lucky young articled clerk, he had married that rich wife, his master's daughter.

He told the Ratsholmites how heartily he could recommend his friend Mr. Straddle. He told them that his name was already famous among them and indeed among his fellow-countrymen at large. He told what an enormous amount of public work Mr. Straddle had done in connection with the numerous activities of his late and greatly lamented relative Mr. John Scott Guthrie of New York. He alluded to the link with our cousins overseas. Then he got to the meat; that solid block of sober



The Home Secretary yields to no one.

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rhetoric which it was his custom to use upon these occasions, and which he had tried on the dog all over England with the same quiet and solid success.

“I need not tell you that Mr. Straddle is a strong, convinced Socialist.” He himself, the Home Secretary, yielded to no one in his own conviction upon the same side. But in the grave times through which our country had been passing during the last thirty odd years it had been imperative to sink all the old Party differences in the combination of a United National Front. They would find that their prospective candidate for Ratsholme, should they adopt him (as he heartily recommended them to do) would loyally serve the existing Government and put its interests and those of his country before all Party considerations. He begged to recommend to them Mr. Wilfred Straddle, and trusted that he would hear from them within a few days. He extended his hand to the fortunate young man. The fortunate young man rose and took it. They might almost have been photographed so, posing like stuck pigs for some newspaper photograph. Then they unclined, and the deed was done.

The Home Secretary kept Wilfred to dinner with him. He got home mercifully late; there was no Mrs. Cramp to beard him. He crept into his rooms, and to bed.

XIII

AT breakfast the next morning the cloud surrounding Mrs. Cramp's austere head was as dark as Chaos and old Night. The storm had not broken, but its crash was imminent. Wilfred, in desperation, took the bull by the horns.

"Mrs. Cramp," he said, as he rose from the table, "there is a thing I have been wanting to say to you for a long time past."

Mrs. Cramp replied not. What her face said was: "I should jolly well think so!"

"Mrs. Cramp, you can understand there has been some delay about remittances to me from the Trustees. . . . No one has regretted this more than I have." He cleared his throat. "I have to go down . . . to Lodiham . . . to Lord Lodiham's—to-day."

The title did not mollify Mrs. Cramp. She worked without reserves, poor woman! And all this putting off and putting off had strained her finances badly. These Lords and Ladies of Mr. Straddle were all very well, but they were putting no money in her pocket. No doubt he would be doing all sorts of grand things down there, and

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giving tips to butlers and chauffeurs; but that was no good to her.

“Mrs. Cramp, I do assure you that on my return . . . I shall be back by the end of the week at the latest, and by that time the gentleman from whom I am certain to receive a remittance will be in London.”

“Yes, sir,” said Mrs. Cramp—not with confidence, nor with geniality, rather in a frozen manner. “Now, Mr. Straddle, sir, this time really I shall *not* be able to wait any longer.”

“I assure you, Mrs. Cramp. . . .”

“You’ve assured me before, sir. Oh yes” (her voice began to rise), “if assurances was any good I’ve had plenty of ’em! But one can’t eat assurances, Mr. Straddle, sir, nor drink assurances, neither. Nor they don’t buy clothes for one’s back” (she was warming up, and if Wilfred had had the courage he would have fled). She became voluble. Her indignation gave her eloquence. When she paused, but with a threat of starting again, he renewed his promises with a fervour that surprised himself, and made a dash for it. He got away with his bag in a taxi for Victoria and for the glories of Lodiham. Might that not be the last hospitality he should ever receive?

One thing was certain. When he got back—and he aimed at being back in two days—he absolutely *must* tackle Bill; it had become a matter of life

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and death. He must tackle Bill, and then immediately after he must see Joan, and nerve himself to begin writing in earnest.

He would insist on the Kleindrift speculation being closed. Never mind the loss—better to have a hundred and fifty, or whatever it might come to than nothing.

Misfortune anneals men. Even prolonged and increasing anxiety, though it undermines them, gives them a certain edge. Wilfred was becoming determined. He must get that money back somehow or other, or, at any rate, whatever could be saved of it. He must have something to float him until he might be getting articles regularly taken, or until he had some other form of income, however small—and Joan at least would help him to write.

At Lodiham it was, of course, Merriden over again, and during those three days as little happened as happens at all the Lodihamms and all the Merridens all over England, first and last, big and little. There are hundreds of them and they are all of a pattern.

Mark you, when I say that while he was at Lodiham nothing would happen, and that it would only be Merriden and the Duke's all over again, when I say that the Lodihamms and the Merridens throughout England are of a pattern, so that a man can hardly remember where he was last among them, I must admit certain trifling differences.

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At Merriden he had shot that poor old Buffer his host. At the Duke's he had narrowly missed drowning. Wilfred's three days at Lodiham, his two nights and one whole day in between, even also provided him with two accidents, each of some moment, the one wholly concealed from him, the other partly concealed from him.

The first was this:—It was just during those days that the Rumour began.

What Rumour?

The Rumour that all was not well with the Guthrie millions; or rather, that all was not well with the inheritance of those millions by the presumed Guthrie heir.

God forbid any man should believe it to have started with Worms and Handler: our men of business are as reliable as steel, and as discreet as the deaf and dumb. God forbid any man should believe it to have started at the Bank! Certainly that great man the Manager of so important a branch could not have been guilty. A messenger had come in while they had conversed, but every messenger in our English banks is as reliable as the Venetian Council of Ten. Then there were the clerks and the people who did the typewriting behind the scenes. Altogether there were forty-seven human beings under that roof, from the Manager down, who could have launched this Rumour. But we know that the Rumour could

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not have started with any of these. Every one in every bank is the soul of honour and discretion.

What started the Rumour, with whom it started, I do not know. All I do know is that it was on the move, plodding on and wagging its head over a wider and a wider field.

Piggy heard it at the Club, and was surprised. Jack Purling had had details. Tom Dickinson was willing to believe them. And Piggy and Jack and Tom were very excellent centres of radiation.

Even while Wilfred was still down at Lodiham receiving the drum-fire of his hostess and Loulou, even while he was walking with Loulou—the potential Lady Louise Straddle; even while he was being driven by a prospective mother-in-law to see the ruins of the old Castle (uncommonly different from the new one), the Rumour was breeding like a mosquito. It was laying eggs all up and down the place. Happily it had not yet reached Lodiham—but it had reached Lady Penelope. Piggy was her informant. Tom Dickinson, the day after she had seen Piggy, had confirmed and enlarged the story.

“Not a bean,” was the news of the one young man.

“No earthly,” was the verdict of the other.

As for Jack Purling, his phrase was of yet another sort, and very apt. He shook his head and murmured: “Refer to Drawer.”



Lady Penelope Caryl hears the news.

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Perhaps before the days of telephones it might have taken a week for this Rumour to get north. As it was, they had it in Sutherlandshire within the twenty-four hours, and the Press was only one day behind. The gossip writers held their hand: one has to be certain on things like these, but they stood by for amusing scoops.

There! That was the first thing that was happening to the still unconscious Wilfred while he was boring himself to death at Lodiham.

The second thing had a more definite edge to it. It was this:

On the last evening of his visit his host, Lord Lodiham, stole Wilfred's pocket-book.

Ah! Do not start! It is very simply explained. Lord Lodiham was a man of exceptional talent, even for one of his rank. He had filled (to the advantage of his country) many great offices. His brain had been in active service for now over thirty years—except of course during week-ends.

Now nearly all great men who do their duty by working hard for their country have to pay some penalty, and usually the penalty is levied upon their nervous system. Happily in this case it took no worse form than the quite common and innocuous lesion known to the Faculty as Kleptomania. He took things. He thought it great fun to take things. He was always taking things. He felt a little triumph every time he managed



Effects of nervous strain in Public Life.

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to take a thing without being caught red-handed. He had developed no inconsiderable skill: a technique of his own which would have served him well in the Caledonian Market.

He took things, I say—but he was not allowed to keep them. He had discovered long ago that reward lies in endeavour, and that success is dead-sea fruit. Having taken things, he would secrete them in a private drawer. To that private drawer Lady Lodiham had years ago possessed herself of a duplicate key, and regularly as day succeeded day Lord Lodiham's man would return the missing objects to their rightful owners: sometimes going in person when this pastime was played in town, sometimes making up the parcels with care and registering them.

The man was worth his weight in gold to Lady Lodiham, and he saw that he got it. The wives of the great have their little troubles to bear, but it's worth it.

