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Author: Arthur Quiller-Couch

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MERRY-GARDEN AND OTHER STORIES.

By

ARTHUR THOMAS QUILLER-COUCH.

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CHAPTER LINKS

MERRY-GARDEN.

THE BEND OF THE ROAD.

HI_SPY_HI.

HIS EXCELLENCY'S PRIZE-FIGHT.

THE *BLACK JOKE*.

WHERE THE TREASURE IS.

A JEST OF AMBIOLET.

MERRY-GARDEN.

I.

PROLOGUE.

Beside a winding creek of the Lynher River, and not far from the Cornish borough of Saltash, you may find a roofless building so closely backed with cherry-orchards that the trees seem by their slow pressure to be thrusting the mud-walls down to the river's brink, there to topple and fall into the tide. The old trees, though sheeted with white blossom in the spring, bear little fruit, and that of so poor a flavour as to be scarcely worth picking. They have, in fact, almost reverted to savagery, even as the cottage itself is crumbling back to the earth out of which it was built. On the slope above the cherry-orchards, if you moor your boat at the tumble-down quay and climb by half-obliterated pathways, you will come to a hedge of brambles, and to a broken gate with a well beside it; and beyond the gate to an orchard of apple-trees, planted in times when, regularly as Christmas Eve came round, Aunt Barbree Furnace, her maid Susannah, and the boy Nandy, would mount by this same path with a bowl of cider, and anoint the stems one by one, reciting—

Here's to thee, good apple-tree—
Pockets full, hats full, great bushel-bags full!
Amen, an' vire off the gun!

—Whereupon Nandy, always after a caution to be extry-careful, would shut his eyes, pull the trigger of his blunderbuss, and wake all the echoes of the creek in an uproar which, as Susannah never failed to remark, was fit to frighten every war-ship down in Hamoaze. The trees, grey with lichen, sprawl as they have fallen under the weight of past crops. They go on blossoming, year after year; even those that lie almost horizontally remember their due season and burst into blowth, pouring (as it were) in rosy-white cascades down the slope and through the rank grasses. But as often as not the tenant neglects to gather the fruit. Nor is it worth his while to grub up the old roots; for you cannot plant a new orchard where an old one has decayed. One of these days (he tells me) he means to do something with the wisht old place: meanwhile I doubt if he sets foot in it once a year.

For me, I find it worth visiting at least twice a year: in spring when the Poet's Narcissus flowers in great clumps under the north hedge, and the columbines grow breast-high—pink, blue, and blood-red; and again in autumn, for the sake of an apple which we call the gillyflower—small and shy, but of incomparable flavour—and for a gentle melancholy which haunts the spot like—yes, like a human face, and with faint companionable smiles and murmurs of dead-and-gone laughter.

The tenant was right: it was a wisht old place, and the more wisht because it lies so near

to a world that has forgotten it. Above, if you row past the bend of the creek, you will come upon trim villas with well-kept gardens; below, and beyond the entrance to the creek, you look down a broad river to the Hamoaze, crowded with torpedo-boats, powder-hulks, training-ships, and great vessels of war. Around and behind Merry-Garden—for that is its name—stretches a parish given up to the cultivation of fruit and flowers; and across the creek another parish 'clothed'—I quote the local historian—'in flowers like a bride'; and both parishes learned their prosperity from Merry-Garden the now deserted. In mazzard time ('mazzards' are sweet black cherries) the sound of young laughter floats across Merry-Garden; but the girls and boys who make the laughter seldom, wander that way. No longer to its quay come boats with holiday-parties from the Fleet and the Garrison at Plymouth, as they came by scores a hundred years ago.

In those days Merry-Garden was a cherry-garden. The cottage was faced with a verandah overlooking the tide. In the wide stone chimney-place, where now, standing knee-deep in nettles, you may look up and see blue sky beyond the starlings' nests, as many as twenty milk-pans have stood together over the fire, that the visitors might have clotted cream to eat with their strawberries and raspberries. In the orchards, from under masses of traveller's joy, you may pull away rotten pieces of timber that once made arbours and summer-houses.