Yes, Lord Lodiham had delicately lifted that pocket-book from Wilfred's coat in the hall. The amusing prank had occurred to him, as I say, on the night before the young man's departure for London. The pocket-book, note you, was safe in the hands of God, whence it would ultimately trickle into those of her Ladyship, his Lordship's invaluable man, and thence sooner or later to its rightful owner. That was the invariable run of

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these pranks with which Lord Lodiham amused himself.

Behold, therefore, what used to be called our hero, what we will for the purposes of this book call our Hedger, waking on Friday morning in his enormous bedroom at Lodiham, remembering where he was, grasping at the watch under his pillow, and finding that he had just time to get breakfast and catch his early train. He had his plan all cut and dried. He would first try to get Bill on the telephone, and if that failed he would send a telegram from the station. It was imperative he should see Bill, for on Saturday would come the vital interview with Mrs. Cramp. Were he to meet Mrs. Cramp empty-handed she would strike him dead.

So far so good.

Wilfred dressed; he always gave much too big tips in country houses. He felt in his pocket for his note-case. He was actually going to give ten shillings to the man who had looked after him, and God knows what to the butler. He found no note-case there. He must have left it in the hall. Imprudent, but anyhow not fatal.

On his way to the morning-room where his solitary breakfast was laid out (the prospective Lady Louise Straddle, and the prospective Mother-in-law, never came down so early; the prospective father-in-law might be more courteous—one never

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could tell), he dived into the pocket of his dust-coat hanging in the hall. The note-case was not there. Then indeed he was taken aback. For a moment he was staggered.

What had he done with it? What had happened? In his pocket he had his return ticket, and one shilling and eightpence in small change. What about those formidable confounded beasts who were waiting for their tips? One of them was moving about, all dressed up to kill, hovering round the table. Another would be lurking upstairs and gnashing his teeth angrily for the absent tribute; and the Lord High Master of all Ceremonies who would take him out and tuck him into the motor would be surprised to find himself going empty; and the man who drove the motor to the station would be surprised still more.

Necessity never yet made a man courageous; in especial has it never given men that kind of courage which enables them to meet the disdain and anger of their fellow men. One is brave, or one is not brave—and if one is not, there is no remedy. Necessity compels us sometimes to do things which look courageous; and necessity was now compelling Wilfred Guthrie Straddle to behave with a look-see heroism almost unknown in the class of which he had become so quickly so distinguished an ornament. *He was going to leave Lodiham, without giving any tips at all!*

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The motor was purring outside, his breakfast was done, when, just in the nick of time, there came a noise of shuffling feet, and the retired statesman was with him to conduct him to the door. Lord Lodiham could not in decency leave this considerable fortune without one farewell. I do not know at what scale of income Lord Lodiham would have omitted the ceremony, but at any rate a rumoured fifteen million dollars soon to be (so his wife said) in the family demanded so much courtesy on the part of the House. He had come down, therefore, in a dressing-gown, and he waved Wilfred Straddle away, not without a curious smile upon his face as he turned back through the door.

Wilfred Straddle was driven to the station in a cold, silent, almost brutal manner. Giving some few of his last pence to a porter, he broke away from the vehicle, nor cast one longing lingering look behind—let alone largesse. He had one shilling and twopence in hand and a return first-class railway ticket; would that he had taken a third! But then, for that matter, would that the hull of *Argo* had not sailed! He could not go all the way to London without a paper; he reduced the thin remaining wall between him and disaster to the thickness of one and a penny, and he read the *Daily Telegraph* all the way up. Not even the crossword puzzle consoled him. There is

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only one way to meet Doom, and Hedgers are slow to face it.

When he got to Victoria, his mind all muddle between the incompleated crossword puzzle (which he carefully treasured) and approaching Doom, he carried his bag himself, heavy as it was, to the cloakroom; there disbursed another three pence, and thence proceeded to a pawnshop which stared him in the face at the corner of the street opposite the station. He had determined (O! Poverty, teacher and maker of men!) to raise money on his watch.

It was a thing he had never done in his life, and a thing which he only managed to do now by the skin of his teeth. For the pawnbroker, handling the trinket with contempt and disdain, gave it back to him and said: "Nothing doing." It kept time all right, but it had been cheap. He had never spent money on a good watch, and once again, would that he had done so—but then (once again) would that the hull of *Argo* had not sailed.

There remained the chain. The chain was of thin gold. He got five shillings on it. Resolutely he took to his feet.

It was just after eleven when he got to Bill's flat. Then came the first blow of that difficult day. Bill was not in town. Bill was not yet back from St. Bennet's. He had returned there to his *Antigua*. He would be home to-morrow.

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Wilfred wondered whether he dare ring up the Abbey. He cursed the enormous rates of the English telephone exchange. He decided not to ring up. Would Bill certainly be back the next day? His man said, "Oh yes! Mr. Robinson was coming by the train that got in in time for luncheon. He would be lunching at his flat."

Wilfred left an agonized note. All those other appeals had been agonized enough, but this was superheated agony. It was a yell. What was more, while he was about it, he was determined to get a meal out of Bill, and he said so in his note: "You'll have to give me lunch; I'll tell you why when I see you."

He went to the Club, but there were no letters for him. And once again he showed the initiative born of despair. He walked slowly towards the Pillbox. He would see Mr. Worksope, who would be there by this time, he would see him and tell him that he wished to resign. He came in just in time to see Jack Purling and Piggy and the rest of them at the bar; he was going to hurry past them towards the little private room when someone whom he could not place seized him, familiarly enough, and said:

"Here's Willy—Willy'll weigh in!"

"Weigh in to what?"

He saw doubt and coldness in the faces of the other three. The unknown was beginning to spin



“Willy will weigh in . . .”

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out a yarn about a collection for a present of plate, a testimonial to Mr. Speider on the Pillbox's coming of age.

Wilfred shook his head, slightly. He mumbled and murmured. "Just now I'm afraid . . ." he faltered, and then stuck. The three understood. All four dropped away from him.

Worksop had not come in. Wilfred ran the gauntlet, and passed out. As your Atlantic liner off the Banks smells ice, so did Wilfred smell a certain coldness in the air around. He was not mistaken. They were thinking, and the moment he was out of earshot they were saying: "Stinking miser!"

Even that same hour of that same morning in far-off happy Kent, Lady Lodiham was expressing mild surprise to her Lord.

"He's really a very extraordinary young man, Charlie!" she said.

"Didn't think he was even that!" replied the statesman.

"Smithson tells me he left nothing for *anyone*—not even for Parrell, who looked after him!"

"Close-fisted brute. Always heard that," answered the peer. "You brought him here: I didn't."

"And don't talk like that. And above all, don't quarrel with him. If that sort of person chooses to be eccentric, he can afford to. But I do think it

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looks odd. And now we shall have that new chauffeur in a temper all day; for he can't have given him anything either, if he didn't give Parrell anything."

So passed the affair in Kent. But in Herts, a less pleasing county, Lady Penelope was talking seriously to Joan. Joan had heard the news and was overjoyed. "He's burst, has the darling? Oh! I *am* glad!"

"It's sheer perversity," said her mother angrily, "if all this is true; and I suppose it is true—Jack Purling always knows, and all the others say the same. . . ."

"Well, Mamma, if it's true, I'm as happy as Christmas. It's the best news I've heard for years."

Her mother half sighed, then groaned.

"I can make nothing of you, Joan."

"Mamma, I've made up my mind. I could not act at all till now, and now I can. I'll take him in hand. I'll see that he earns enough to put side by side with my little bit, and then we shall be on our own."

We! Lady Penelope's heart stopped beating. Then her experience returned and supported her. Well, if the child would cut her own throat there was no stopping her. But it was very bitter! It was extraordinary what the younger generation were doing. Lady Penelope would have sneered at anyone who should have described Lady Antigua as one of the "younger" generation, but



Lady Penelope can make nothing of Joan.

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even Lady Antigua had done what the younger generation were doing. She had seen the news in the papers that morning. "A marriage has been arranged and will shortly take place between . . . etc. etc." There it was in black and white. Lots of people had been hinting at it, and now it was clinched. That bouncer William Robinson, whom everybody knew and no one knew anything about, had been gaffed and was safe in Antigua's basket.

However, that was her affair. She was rolling in it, and her father could add any amount, and if she liked cads, well, she was well suited. But why Joan should sink away into the void, Joan with her strong character and fine upstanding self, why her own child, her only child, should deliberately condemn herself to poverty, was more than she could understand. For she had no doubt that poverty it would be. Old Guthrie had cut Wilfred Straddle out of his will. All London knew that.

* * * * *

The long day passed with Wilfred, a lovely mild September day. He had filled it thus. He had sat in Green Park on a Bench. He had got up and looked at the birds in the water. He had gone back to the Bench; he had got up and looked at the birds again. He had returned to meditation on the Bench: his hands in his trouser pockets, his chin on his chest.