The present tenant will sub-let you the whole of Merry-Garden, if you wish, for two pounds ten shillings per annum. He is an old man, with an amazing memory and about as much sentiment as my boot. From him I learned the following story: and, with your leave, I will repeat it in his words.

I.

Aunt Barbree Furnace was a widow woman, and held Merry-Garden upon a tenancy of a kind you don't often come across nowadays—and good riddance to it!—though common enough when I was a boy. The whole lease was but for three pounds a year for the term of three lives—her husband, William John Furnace; her husband's younger sister Tryphena, that had married a man called Jewell and buried him within six months; and Tryphena's only child Ferdinando, otherwise known as Nandy. When the lease was drawn, all three lives seemed good enough for another fifty years. The Furnaces came of a long-lived stock, and William John with any ordinary care might hope to reach eighty. His sister had been specially put into the lease on the strength of her constitution; and six months of married life had given her a distaste for it, which made things all the safer. As for Nandy, there's always a risk, of course, with very young lives, 'specially with boys: but if he did happen to pull through, 'twas like as not he might lengthen out the lease for another thirty years.

At any rate Mr. and Mrs. Furnace took the risk with a cheerful mind. The woman came from Saltash, where she and her mother had driven a thriving trade in cockles and other shellfish, particularly with the Royal Marines; and being a busy spirit and childless, she hit on the notion of turning her old trade to account. Her husband, William John, had tilled Merry-Garden and stocked it with fruits and sallets with no eye but to the sale of them in Saltash market. But the house was handy for pleasure-takers by water, and by and by the board she put up— *Mrs. Barbree Furnace. Cockles and Cream in Season. Water Boiled and Tea if You Wish*—attracted the picnickers by scores; and the picnickers began to ask for fruit with their teas, till William John, at his wife's advice, planted half an acre of strawberries, and laid out another half-acre in currant and raspberry bushes. By this time, too, the cherry-trees were beginning to yield. So by little and little, feeling sure of their lease, they extended the business. William John, one winter, put up a brand-new chimney, and bought three cows which he pastured up along in the meadow behind the woods; and next spring the pair hung out a fresh board and painted on it—*Furnace's Merry-Garden Tea-House. Patronised by the Naval and Military. Teas, with Fruit and Cream, Sixpence per head*: and another board which they hoisted in the mazzard-season, saying—*Sixpence at the Gate, and eat so Much as you Mind to. All are Welcome*. With all this, Aunt Barbree (as she came to be called) didn't neglect the cockles, which were her native trade. In busy times she could afford to hire over one of the Saltash fish-women—the Johnses or the Glanvilles; you'll have heard of them, maybe?—to lend her a hand: but in anything like a slack season she'd be down at low water, with her petticoat trussed over her knees, raking cockles with her own hands. Yes, yes, a powerful, a remarkable woman! and a pity it was (I've heard my mother say) to see such a healthy, strong couple prospering in all they touched, and hauling in money hand-over-fist, with neither chick nor child to leave it to.

Prosper they did, at any rate; and terrible popular the place became with the Fleet and the Army, till by the year eighteen-nought-five—the same in which Admiral Nelson fought the Battle of Trafalgar—there wasn't an officer in either service that had ever found himself at Plymouth, but could tell something of Merry-Garden and its teas, with their cockles and

cream and strawberries in June and mazzards in July month. By this time the Furnaces had built a new landing-quay—the same to which your boat is moored at this moment—and rigged up arbours and come-sit-by-me's in every corner of the garden and under every plum-tree and laylock-bush: for William John was extending his season by degrees, and had gone so far as to set up a board in May-time by Admiral's Hard, down at Devonport, and on it '*Officers of the United Services will Kindly take Notice that the Lay locks in Merry-Garden are in Bloom. Cockles Warranted, and Cream from best Channel Island Cows. Patronised also by the Nobility and Gentry of Plymouth, Plymouth Dock, Saltash, and East Cornwall*.'

You may wonder that the Furnaces' success didn't encourage others to set up in opposition? But a cherry-garden isn't grown in a day. Mrs. Furnace had dropped into it (so to speak) when the trees that William John had planted were already on the way to yield good profit. Also she was a woman who knew how to keep a pleasure-garden decent, however near it might lie to a great town and a naval port. Simple woman though she seemed, she understood scandal.