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There had been five weeks due to Mrs. Cramp. This would be the sixth.

A little cheque for £8. 16s. 0d. sent in the days of his prosperity, forgotten, and not entered in his counterfoils, had been cashed absurdly late by the poor devil to whom he had given it. That had created a small overdraft, and there had been *two* successive letters from the bank insisting on the thing being put right.

Big overdrafts are respectable, but how fiercely small overdrafts can be attacked, only the victims know.

On the top of that he had in some horrible way lost his note-case at Lodiham and with it his last resource.

He brooded on these things and he felt the waters meeting over his head.

He ought to have gone back to face Mrs. Cramp. He ought to have gone and redeemed his bag from the cloakroom, and boldly taken his way to Westminster and Mrs. Cramp and insisted on his bed. He dreaded the weight of the bag, and still more did he dread a justly angry woman.

He had sixteen hours to pass somehow before his redeemer should appear (if redeemer Bill should prove to be). The night was approaching, and he must manage to carry on till morning. He must eat, anyhow.

He seemed vaguely to have heard of places

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where one could get a bed very cheap indeed. He had a meal, and after that there still remained to him nearly a couple of shillings.

He could not remember what those cheap places cost. He took counsel of a policeman, who looked him up and down, and gave him an address. He took a roundabout way to reach the place, but when he saw the down-and-outs slouching towards it, it was more than he could bear. He would rather pace the streets all night. The nights had grown longer. It would be long till dawn, and perhaps chilly before dawn—but he would risk it.

He did risk it, and suffered the disagreeables of which he had never had experience, but which men do suffer when they are up against it.

He was too well dressed for the part. He was routed off a bench on the Embankment, and was followed suspiciously by a policeman for some little way. He got free, and, having gone miles eastward, he turned round to come back miles westward, in the small hours.

He was tired out and dropping from want of sleep, but he compelled himself to walk quickly lest he should be questioned again, as he had already been, twice, since London had gone silent and empty.

He broke his last remaining shilling with a slab, a stir of the thick and (what did do him some good) a rasher of bacon: he got all that from one of the common coffee-stalls, just ending its business.

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London half awoke, and with these few pence in his pocket he sauntered about more boldly under the Dawn. He would no longer be a marked man. The streets filled slowly, and still the hours dragged past. But it was close on twelve before he moved towards Bill's door.

Bill blew in like a hearty southern gale, but a vernal gale. He was pleased with himself and the world. He greeted Wilfred as though they were boys again, opened Wilfred's awaiting note and said: "Oh, that's all right! I'll settle that before we lunch, my dear! You wait here!" and a new-born hope broke on Wilfred. It looked as though something was on the way.

"You wait here and make yourself comfortable. You look tired. What's the matter?"

"I've been up all night," said Wilfred sullenly.

"Up all night? What made you do such a thing?"

"I'd nowhere to sleep!"

"Oh, my dear fellow, come! What about old mother Cramp?"

"I couldn't face her."

Bill whistled. He was really moved.

"Look here," he said, "I mean what I say. I'll be off at once. You wait here. If I were you I'd take a nap. But I shan't be more than half an hour."

During that half-hour Bill saw his banker.

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Bill's banker knew more about Bill than most people. The index card had told him all there was to know. He even knew the name of Bill's father—which is more than could be said of any single man or woman in the great world which called Bill by his Christian name. What Bill's banker, reviewing that curious fever-chart of Bill's balances and overdrafts in the last five years knew best at this moment, was that Lady Antigua had harpooned his client—or had he harpooned Lady Antigua? It mattered little. It may not be orthodox banking to go into things like that, but when it comes to financing young bloods, and especially young bloods who are bounders, and particularly young bloods who are bounders and who have fallen soft, it is very wise for a branch manager to do the right thing, however unorthodox.

So when Bill asked for a credit, he got it—and he got it largely. He drew out more than half of it in cash at once. He had supplied the data, even down to the date that had been fixed for the wedding. With the roll of notes in his pocket he went back and wakened Wilfred, who was lying in a profound sleep on the sofa in his flat.

“I'm sorry, Willy,” he said, “but I think you won't mind being wakened for this.” And he handed a batch of twenty tenners to his friend.

“I couldn't keep you waiting any longer,” he said, “and if there's any loss when I sell—I don't

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think there will be—I'm going to stand the racket myself. I haven't sold out yet. I had no idea there would be such a squeeze. I'm sure it's bound to be all right. But I should feel myself impossible if I didn't refund. So here it is. It was awfully good of you, and I did think we should bring it off. Perhaps we may. And if we do, I promise you it shall be fifty-fifty, just as I said."

Two hundred mortal great pounds! Not really pounds, of course—only paper; and not even real paper, only bank credit. But still, two hundred pounds of what the erudite call "purchasing power"! Wilfrid's first impulse was to rush off and settle things with Mrs. Cramp, and, in his eagerness, he said as much to Bill.

"Come with me!" he cried.

"I shouldn't hurry," cooed Bill. "I should go to the Club and look at my letters first. I'll come with you. There's plenty of time for the old bitch. And mind, *only give her something on account*. Don't waste it. You may need it."

XIV

THERE was quite a bunch of letters for Wilfred at Doulton's—of very different kinds.

There was one envelope, registered and posted from some London address, and with a brief note inside, cold at that. It was from his late hostess at Lodiham—and, oh joy! she had sent the pocket-book!

In his new-found wealth another half-dozen pounds did not feel as much as it had on the day of its loss, but still, he felt as though the tide were turning. He regretted the coldness of Lady Lodiham's note. He determined to make his own Collins as cold in return. He cared nothing whatever whether he saw the Lodiham's again from now until he died. His mind was full of Joan, and of relief from immediate necessity. Before ringing her up he opened another envelope from the Merridens saying how sorry they were they could not keep that appointment they had made. They were not going to spend the night in town after all: or rather, they were only barely going to spend the night in town, with a scrap meal.

The note was a little too brief. Wilfred didn't

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quite like the tone of it, but that didn't matter. He was going to ring Joan up in a minute or two. Then, in the heap of envelopes, his eye fastened on the names "Worms and Handler" on the back of a flap. It was a long envelope. There was also another long envelope with an American stamp on it.

"Give me time to look at these, Bill," he said, going into the smoking-room.

"Plenty of time," said Bill. "I'll leave you to read them in peace. I shall be out of town again until the beginning of next week. Don't fail to ring me up on Tuesday—mind you, *Tuesday*. I've a reason!" He nodded, with cheerful mastery, and was gone. Wilfred, rolling in the recovered note-case and the enormous wad of twenty tenners, did not press for lunch.

What Bill's reason for that urgent Tuesday appointment could be, Wilfred couldn't imagine. Nor was he occupied with it for long. The diversity of the letters he had found waiting for him was startling.

To begin with, there were three which puzzled him enormously, each more than the last.

One was from a Mrs. Barrington-Goyle. She had made an intolerable fuss almost a month ago about having him down to her house, insisting on his coming to dinner the very day after the morrow in which he thus opened her letter. He did not

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know her at all well. He had not come to know her as he knew the Merridens and the Lodihamms, and yet she had pressed like a football scrum—not only she, but her niece who lived with her. He had forgotten it. Well, here was Mrs. Goyle now writing to say “it was really too unfortunate, but she found that if he came it would make thirteen, and she wondered if he would *very* much mind changing the day?”—but of any other date, not a word.

Wilfred was in a sheer fog as he opened yet another letter, and that other letter did not lessen his perplexity.

It was from Mrs. Matheson—or rather, not even from Mrs. Matheson, but from Mrs. Matheson’s secretary who helped her to work the Middle Class Mothers. It was typewritten, and only a little less brief than the others had been.

Mrs. Matheson was dreadfully sorry, but she found she couldn’t manage that supper and the play on Saturday after all. There was no excuse. It was a brief statement. “I am requested by Mrs. Matheson to write and tell you . . .”

He felt rather alone in the world, did poor Wilfred, at this cold shower-bath greeting him just as his spirits were getting slightly lifted by the unexpected recovery of the pocket-book and the still more unexpected recovery of the two hundred pounds. These last would float him till



Mrs. Matheson serving the cause of Middle-class Motherhood.

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he could turn round. He could earn something anyhow, after he had seen Joan.

Next he opened a curious buff-coloured envelope in which was no letter, but a long folded, printed thing, filled up with ink at various points. It authorized him to call at the *Howl* and draw the sum of fifty pounds from a person apparently called in that big new establishment the deputy cashier. He was requested to call between the hours of two and three p.m. (in ink) on some day before the 25th.