But in the midst of life we are in death. One day, at the height of his prosperity, William John drove over to Menheniot Churchtown (where his sister Tryphena resided with her boy Nandy and kept a general shop) to fetch them over to Merry-Garden for a visit. Aunt Barbree loved children, you understand: besides which, Tryphena's husband had left her poor, and 'twas the first week in August after a good season, and the mazzards wanted eating if they weren't to perish for want of it.... So William John, who by this time was rich enough to set up a tax-cart, but inexperienced to manage it, drove over to Menheniot and fetched his sister and the boy: and on the way home the horse bolted and scattered the lot, with the result that William John was flung against a milestone and sister Tryphena across a hedge. The pair succumbed to their injuries: but the boy Nandy (aged fourteen) was picked up with no worse than a stunning, and a bump at the back of his head which hardened so that he was ever afterwards able to crack nuts with it, and even Brazil nuts, by hammering with his skull against a door or any other suitable object. Of course, when they picked him up he hadn't a notion he possessed any such gift.

Well here, as you might say, was a pretty kettle of fish for Aunt Barbree. Here not only was a loving husband killed, and a sister-in-law, but at one stroke two out of the three healthy lives on which the whole lease of Merry-Garden depended. She mourned William John for his own sake, because, as husbands go, she had reason to regret him; and Tryphena Jewell, for a poor relation, had never been pushing. Tryphena's fault rather had been that she gave herself airs. Having no money to speak of, she stood up against Aunt Barbree's riches by flaunting herself as a mother: "though," as Aunt Barbree would complain to her husband, "I can't see what she finds uncommon in the child, unless 'tis the number of his pimples: and I've a mind, the next time, to recommend Wessel's Antiscorbutic Drops. The boy looks unhealthy: and, come to think of it, with his life in the lease, 'tis only due to ourselves to advise the woman." She only said this to ease her feelings: but the truth was (and William John knew it) she yearned for a child of her own, even to the extent sometimes of wanting to adopt one.

Well, this terrible accident not only widowed the poor soul, but brought all her little jealousies, as you might say, home to roost. She couldn't abide Nandy, and Nandy had reached an age when boys aren't at their best. But adopt him she had to; and, what tried her worse, she was forced to look after his health with more than a mother's care. For, outside of a stockingful of guineas, all her capital was sunk in Merry-Garden, and all Merry-Garden hung now on the boy's life.

The worst trial of all was that, somehow or other, Nandy got to know his value and the reason of it, and from that day he gave Aunt Barbree no peace. He wouldn't go to school; study gave him a headache. His mother had taught him to read and write, but under Aunt Barbree's roof he learned no more than he was minded to, and among the things he taught himself was a tolerable imitation of a hacking cough. With this and the help of a hollow tooth he could spit blood whenever he wanted a shilling. He played this game for about six months, until the poor woman—who was losing flesh with lying awake at night and wondering what would happen to her when cast out in the cold world—fixed up her courage to know the worst, and carried him off to a Plymouth doctor. The doctor advised her to take the boy home and give him the strap.

Aunt Barbree applied this treatment for a time, but dropped it in the end. The boy was growing too tall for it. The visit to the doctor, however, worked like a miracle in one way.

"Auntie," said the penitent one day, "I'm feeling a different boy altogether, this last week or two."

"I reckoned you would," said Aunt Barbree.

"My appetite's improving. Have you noticed my appetite?"

"Heaven is my witness!" said Aunt Barbree. The cherry season was beginning. She had consulted with a friend of hers in Saltash, the wife of a confectioner. It seems that apprentices in the confectionery trade are allowed to eat pastry and lollypops without let or

hindrance, until they take a surfeit and are cured for ever after. Aunt Barbree was beginning to wonder why the cure worked so slow in the case of fresh fruit. "Heaven is my witness, I *have!*" said Aunt Barbree.

"There's a complete change coming over my constitution," said Nandy, pensive-like. "I feel it hardening every day: and as for my skull, why— talk about Brazil nuts!—I believe I could crack cherry-stones with it."

"I beg you won't try," pleaded Aunt Barbree, for this trick of Nandy's always gave her the shivers.

"A head like mine was meant for something worthier than civil life. I've been turnin' it over—"

"Turnin' *what* over?"

"Things in general," said Nandy; "and the upshot is, I've a great mind to 'list for a sojer."

"The good Lord forbid!" cried Aunt Barbree.

"The Frenchies might shoot me, to be sure," Nandy allowed. "That's one way of looking at it. But King George would take the risk o' that, and give me a shilling down for it."

"O Nandy, Nandy—here's a shillin' for 'ee, if that's what you want! But be a good boy, and don't talk so irreligious!"

Well, sir, the lad knew he had the whip-hand of the poor woman, and the taller he grew the more the lazy good-for-nothing used it. Enlistment was his trump card, and he went to the length of buying a drill-book and practising the motions in odd corners of the garden, but always so that his aunt should catch him at it. If she was slow in catching him, the young villain would draw attention by calling out words from the manual in a hollow voice, mixed up with desperate ones of his own composing— "*At the word of command the rear rank steps back one pace, the whole facing to the left, the left files then taking a side step to the left and a pace to the rear. Ready, p'sent! Ha, what do I see afore me? Is't the hated foeman?*"—and so on, and so on. Aunt Barbree, with tears in her eyes, would purse out sums varying from sixpence to half a crown, coaxing him to dismiss such murderous thoughts from his mind; and thereupon he'd take another turn and mope, saying that it ill became a lad of his inches, let alone his tremenjous spirit, to idle out his days while others were dying for their country; to oblige his aunt he would stand it as long as he could, but nobody need be surprised if he ended by drowning himself, And this frightened Aunt Barbree almost worse than did his talk of enlisting, and drove her one day, when Nandy had just turned seventeen, to take a walk up the valley to consult Dr. Clatworthy.

II.

Dr. Clatworthy was a man in many respects uncommon. To begin with, he had plenty of money; and next, he was as full of crazes as of learning. One of these crazes was astronomy, and another was mud-baths, and another was open windows and long walks in the open air, and another was skin-diseases and nervous disorders, and another was the Lost Tribes, and another was Woman's Education; with the Second Advent and Vegetable Diet to fill up the spaces. Some of these he had picked up at Oxford, and others in his travels abroad, especially in Moravia: but the sum total was that you'd call him a crank. Coming by chance into Cornwall, he had taken an uncommon fancy to our climate and its 'humidity'—that was the word. There was nothing like it (he said) for the skin—leastways, if taken along with mud-baths. He had bought half a dozen acres of land at the head of the creek, a mile above Merry-Garden, and built a whacking great house upon it, full of bathrooms and adorned upon the outside with statues in baked earth to represent Trigonometry and the other heathen gods. He had given the contract to an up-country builder, and brought the material (which was mainly brick and Bath-stone) from the Lord knows where; but it was delivered up the creek by barges. There were days, in the year before William John's death, when these barges used to sail up past Merry-Garden at high springs in procession without end. But now the house had been standing furnished for three good years, with fruit-gardens planted on the slopes below it, and basins full of gold-fish: and there Dr. Clatworthy lived with half a score of male patients as mad as himself. For, though rich, he didn't spend his money in enjoyment only, but charged his guests six guineas a week, while he taught 'em the secret of perfect health.

Well, you may laugh at the man, but I've heard my mother (who remembers him) say that, with all his faults, he had the complexion of a baby. She would describe him as an unmarried man, of the age of fifty,—he had a prejudice against marrying under fifty,—

dressed in nankeen for all weathers, with no other protection than a whalebone umbrella, and likewise remarkable for a fine Roman nose. 'Twas this Clatworthy, by the way, that a discharged gardener advised to go down to Merry-Garden and make a second fortune by picking cherries, "for," said he, "having such a nose as yours you can hook on to a bough with it and pick with both hands." I don't myself believe that he came to visit Merry-Garden on any such recommendation; but visit it he did, and often, while his own trees were growing; and there his noble deportment and his lordly way with money made an impression on Aunt Barbree, who had already heard talk of his capabilities.