So far so good. Wilfred would go and collect that £50 this very afternoon. He did some rapid addition. 200 *plus* 50 *plus* 6: 256. He was solid now indeed.

The next thing he opened was a strong personal note from Lord de la Guarrenne. It was quite charming, considering how little practice the writer had had.

“I have never had the pleasure of meeting you, dear Mr. Straddle” (Lord de la Guarrenne had had two letters that same week written to him in this fashion, with the ‘dear’ coming in the second line instead of the first, and he had got the impression that there was something toney about it). “I have never had the pleasure of meeting you, dear Mr. Straddle. But you really must allow me to

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express my delight at receiving from your pen that powerful plea for the reunion of the Anglo-Saxon race. It is a matter that I myself have near at heart, but even had your point of view differed widely from mine, I should still have been proud to bring the contribution from a man so well qualified to speak upon the subject and so practical and incisive in expression." (This last phrase Lord de la Guarrenne had got out of a review which he had been reading in one of his own newspapers.) "You will have received before now the Order from the office for £50. 0s. 0d. I hope you won't mind our habit of cashing in there. We like to do our own banking. But of course, if you endorse it as you would a cheque and tear off at the dotted line, it is the equivalent of a cheque and you can pass it through your own bank.

"I wonder whether we might not meet? If you will ring me up at the office any week-day (except Mondays and Saturdays) at about 12.30, we could make a date. I thank you in anticipation.

"de LA GUARRENNE."

Reader! O Reader! Note the little "de"!

Under that letter in the pile there was another letter, with the imprint of his accursed Bank upon

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it. It was a mere printed form, the third of the series, calling his attention to an overdraft of £2. 16s. 3d., with an insistent underlying postscript begging that the matter should receive immediate attention "in order that it might not be necessary to proceed further." That did not trouble Wilfred. It would have troubled him abominably an hour or two before, but it did not trouble him now. He was floating. And when he thought of that extra fifty pounds which he could scoop up when he liked, he floated yet more securely. He was beginning to feel rich again.

The letter from Worms and Handler was very brief and formal. It was courteous enough, begging him to let them know when he could come round, as they had a matter to lay before him which would be of interest to him. There was, however, no urgency. If he would let them know when he could come, they would be obliged.

There was the usual enormous batch of circulars and begging letters and requests to act as steward at a vile public charity dinner (and pay five pounds); there were pleas for hospitals and for good and bad causes of every kind—a haystack of stuff which took for granted his great coming fortune and which had been such an added bitterness to him, during the days just past. He opened them perfunctorily and very rapidly and threw them away one after the other.

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He left till last that large long envelope with the American postmark and the typewritten address:

Wilfred G. Straddle, Esq.

The "G" grated on him. After all, his mother was a Guthrie, and as like as not the letter might be about Guthrie affairs.

He was right. It was.

The letter was a long one, in legal American form (which is clearer and better than legal English). It said what it had to say both simply and fully, in two and a half pages of single-spaced typewriting.

Every effort had been made by Messrs. Hasdrubal C. Gantock, Mr. Guthrie's lawyers, to find a Will of the late Mr. John Scott Guthrie. None had been discovered. It was the more remarkable as he had left very careful instructions, as a man of his character was bound to do, saying where all his most private papers were to be found, leaving a key in a sealed envelope, marked "To be opened after my death."

They had opened the very small metal safe in the secret drawer. There were half a dozen memoranda and receipts—but of a Will, no sign. They had applied to the Courts for an interim decision as to whether, and if so when, their late client Mr. John Scott Guthrie, of 15, Ruysbeck Street, New York City, might be provisionally presumed to have died intestate, under the Statute,

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when another lawyer, a certain Mr. Abraham St. John, whom Mr. John Scott Guthrie had consulted without their knowledge, had provided a new piece of evidence which had settled the whole affair.

This other lawyer, Mr. St. John, had produced a letter which explained everything.

Mr. Guthrie had written to Messrs. A. St. John making an appointment for the fourth day after the arrival of the boat upon which he had taken his return to the States. He explained that he had done so in order to allow for any possible delays from the weather or what not, adding that he would cable upon starting. In that letter he had said that he would write further in regard to a very important and private matter. He had never yet drawn up his Will, and now wished to do so. He meant the Will to be brief, the schedule of the property and of his intentions upon it being already fixed in his mind, though not yet committed to paper. A further letter would follow, in which the details would be put before them, so that they should be ready to draw up the instrument on his arrival with the least delay.

This other firm, Messrs. Abraham St. John, had read, of course, in the public press of Mr. Guthrie's sudden and tragic demise, and they understood why no cable had reached them; for the unfortunate gentleman had never sailed. But they

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had delayed, on the possibility of a second letter reaching them.

Evidently it had not been written, when Mr. Guthrie had come so untimely by the accident which was as well known to themselves as to Mr. Wilfred G. Straddle.

That was the letter which Messrs. Hasdrubal C. Gantock had received from Messrs. Abraham St. John of whose connection with Mr. Guthrie they had had until then no suspicion.

They preferred not to express their regret that Mr. Guthrie should have chosen to consult other legal advisers than themselves on so important a matter; but the late Mr. Guthrie's idiosyncrasies were such that they were less surprised than they would have been in the case of another man.

Meanwhile, with this new piece of evidence before it, the Court had issued a second order substituting for the provisional order a final decision. They were now prepared to act in due course upon the basis that no will existed.

It was clear that the late Mr. John Scott Guthrie would presumably, in delay of perhaps six months, be presumed to have died intestate. In another letter sent by the same mail to Messrs. Worms and Handler, Messrs. Gantock had informed the London Agents of the late Mr. Guthrie of all the circumstances. If Mr. Straddle would call on Messrs. Worms and Handler, those gentlemen would

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allow him to draw whatever sums he might for the moment need, in reason, until the estate should be wound up, when they would await his instructions. They congratulated Mr. Straddle upon his good fortune, and remained his obedient servants, Hasdrubal C. Gantock.

Wilfred Guthrie Straddle read that letter three times.

There could be no mistake about it. He was back again in the position which not only he, but all London that counted, had taken for granted until the news of his disappointment had leaked out. He was going to be a rich man: a very rich man: a very rich man indeed.

If you will believe me (which of course you won't), his first reaction (as the Anglo-Saxons put it)—his first thought, as we should say, on this side of the Atlantic—was a picture of Joan: Joan with her determined face and Joan's voice—the vivid tone of it as she had told him that nothing should persuade her to be thrust into the marriage market as her mother had desired.

Yes! He was a rich man. He was going to be a rich man. He might even in a few hours have a little money in hand. But then, how would he break the dreadful news to Joan?

He stared at the mass of opened envelopes and the heaps of their contents upon the sofa beside him in the smoking-room at the Club, and

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pondered. That was the problem which overlay everything else. That was the problem that confronted him. How should he break it to Joan?

Riches would mean losing Joan—and that had been passing within him during the last weeks since he had seen her which made him, as passionately as such a nature as his could think passionately, as tragically as such a man could receive tragedy, look upon a Joan-less world as one in which nothing mattered.

That is what you have got to believe, whether you like it or not. There are men whose minds work in that way, or rather, whose tide of affection works in that way. It was Joan or Nix for Wilfred. They are wholly confined to members of the Hedge Club, and even in the Hedge Club they are confined to a very small minority of the members.

Yes; he must tell Joan of his wealth. But he would put it off. He would keep her as long as he could. And thus it was that the great world of London was late in learning a bit of news which so many of its mothers and daughters would have given their wigs and cocktails to have heard.

Wilfred came out of his reverie and pulled himself together, but with a great load on his heart.

He must be practical; he must deal with the matters in hand. He tore up and threw into the wastepaper basket all the begging letters and the worst trash of appeals from lords, and their hospitals,

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and the rest. He walked slowly—I had almost written tottered—to the telephone box, and rang up Worms and Handler. When could they see him?

They could see him now. He looked at his watch. It was only a little after twelve. He told them he would be with them as soon as the peculiar accidents of London traffic would allow, and in the cab on the way, his mind was full of three things confused: this vast fortune in the near distance, the sum he might decently ask Worms and Handler to advance, but overlying all and much more alive than all, flaming, the possession—and the loss—of Joan.