So—as I was saying—one day, being near upon driven to her wits' end, Aunt Barbree marched the boy up to Hi-jeen Villa (as the new great house was called), and begged for Dr. Clatworthy's advice; "for I do believe," she wound up, "the boy is sinking into a very low state of despondency."

"And so should I be despondent," said the doctor, eyeing Nandy, "if I had that number of pimples and didn't know a sure way to cure them."

"Fresh fruit don't seem to do no good," said Aunt Barbree, "though I've heard it confidently recommended."

The doctor made Nandy take off his shirt. "Why," said he, enthusiastic-like, "the boy's a perfect treasure!"

"You think so?" said Aunt Barbree, a bit dubious, not quite catching his drift.

"A case, ma'am, like this wouldn't yield to fresh fruit, not in ten years. It's throwing away your time. Mud is the cure, ma'am—mud-bathing and constant doses of sulphur-water, varied with a plenty of exercise to open the pores of the skin."

"Sulphur-water?" Aunt Barbree had used it now and then upon her fruit-trees, to keep away mildew. She doubted Nandy's taking kindly to it. "He's easier led, sir, than driven," she said.

"My good woman," said the doctor, "you leave him to me. I'll take up this case for nothing but the honour and glory of it. He shall board and lodge here and live like a fighting-cock, and not a penny-piece to pay. As for curing him—if it'll give you any confidence, look at my complexion, ma'am. What d'ye think of it?"

"Handsome, sure 'nough," said Aunt Barbree.

"Satin, ma'am—complete satin!" said the doctor. "And I'm like that all over."

"Well to be sure, if Nandy don't object—" said Aunt Barbree, hurried-like.

Nandy thought that to live for a while in a fine house and be fed like a fighting-cock would be a pleasant change; and so the bargain was struck.

Poor lad, he repented it before the first week was out. He couldn't abide the mud-baths, which he took in the garden, planted up to the chin in a ring with a dozen old gentlemen, stuck out there like cabbages, and with Clatworthy planted in the middle and haranguing by the hour, sometimes on politics and Napoleon Bonaparte, sometimes on education, but oftenest on his system and the good they ought to be deriving from it. Moreover, though they fed him well enough, according to promise, the sulphur-water acted on his stomach in a way that prevented any lasting satisfaction with his vittles. In short, before the week was out he wanted to run away home; and only one thing hindered him—that he'd fallen in love.

This was the way it happened. Dr. Clatworthy, having notions of his own upon matrimony, and money to carry them out, had picked out a pretty child and adopted her, and set her to school with a Miss St. Maur of Saltash, to be trained up in his principles, till of an age to make him 'a perfect helpmeet,' as he called it.

The poor child—she was called Jessica Venning to begin with, but the doctor had rechristened her Sophia—was grown by this time into a young lady of seventeen, pretty and graceful. She could play upon the harp and paint in water-colours, and her needlework was a picture, but not half so pretty a picture as her face. She came from Devonshire, from the edge of the moors behind Newton Abbot, where the folks have complexions all cream-and-roses. She'd a figure like a wand for grace, and an eye half-melting, half-roguish. People might call Clatworthy a crank, or whatever word answered to it in those days: but he had made no mistake in choosing the material to make him a bride—or only this, that the poor girl couldn't bear the look or the thought of him. Well, the time was drawing on when Clatworthy, according to his plans, was to marry her, and to prepare her for it he had taken to writing her a letter every day, full of duty and mental improvement. Part of Nandy's business was to walk over with these letters to Saltash. The doctor explained to him that it would open the pores of his skin, and he must wait for an answer. And so it came about that Nandy saw Miss Sophia, and fell over head and ears in love with her.

But towards the end of the second week he felt that he could stand life at Hi-jeen Villa no

longer—no, not even for the sake of seeing Miss Sophia daily.

"It's no use, miss," he told her very dolefully, as he delivered Friday's letter; "I've a-got to run for it, and I'm going to run for it to-morrow." He heaved a great sigh.

"But how foolish of you, Nandy!" said Miss Sophia, glancing up from the letter. "When you know it's doing you so much good!"

"Good?" said Nandy, savage-like. "How would *you* like it? There now— I'm sorry, Miss Sophia. I forgot—and now I've made you cry!"