The manner in which Worms and Handler received him was a singularly fine refutation of those who think cynically of all agents and all lawyers and all men of business in general. Both rose—Worms rose as do Worms, Handler rose as do Handlers. The first sinuously, the second erect. Both greeted him warmly, Worms with more oil in his warmth than Handler, but even Handler not stiffly. Both made Wilfred the honoured guest, and alternately they told him in rather wearisome detail, each prompting the other and each confirming the other in one point after another, the change in his fortunes. Wilfred answered only with a very brief “Yes” now and then. “Yes, I think so,” and then later, more urgently, “By all means. Yes. I understand.”



Worms and Handler registering courtesy and enthusiasm.

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There was a pause. There was much of the concealed Horse in Worms, and still more of the open Horse in Handler, than the now set-up Hedger could have guessed. They took the initiative; and while he was yet casting about in his mind as to whether he might dare to ask for five hundred pounds, while he was yet wondering what those New York lawyers meant by that phrase "in reason," they told him that they supposed a credit of a thousand pounds would meet all immediate requirements. Of course if there were further delays, nothing could be easier than to increase that sum. Meanwhile they were sure his bankers would oblige as well, and they would give him a note to those Impersonalities—which meant in the concrete the formidable Manager, the Manager who had been so suave with that "Hardly, hardly!—Eh?" only so little a time ago.

They had already made arrangements, had Worms and Handler. Might they let him have their cheque now? It was well to do these things promptly!

Wilfred was quite agreeable. They handed him an envelope, with another outburst of geniality from Mr. Worms and something approaching courtesy from Mr. Handler; and that was that.

The monstrous palladian edifice that housed the sacred head of Lord de la Guarrenne when he was overseeing his monstrous ganglion of newspapers

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was halfway from Worms and Handler to Wilfred's Club. He stopped there. Lord de la Guarrenne would be delighted to see him.

In his new-found wealth Wilfred had kept the taxi waiting at Worms and Handler's. He kept it waiting again when he reached Bodger Building—Bodger being, I need hardly remind you, the family name of the de la Guarrennes, with which they had originally baptized his commercial Palace, before the Peerage. The town residence in modern style overlooking the park bears the later and nobler title.

Wilfred cashed the £50 order. He liked to have the stuff in his pocket. Then he went up to the millionaire's room—a simple little apartment in the tradition of Louis XV. He was greeted with an enthusiasm which those who knew de la Guarrenne best would have hardly credited. He was taken off there and then to lunch in de la Guarrenne House: they two alone. Before he left it he had been persuaded to write another article on the all-important matter of Anglo-Saxon relations. Lord de la Guarrenne hoped and believed that it would only be the beginning of a long and close connection.

After that luncheon Wilfred bethought him of his Bank. In his simple soul he conceived that Bank Managers left their offices at that same hour in which the vile public finds the doors shut against

The Hedge and the Horse

it for the day. He little knew that men of such standing have hardly drifted back from their luncheon so early in the afternoon. He had to wait, as he had had to wait on that past day when the Controller of Credit had smiled so sweetly at him and murmured: "Hardly!—Eh?"

But he now occupied the banker's antechamber in a very different frame of mind: a mood of assurance and content. He was in no hurry.

He heard movements beyond the door. He was ushered solemnly in, and for the third time that day he was greeted with the whole-hearted hospitality which marks Men of Business upon suitable occasions.

"My dear Mr. Straddle! I do hope I haven't kept you waiting?" The hands were outstretched. The eyes did not gleam behind their glasses, because they could not, but the muscles of the financial face had nothing about them of the fatal smile. They were pulled into curves of real welcome, or at any rate into something more than half-way to same.

"My dear Mr. Straddle!—Now let us talk matters over. What have you come to see me about? I have heard, of course, from the late Mr. Guthrie's Agents, Messrs. Worms and Handler. May I congratulate you?"

It is a difficult thing to congratulate a man and to condole with him at the same moment. But



His dear Mr. Straddle.

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the Manager had done that kind of thing three hundred times and eighteen before, and he pulled it off fairly successfully. He glided from condolence to business with an easy motion, and he soon found out what he could do for Mr. Wilfred Guthrie Straddle, heir, full heir and chief mourner to the (alas!) late Mr. John Scott Guthrie.

How long the winding up of an estate of that sort would take no one, of course, could tell, but pray let him regard the Bank as being at his disposal: this branch of the Bank, anyhow, or any branch which Mr. Straddle might have occasion to visit. He hoped, of course, that Mr. Straddle would continue his connection with, etc. etc. etc.

Wilfred was guided and smoothed, and all went well. No, he did not intend to take up his residence in America. He might have to go there later on, he probably would have to, but he meant to live in England. He had never been out of England. He almost blurted out "Except once to Sluys," but thought better of it in time.

"Indeed?" said the Manager. "Indeed?" as though he were receiving a marvellous piece of news. Very rich men so often go to the Riviera, and even further afield.

Once more for a moment was Wilfred Straddle at a loss. He did not like to mention particular figures, and once more the initiative was taken out of his hands.

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"I don't want to fix any maximum, Mr. Straddle," said the Manager, "but if we say up to five thousand, I think we shall understand each other. We certainly shall not have to wait more than six months, I understand. The American taxes, I believe, will be dealt with on the other side. No doubt we can discuss later whether you will transfer any of the investments, and perhaps I may be of use in connection with the documents which make the burden of overseas payments less grievous, though I am afraid they must always be very heavy, Mr. Straddle" (shaking his head), "very heavy! Here we are, with the Great War half a lifetime behind us, and they are still very heavy, Mr. Straddle! Very heavy! Heavy enough," he sighed, "when a man has all his possessions locked up in this country, but almost crushing when he draws income from abroad!"

"Yes," said Wilfred simply. He had no doubt it was so. But in his heart he could conceive of nothing crushing that could crush so monstrous an accumulation as that which was now within his reach.

"Unless," continued the Bank Manager, with happy tact, "unless, of course, the investor is properly advised and the right methods are suggested to him. Right methods, yes, right methods. . . . I shall be happy to show you . . ." here he rose and took some forms out of a drawer, "one or two examples."

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He readjusted his glasses and compelled the unfortunate Wilfred to pass more than half an hour pretending to read forms which meant nothing to him at all. At last Wilfred could bear it no longer. He mumbled an excuse and got up.

“Later on, Mr. Straddle, we shall come to signatures, eh? Meanwhile, Mr. Straddle, let me congratulate you again most warmly.”

They shook hands and Wilfred went off to complete three bits of business which had intruded themselves upon his thoughts successively in the course of that day as he realized the opportunities he now had wholly at his disposal.

First he would go to the Pillbox—it was a piece of good luck that he had not found Worksop there on his first visit—he felt illogically grateful to think that by an accident he had not suffered that humiliation, and he now determined to subscribe largely in the way he had been asked to do.

The second thing he had to do was to answer all those letters, cold as they had been. That would take him a good part of the afternoon.

The third thing he had to do was to make his peace largely with Mrs. Cramp. He was conscious of his shortcomings in the matter of that good woman. He had tried her sorely. She was poor; she was hard driven; *she* was in no way to blame for what had passed: rather was *he* to blame. He ought to have done almost anything rather than

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keep *her* waiting. *She* had the chief claim upon him.

Such was the order of his day. But he changed it.

He first answered his letters with a heavy heart. He did not misunderstand their tenor, though it was beyond him to know why there should have been this curious change in so many relations.

He would go on knowing these people, of course—but hardly on the same terms as before. As for Mrs. Matheson, *certainly* not on the same terms as before. He felt mildly angry with her, only a little bewildered at the others. One relief he had anyhow in all this; it was that he would no longer be troubled by Loulou. He would no longer be pestered by Fanny.

He softened at what he feared was the coldness arisen between him and the Merridens—and after all, he had shot old Nigger, hadn't he? It was understandable that there should be an aftermath. He added a word or two to his notes saying that he hoped he should find Lady Merriden at home—he would so much like to see her again! He would call, if she did not mind, the day after to-morrow, after tea-time. (He carefully put in "after tea-time" hoping that perhaps he should find her free from the company of friends whom he less desired to see.)

Then he suddenly remembered that he hadn't given any tips when he left the Lodiham's, and

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they might have been annoyed by having to send on his note-case. It is always a temptation to servants to leave a note-case lying about.

Yes, he would be courteous in these replies—except to Mrs. Matheson. She was now beyond the pale to him.

Then before dinner, he went to make his peace with Mrs. Cramp. He put up the full amount due to her, with a week in advance, in an envelope, and had all his plans ready for making amends.

He wondered what she would like. Then he remembered that early in their acquaintance, in a chat with him, she had envied the possession of a really good radio. He would suggest that. Sixty, seventy pounds—whatever it was, there should be no mention of money. After all, she had borne with him in spite of the friction at the end, and she was a poor woman. A radio would give her such pleasure!

But alas! when he met the good lady that evening he met a Fury.

“Mr. Straddle, I must tell you plain, sir, that I don’t understand you! I don’t understand you at all! And what’s more, I won’t stand it any more, Mr. Straddle, no more! You haven’t so much as wrote me a word! And do you know how much there is owing, Mr. Straddle?”

“Now, Mrs. Cramp,” began the gentle Wilfred, “Dear Mrs. Cramp . . .”

“And don’t you dear Mrs. Cramp me! Not

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another day, Mr. Straddle. I've got your things here, and I'm going to stick to them, and as to you, I don't have you through this door again, not till you've paid me, and if you don't, I'll know how to get my money back." After all, his wardrobe was ample, and she had been impressed by those guns: though, like their owner, she was a little intrigued as to whether she had a right to property which had not been paid for. "So, Mr. Straddle, that's how it is! Until you pay I keep everything! And one thing's certain—you're not sleeping here, to-night, Mr. Straddle!"

"I must take my little bag," said Wilfred, putting things in the wrong order. "And look here, Mrs. Cramp, since you feel like that . . . I've got the money here for you." He handed her the parcel.

Mrs. Cramp was so surprised that she sat down in a chair without so much as "I beg your pardon," and, short of breath, counted the notes. There was all the arrears, and a week in advance. She was a good woman, and she felt softened.

"I'm sure, Mr. Straddle, sir, I didn't mean anything more than I said."

"No, Mrs. Cramp," said Wilfred humbly, "I know. But it doesn't matter. I'll get a room at my Club. I'll send for my things."

"Oh, sir," replied Mrs. Cramp, rising, "I don't want you to take anything amiss . . ."

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“No, it’s all right, Mrs. Cramp.” He was not far from tears. He had hoped the world would treat him better.

He passed the night at his Club, more unhappy at the diminution of friendship which for some extraordinary reason was going on around him than happy in his new security.

In the morning the trouble began again: the usual mass of letters from lords and ladies who wanted money for good objects and bad: more commoners who had needs of their own, or brilliant opportunities to recommend. But among these letters, one had thrust the iron a little deeper into his soul. It was from the Central Office, and it astounded him.

He had no idea that elementary education played so large a part in the political emotions of his fellow-countrymen!

Mr. Holder’s letter was brief, and ran thus:

MY DEAR MR. STRADDLE,

I am sorry to say that there has been a hitch in connection with your candidature for Rats-holme; in fact, I must tell you, in a word, that we must beg you to regard it as being at an end. Certain members of the Committee—a majority, I believe, but at any rate a sufficient number of influential men to determine the matter—have heard of your attitude

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on the compulsory teaching of dancing in the elementary schools. They feel strongly upon the matter and I am afraid I cannot but agree with them myself. I had no idea, until I heard it at Mrs. Matheson's, that you held such views against this addition to our national curriculum. Of course I respect your opinions, and would not for a moment attempt to put pressure upon you. I honour you for having had the courage to take what I am sure you must have known would be an unpopular attitude, but as things are, I am afraid it has settled the matter.

Wilfred took it for granted that it did. It was an awful and inexorable machine, was the Government of his country. What he had said to Mrs. Matheson, and when, he had no idea. He must have opened his mouth in a perfunctory way for or against dancing, but he had no recollection of it—and no wonder, for he had never done so. He would do the dignified thing. After all, he had always heard that the House of Commons stank. Bill knew the world better, and Bill had said so over and over again. Wild horses, Bill had told him half a dozen times, would not drag him near the place. Politics (said Bill) was the beastliest of all beastly professions.

What Wilfred did feel was the brevity, he might

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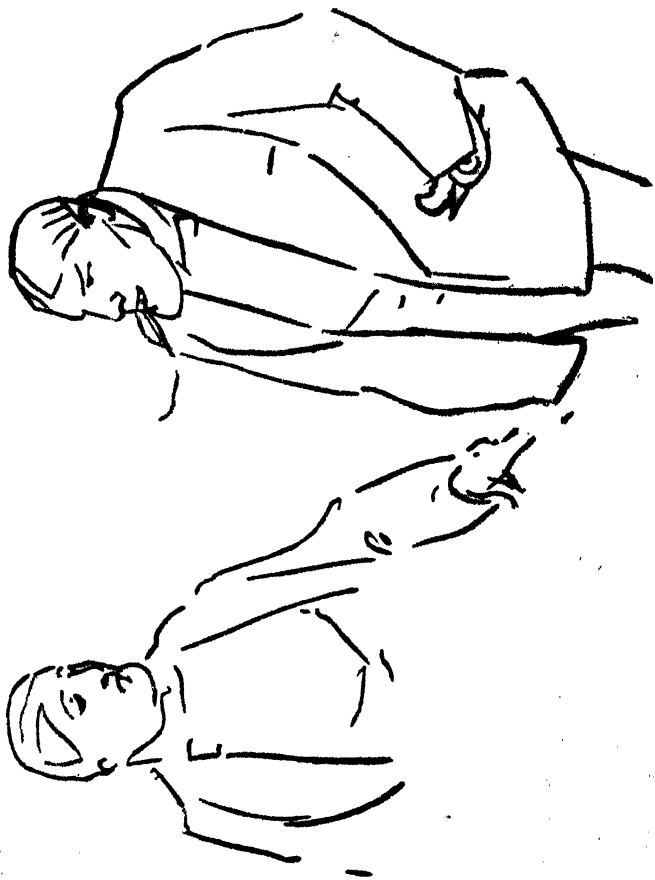
almost have called it the brutality, of the message. But it might be a lucky escape.

He wrote a quiet letter back, assuring Mr. Holder that he quite understood the strong feelings of the Committee on the subject, and that he was happy to offer his resignation. But, ah me! How empty and lonely he was getting!

There was one place, anyhow, where good fellowship reigned, and where something was expected of him which he could now perform. That was the Pillbox and collection for the Speider testimonial. It was not a very reputable good-fellowship. He was determined not to haunt the place. He would drop it gradually. But he could at least make good on that little point. He would do the generous thing in the matter of the subscription. Two hundred ought to go a long way, or three hundred. He would make it three hundred.

He did not let his resolution cool. He did not like the place, he hated it, but at any rate there was still friendship there of a sort, he supposed, although he had had a shock the last time he was there. But that was understandable. Perhaps he had refused too brusquely.

When he got into the Pillbox he found them all there, and a larger bunch of them than usual. There was Piggy, of course, and Jack Purling, of course, and Tom Dickinson, of course, and others who had expected him to put up the money. He



Jack Purling, of course, and Tom Dickinson.

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was glad that they were there. All members of the Hedge Club are glad to have a bridge by which to cross the icy river of a temporary coldness. He would propose a drink, and introduce the subject of that trifle of two or three hundred pounds. He could do it now.

But it was not to be. One of them barely glanced at him over his shoulder, nodded coolly, and went on with his conversation. Piggy nodded—or didn't; he couldn't tell—the gesture was so slight. Jack Purling behaved as though Wilfred was not there, and Tom Dickinson as though Wilfred had not come in at all. As for the others, he knew them even less well, and they were even more completely distant.

Wilfred had almost ordered a tomato cocktail for himself (remember that Hedgers keep their word more than Horses do) when the resolution faded. No. He would go straight into Worksop's office, though it involved running the gauntlet of all the people round the bar, including four women, one of whom looked at him with a curious insolence, one of whom grinned at him, but of whom the other two did not even do that, but looked away. He ran the gauntlet like a man—not like a Horse, indeed, but, still, like a man.

When he got into Worksop's little room, Worksop did not rise. He finished the bit of writing he was doing, then said:

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"Oh yes! Mr. Straddle? Yes, what is it you want?"

"I have come to tell you, Mr. Worksop, that I am resigning from the Club."

"I'm sorry to hear that!" said Mr. Worksop, in a cheerful tone. "I'm sorry to hear that! Well, I suppose you'll send me your formal resignation, won't you?"

Wilfred had not been offered a chair.

"I'll write it now, and here, Mr. Worksop," he said.

Without rising, Mr. Worksop reached forward to a notepaper case and, taking a card and an envelope, chucked them across the table. Wilfred wrote his note in the third person and left it on the table for Mr. Worksop to put into the envelope or not as he felt inclined, and went out without a word.

He noted the hour. There was still time before they would be dressing for dinner. It was just the suitable hour, as he had said. There would be no crowd at the Merridens, and he could go and make what apology he had to make and what reconciliation he could make with his former hostess, perhaps in private. At any rate he would have made what they call on the Continent, "Act of Presence." He would have done the right thing.