"I—I sh—shan't like it at all," quavered Miss Sophia, blinking away her tears. "And—and it's not at all the same thing."

"No," agreed Nandy; "no, o' course not: you ha'n't got no pimples. Oh, Miss Sophia," he went on, speaking very earnest, "would you really like me better if I weren't so speckity?"

"Ever so much better, Nandy. You can't think what an improvement it would be."

"'Tis only skin-deep," said Nandy. "At the bottom of my heart, miss, I'd die for you.... But I can't stand it no longer. To-morrow I've made up my mind to run home to Merry-Garden: and there, if it gives you any pleasure, I can go on taking mud-baths on my own account."

"Merry-Garden?" said Miss Sophia. "Why, that's where Dr. Clatworthy wants us to take tea with him to-morrow! He writes that he is inviting Miss St Maur to bring all the girls in the top class, and he will meet us there. ... See, here's the letter enclosed."

"That settles it," said Nandy.

He walked home that afternoon with two letters—a hypocritical little note from Sophia, a high polite one from Miss St. Maur. Miss St. Maur accepted, on behalf of her senior young ladies, Dr. Clatworthy's truly delightful invitation to take tea with him on the morrow. She herself— she regretted to say—would be detained until late in the afternoon by some troublesome tradesmen who were fixing new window-sashes in the schoolroom. She could not trust them to do the work correctly except under her supervision, and to defer it would entail a week's delay, the schoolroom being vacant only on Saturday afternoons. The young ladies should arrive, however, punctually at 3.30 p.m., in charge of Miss de la Porcheraie, her excellent French instructress: she herself would follow at 5 o'clock or thereabouts, and meanwhile she would leave her charges, in perfect confidence, to Dr. Clatworthy's polished hospitality.... Those were the words. My mother—who was fond of telling the story—had 'em by heart.

>br>

III.

Nandy kept his word.

Breakfast next morning was no sooner over than he made a bolt across the pleasure-grounds, crept through the hedge at the bottom, and went singing down the woods towards Merry-Garden, with his heart half-lovesick and half-gleeful, and with two thick sandwiches of bread-and-butter in his pocket to provide against accidents. But he didn't feel altogether easy at the thought of facing Aunt Barbree: and by and by, drawing near to the house and catching sight of his aunt's sun-bonnet up among the raspberry-canes, he decided (as they say) to play for safety. So, creeping down to the front door, he slipped under it a letter which he had spent a solid hour last night in composing; and made his way to the foreshore, to loaf and smoke a pipe of stolen tobacco and, generally speaking, make the most of his holiday. The note said—

> "Dear Aunt,—Do not weep for me. The sulphur-water made me sick and I could stand it no longer. So am gone for a Soger. Letters and remittances will doubtless find me if addressed to the Citadel, Plymouth. A loving heart is what I hunger for—Your affect, nephew,
>
> Ferdinando Jewell."
>
> "P.S.—On 2nd thoughts I may be able to come back this evening to say farewell for ever."
> "P.S.—Don't sit up."

Now a boy may be a lazy good-for-nothing, and yet (if you'll understand me) be missed from a garden where there are ladders to fix and mazzard cherries to pick; and likewise, though liable to be grumbled at, a boy has his uses in the gathering of cockles. Though she knew him to be an anointed young humbug, there's no denying that Aunt Barbree had

missed Nandy and his help. She was getting past fifty, and somehow the last ten days had reminded her of it.... The long and short of it was that, after a couple of hours fruit-picking—and it took her no less to get together the supply she'd reckoned on for her afternoon customers—she entered the house with a feeling of stiffness in her back and a feeling that answered to it elsewhere, that maybe Nandy was a better boy than she'd given him credit for. Upon top of this feeling she pushed open the door and spied his letter lying on the mat.

The reading of it turned her hot and cold. She marched straight to the dairy, where Susannah was busy with the cream-pans, and says she, loosening her bonnet-strings as she dropped upon a bench, "He was but an orphan, after all, Susannah: and now we've driven 'en to desperation!"

"Who's been driven to desperation?" asked Susannah.