He groomed carefully in anticipation of that interview. At the door of Merriden House he saw that Splendid Rolls in all its glory waiting for its mistress. Here was luck! Perhaps she would

The Hedge and the Horse

drive him somewhere. It would be easier to talk alone with her like that than in her room.

The man who opened the door said that he feared Lady Merriden was not at home.

“Not at home?” gasped Wilfred. And even as he said it the door of the back drawing-room upstairs opened, and he heard an important but motherly voice pronouncing sentences which remained in his mind for ever.

“He said he was coming here this afternoon, my dear. Don’t go down now. You might meet him at the door. Wait till I’ve got off. He said he was coming late, and he might be here at any minute. Wait till I get away.”

“Oh Lord, Mamma! that fellow?” It was the voice of Fanny Blackman. And then the door shut again.

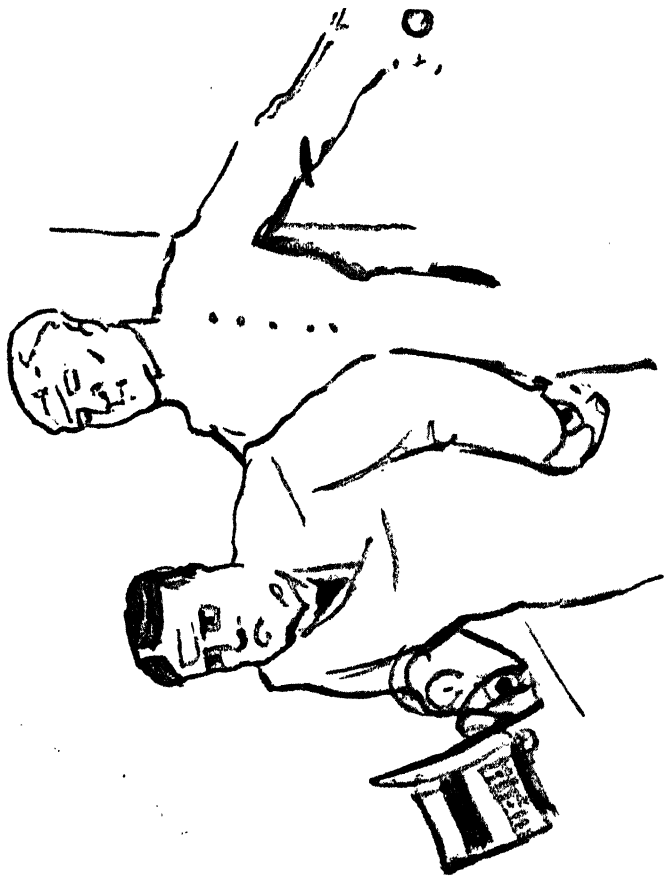
To Wilfred, still lingering, the warden of the portcullis repeated more firmly the decisive phrase: “Her Ladyship is not at home.”

“Oh!” said Wilfréd.

He said it, not exactly into his hat, but towards it, and turned down the steps to the street.

They were fine steps; it was an eighteenth-century house, and I am sorry that they are going to pull it down. But the Merridens could not refuse the offer.

Wilfred went off, weighed with the curse of gold, but more with the arctic temper of this world. He rang up Hertfordshire. Joan came promptly.



“Oh!”

The Hedge and the Horse

Yes. She would see him whenever he liked the next day. He must not come to lunch. There were reasons. But if he came some time between three and four, they could have a long talk. Had he got any more work?

Yes, he had. He had an order for another article.

“Good. Did they pay you?”

“Yes.”

“How much?”

“Fifty pounds.”

There was a whistle at the other end of the wire, as though the telephone had turned into one of those old-fashioned speaking tubes.

“Would they give you that again?”

“Yes, they say they will. I shouldn’t wonder if they made it a feature, the way they talked.”

“Oh, Wilfred!” and the voice became urgent. “That’s three hundred a year! And then you may be able to earn something else on the side. Who knows?”

“On the side?” said Wilfred.

“Three minutes,” said another voice.

“All right—another three. . . . What’s on the side? Oh, extra stuff, you know. I’ll explain it all when you come. Bless you, Wilfred.”

“Good-night, dear, dear Joan,” was Wilfred’s farewell. You cannot kiss a telephone, but he knew he had crossed the frontier.

“Good-night, darling Wilfred.”

XV

JOAN was not a Horse. She was not even a mare as yet. But she was a strong filly. If ladies were admitted to the Horse Club she would certainly be on the Committee. She marched straight off to Lady Penelope's little room, still Victorian.

"Mamma," she said, as she shut the door behind her and stood erect. "I'm going to marry Wilfred."

"What!" shouted Lady Penelope.

"I am going to marry Wilfred, Mamma."

Of course Lady Penelope had known that—but the brutal truth in crude words unmanned her—I mean, undowagered her.

"You silly young fool! You're going to do nothing of the kind!"

"Yes, I am, Mamma. He's earning money now, and I as good as gave him to understand that now he was poor . . ."

Lady Penelope was not a woman of many words, she knew her daughter horribly well. She snorted—and added to Joan's decision.

"He is coming here to-morrow, Mamma. And if he doesn't speak, I shall."

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Lady Penelope turned back to her writing.

“Very well, Joan. If you like to cut your throat, you can. But remember this: I shall do nothing to help. *Nothing!*”

“I wouldn’t take it if you did, Mamma,” said Joan.

“You won’t get the chance,” said Lady Penelope, snapping her rattlers. But she did not mean it, poor woman. She was suffering.

* * * * *

The next morning was Wilfred’s appointment with Bill. Bill was more flagrantly dressed than ever, and with spirits in him like a typhoon.

“I’ve done the trick, Wilfred!” he said.

“I don’t know what you mean, Bill!”

Wilfred in his heart thought it meant the engagement to Lady Antigua. But even so Bill would hardly use such language, especially of something now well known and old. He was wrong there. Bill would have used any language about anything. But his next words showed what he was talking about.

“They’ve asked me to stand for Ratsholme. It’s a sitter! The Head Office told me that if I stood as an Anarchist there would be no doubt at all. They are impressed by Antigua,” he added with divine simplicity. “I said I was willing to stand as a Socialist, but they said no, it was better

The Hedge and the Horse

to stand as an Anarchist. It seems they've already turned you down as a Socialist for some reason. . . . After all, there's no difference between the Parties now, is there? I shouldn't care much if there was. They are giving me a jolly send-off. The Home Secretary came to talk to me at the first meeting with the Committee, two days ago. I don't like the fellow. He said all the usual things—he 'yielded to no one in umpterara'—and all that. 'He might not himself see eye to eye with me in political principle, but we should all agree nowadays that the nation comes first. This was the fourth National Government. In so grave a moment there should be no question of reviving the bad old party spirit'—and so on. He is the hell of a bore, I can tell you! And when he shook hands with me at the end and praised me to my face I should like to have landed him an uppercut. I talked the better part of half an hour, and believe me, Willy, I talked well! I never saw men more stirred than those fossil Ratholmites. It was when I turned on the jingo tap that they were most moved. I did that at the end. I shan't even be opposed."

Then he added, abruptly, "Willy, you'll be my best man, won't you?"

"Your what, Bill?"

"Best man. Dress the part."

"Oh yes, Bill, certainly, I shall be proud."

The Hedge and the Horse

“I’ll send you all the details.”

Bill was fussed and full of affairs. “I’d like us to dine to-night, but I don’t think it’s possible. The old boy’s come up to town. She brought him and her mother with her, and I’ve got to dance attendance.”

* * * * *

Three days later the second letter came from Hasdrubal C. Gantock. It confirmed the now accepted intestacy of the Great Dead.

Willy the Hedger, the newly re-established toff (and oh, how solidly established now!), drove up to Hertfordshire in a very fine car which he had very specially hired. Railways were a bore, and he wanted to be alone. Also, he had remembered Lady Merriden’s advice in the days of her maternal intimacy. He determined *not* to keep a Rolls in town. No, he would not get a Rolls at all until . . . until . . .

Then, suddenly, a chill struck his heart. He had dreamed of Joan and himself and the place they would seek for themselves and pick out and purchase, and he had thought that since she had such an objection to wealth he would not have all the cars that Lady Merriden had recommended for the country, but he would cherish her as only wealth can cherish. . . .

That was the dream. About a mile from Joan’s

The Hedge and the Horse

house, recollection came to the surface and his soul shrivelled. How should he break it to her that he was rich again? And when he did break it, how would she take it—would it not be the end?