"Why, Nandy," answered Aunt Barbree, tears brimming her eyes. "Who elst?"

"Piggywig's tail!" said Susannah. "What new yarn has the cheeld been tellin'?"

"He's my own nephew, and a Furnace upon his mother's side," said Aunt Barbree; "and I'll trouble you to speak more respectful of your employer's kin. And he hasn't been tellin' it; he've *written* it, here in pen and ink. He've cut and run to take the King's shilling and be a sojer: and if I can't overtake him before he gets to Plymouth Citadel the deed will he done, and the Frenchies will knock him upon the head and I shall be without a roof to cover me. Get me my shawl and bonnet."

"You baint goin' to tell me," said Susannah, "that you act'lly mean to take and trapse to Plymouth in all this heat?"

"I do," said Barbree. "Get me my shawl and bonnet."

"What, on a Saturday afternoon! And me left single-handed to tend the customers!"

"Drat the customers!" said Aunt Barbree. "And drat everything, includin' the boy, if you like! But fetch to Plymouth I must and will. So, for the third time of askin', get me my shawl and bonnet."

It cost a mort of coaxing even to persuade her to a bite of dinner before setting forth. By half-past noon she was dressed and ready, and took the road toward Saltash Ferry. Nandy didn't see her start. He was lying stretched, just then, under the cliff by the foreshore, getting rid of the effects of his pipe of tobacco.

It left him so exhausted that, when the worst was over, he rolled on his stomach on the warm stones of the foreshore and fell into a doze; by consequence of which he knew nothing more till the tide crept up and wetted his ankles; and with that he heard voices—uproarious voices on the water—and sat up to see a boatload of people pass by him and draw to the landing-stage under Merry-Garden.

Nandy rubbed his eyes, studied the visitors—that is, as well as he could at fifty yards' distance—and chuckled. He knew that his aunt was a respectable woman, and particular about the folks she admitted to her gardens. But it was too late to interfere—even if he'd wanted to interfere, which he didn't. So he watched the visitors draw to land and disembark; and sat and waited, still chuckling.

IV.

Susannah, having fitted forth Aunt Barbree and watched her from the gate as she took the road to Saltash, had returned to the house in an unpleasant temper. She was a good servant and would stand any amount of ordering about, but she hated responsibility. To be left alone on a Saturday afternoon in the height of the mazzard season to cope with Heaven-knew-how-many-customers—to lay the tables in the arbours, boil the water, take orders and, worst of all, give change (Susannah had never learnt arithmetic)—was an outlook that fairly daunted her spirit. Her temper, too, for a week past had not been at its best. She, like her mistress, had missed Nandy. In spite of his faults he was a help: and, as for faults, who in this wicked world is without 'em? It's by means of their faults that you grow accustomed to folks.

The early afternoon was hot and thundery, and the hum of the bees (Aunt Barbree was famous for her honey) came lazy-like through the open window. Susannah prayed to the Lord that this quiet might last—until four o'clock, at any rate. Short of an earthquake in Plymouth (which, being pious, she didn't dare to pray for) nothing would ward off visitors beyond that hour, but, with luck, Aunt Barbree might be expected back soon after five, when

the giving of change would begin. Susannah looked at the clock. The time was close upon half-past two. She might, with any luck, count on another hour.

But it wasn't to be.

She had scarcely turned from studying the clock to open the sliding door of the china-cupboard and set out her stock of plates and cups and saucers, before her ear caught the sound of voices—of loud voices too—on the steps above the landing-quay: and almost before she could catch her breath there came a knock on the door fit to wake the dead. Susannah whipped up her best apron off the chair where she had laid it ready to hand, and hurried out, pinning it about her.

The first sight she saw when she opened the door was a sailorman standing there under the verandah, and smiling at her with a shiny, good-natured face. He was rigged out in best shore-going clothes—tarpaulin hat, blue coat and waistcoat, and duck trousers, with a broad waist-belt of leather. Behind him stood another sailorman, older and more gloomy looking; and behind the pair of them Susannah's eye ranged over half a dozen seedy tide-waiters and longshoremen, all very bashful-looking, and crowded among a bevy of damsels of the sort that you might best describe as painted hussies.