Yes: all that money would mean the end. He knew Joan by this time, thank God! Yes, he did; and that very knowledge was killing him. He would have to let her know. It would not be fair not to let her know. He had read of rich young men who dressed up in funny clothes and even grew yellow beards so as to look like wandering artists and so secure for wives some village maidens—breaking it to the victim much later that she had been trapped into a golden cage. Indeed he remembered a lovely, lovely poem about that sort of thing; he had had to learn it by heart at school. It was by Alfred, First Lord Tennyson. He remembered the Head Master telling him that it was silly to laugh at Alfred Lord Tennyson—a thing which Wilfred at that tender age had had no intention of doing, though he hated that Peer for writing things which unfortunate schoolboys had to learn by heart.

No. He would not deceive Joan. He would rather deceive God. That he knew was impossible, and it would be almost as impossible to deceive Joan.

They had much to say to each other before the great subject was approached. It came by way of

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her making him tell her all about the new order for another article, the connection with the *Howl*, and this splendid fifty pounds a shot.

Would it last? she asked. Had he got it in writing? Oh yes, he had it in writing: it had come only that very morning. Confirmation from the Management. They wanted one a month, and they had suggested titles. It was astonishing what a lot they could get out of the Anglo-Saxon theme. It was like the man who first chewed his tobacco, then smoked it, and then used the ashes for snuff.

"It isn't only America, Joan," he said sadly. "It's the Empire as well, you know."

She nodded with sadness in her eyes also for the moment at the thought of the Empire and the thought of America. For she was not built that way. They are not in her world. What was more, she had never pretended to be built that way. In her world they had to pretend to be so in public, though in private they let themselves go.

She came and sat on the arm of his chair.

"Wilfred, dear," she said in a tone he had not heard from her before. It was an advance by several miles an hour on her former pace, was that tone. "Wilfred, dear, you will earn that three hundred, and you will earn more than three hundred. I'll see to that. I have got three hundred of my own. And so we can do it."

"Yes, dear," said Wilfred; but he only spoke.

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He did nothing to meet that gesture. The time had come for a very very difficult, an heroic act. And Hedgers jib. But he was full of that which conquers Hedgers and Horses alike. The Little God had got him in hand.

"Joan, I must tell you something. . . . I must break it to you, Joan. But Joan," he suddenly said passionately, "if I should lose you . . ."

"Lose your left heel!" said Joan.

"No, Joan, I mean that if I lose you it will kill me."

"Then stay alive, fathead!"

"But, Joan, you don't understand. . . . You see, I'm not poor."

"Yes I do, Wilfred. I don't call three hundred a year poor. It's what I have got myself. I know people can live on six hundred. The best friend I have in the world has been living on six for years, and what's more, she has a hydrocephalic child."

But Wilfred was not hearing what she said. He did not know what hydrocephalic might mean, and he was too modest to risk dwelling upon that adjective.

"No, dearest of dearests"—still looking away, and still not moving. "You think I'm poor compared with the people you meet. . . ."

"But what the hell . . ." said Joan.

"Darling," he cried—four times too loud, twice too high and jumping up suddenly. "I'm *not*

The Hedge and the Horse

poor. I have *not* got three hundred a year. I have got—oh! I don't know how many millions! He did not cut me out of his will after all. He never made a will at all, poor old boy. I'm to have it all—less the state taxes and the Federal taxes and Death Duties and depreciation and the . . . the fees . . . and all that. And then I suppose the English Death Duties, if there are any, and . . . well, it can't be less than ten million anyhow. It may be nearer twelve."

"Dollars or pounds?" asked Joan.

"Dollars. . . . Oh, my beloved! My beloved!"

It is only under the anguish of imperilled love that Hedgers can talk like this.

"That's all right," rose up the voice of Joan, most cheerfully. "It would have been better in pounds. But I don't really mind. It'll be a sell for Mamma, anyhow."

And they embraced.

* * * * *

I am now going to wind up this story, partly because I have come to the end of it, but more because you have had enough and there is nothing so tedious as saying more than is needed.



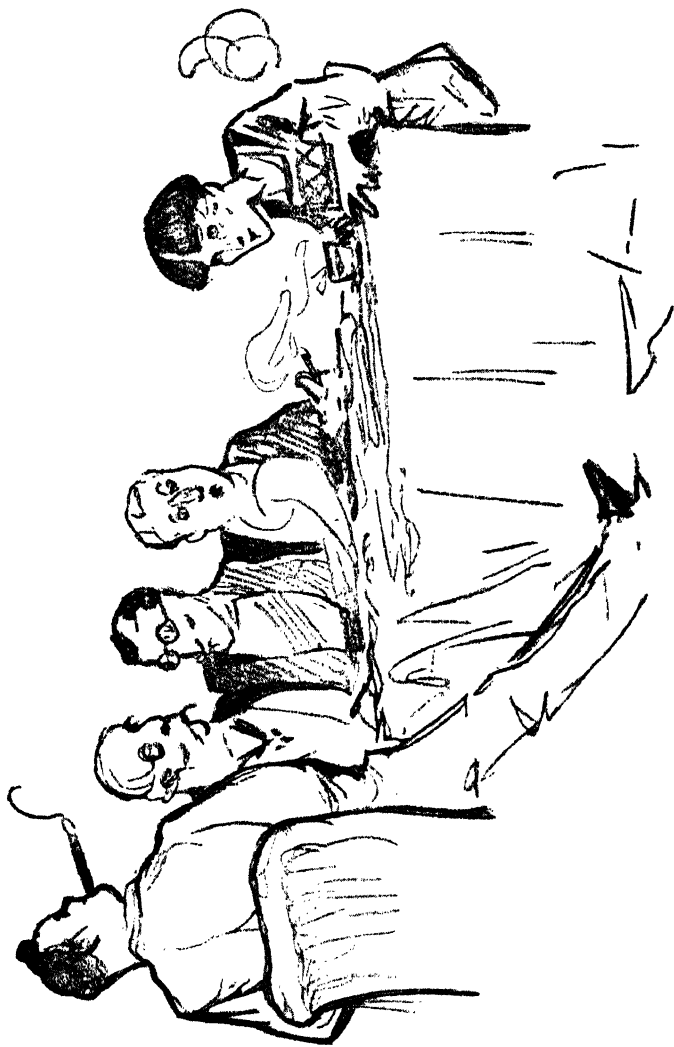
Nagging gambit of a young bride.

The Hedge and the Horse

Wilfred was best man for Bill at his wedding: and the point of that day was not the marriage only (though it was an enormous affair—Bill had seen to that), but the presence of Wilfred *Guthrie Straddle*. It was now firmly believed all over London that the Guthrie Millions had come back home again. They were exaggerated, of course, in the popular eye, and so they were among the well-to-do, the posh, our lot, and all that kind of rot, don't you know. Lady Merriden behind the mask of her set face and grievous inward anger was confident that it was ten million pounds at least. Lady Lodiham biting the bullet would have sworn to fifteen million pounds. She had heard of Yankees with fifty. No one put it at under eight.

After Bill's marriage, as the wedding march made its noise, Wilfred, the Best Man, saw the bride Antigua in somewhat sharp conversation with her mate outside at the church door. He thought for a moment, as did some others, that poor Bill had struck a nagger. Little did he know! The Horse when he is of Bill's calibre suffers from no nadders. Nadders suffer from him; and their nagging dissolves like snows on the farms of the higher valleys when the strong south winds blow.

Two fates were before the two friends: each good. And that is so rare a thing in modern books



Statesmanship.

The Hedge and the Horse

that you may thank me for making you a present of it.

Yes, the fate of each was good, because the fate of each was exactly consonant to the character which each had been given by a beneficent creator.

For many years Bill was to sit, worshipped by a somewhat rejuvenated Antigua and laying down the law even to the most important; showing sternness and vigour, and dominating, at his own table, not only his excellent wife adoring him from the other end, but men who, their hearts told them, could have bought him up four times over. It had been impossible, of course, to keep him out of the Cabinet. Before he had been there three days his wretched colleagues knew that they also had found a master. And Antigua was prouder of him than ever.

As for Wilfred, he and Joan found the house that they wanted in London—which is difficult enough. What is more remarkable, they found the house they wanted in Dorsetshire, which is almost impossible. And they went to furnish it and fill it with life and numbers.

She gave all. He received all. And so should it be with all Hedgers who have been offered the blessing of Heaven.

She had made him write, and he is still writing. He can now write a just tolerable article on his own, though of course it has to be revised by her,

The Hedge and the Horse

to make it passable. He has not written verse yet, but she may yet make him do even that.

Women as gloriously suited to Hedgers can beacon such also to the abodes where the immortals are (Keats—I mean Shelley).



and, who knows but he may yet write verse.

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