"Good afternoon, ma'am," said the sailorman, with a pacifying sort of smile.

"Good afternoon," said Susannah, catching her breath. "But, all the same, this isn't Babylon."

"You serve teas here, ma'am?"

"No, we don't," answers Susannah, very sturdy.

"Then the board hav' made a mistake," said the sailor, scratching the back of his head and pushing his tarpaulin hat forward and sideways over his eyebrows. "It *said* that you was patronised by the naval and military, and that teas was provided."

"But we're a respectable house," said Susannah.

The sailorman gazed at her, long and earnest, and turned to his mate. "Good Lord, Bill!" said he, "what a dreadful mistake!"

"Ho!" said one of the ladies, tossing her chin. "Ho, I see what it is! The likes of us ain't good enough for the likes of her!"

"Not by a long chalk, ma'am," agreed Susannah, her temper rising.

"It's this way, ma'am," put in the sailorman very peaceable-like. "My name's Ben Jope, of the *Vesuvius* bomb, and this here's my mate Bill Adams. We was paid off this morning at half-past nine, and picked up a few hasty friends ashore for a Feet-Sham-Peter. But o' course if this here is a respectable house there's no more to be said—except that maybe you'll be good enough to recommend us to one that isn't."

The poor fellow meant it well, but somehow or other his words so annoyed Susannah that she bounced in and slammed the door in his face. He stood for a while staring at it, and then turned and led the way down the steps again to the quay, walking like a man in a dream, and not seeming to hear the ladies—though one or two were telling him that he hadn't the pluck of a louse: and down at the quay the company came upon Master Nandy, dandering towards them with his hands in his pockets.

"Hullo!" said Nandy.

"Hullo to *you!*" said Mr. Jope.

"Turned you out?" asked Nandy.

Mr. Jope glanced back at the roof of Merry-Garden, which from the quay could be seen just overtopping the laylocks. "She's a sperrited woman," he said; and after that there was a pause until Nandy asked him who he thought he was staring at. "I dunno," said Mr. Jope. "You puts me in mind of a boy I knew, one time. I stood godfather to him, and he grew up to be afflicted in much the same manner."

"I've been unwell," said Nandy, "and I haven't got over the effects of it."

"No, by George, you haven't," agreed Mr. Jope. "I've heard tar-water recommended."

"Is it worse tasted than sulphur-water?" asked Nandy, and with that a wicked thought came into his mind, for he still nursed a spite against all that he had suffered under Dr. Clatworthy's care. "If you can't get taken in at Merry-Garden," said he, "why don't you try Hi-jeen Villa, up the creek?"

"What's that?"

"It's—it's another establishment," said Nandy.

"Respectable? You'll excuse my askin'—"

"Tisn' for me to judge," said Nandy; "but they sit about the garden in their nightshirts, with a footman carryin' round the drinks."

V.

Well, sir, half an hour later Dr. Clatworthy and his patients were enjoying their mud-baths in the garden, up at Hi-jeen Villa, and the doctor had just begun to think about getting his water-douche and dressing himself to keep his appointment with Miss Sophia and the rest of the young ladies, when the back-door opened and what should he see entering the garden but Mr. Jope, with all his bedizened company!

"Hi, you there!" shouted the doctor from his bath. "Get out of this garden at once! Who are you? and what do you mean by walking into private premises?"

For a moment Mr. Jope stared about him, wondering where in the world the voice came from. But when he traced it to the garden-beds, and there, in the midst of the flowers, spied a dozen human heads all a-blowing and a-growing with the stocks and carnations, his face turned white and red, and his eyes grew round, and he turned and stared at Bill Adams, and Bill Adams stared at Mr. Jope.

"Bill," said Mr. Jope, "is it—is it an earthquake?"

"Tis a Visitation o' some kind," said Bill. "I've heard o' such things in Ireland."

"Oh, Bill! an' to think that in another minute, if we hadn' arrived—" Mr. Jope caught hold of his mate's arm and hurried him forward to the rescue.

"Go away! Get out of this, I tell you!" yelled Clatworthy.

"Not me, sir! Not a British sailor!" hurrahed back Mr. Jope. "Bill! Bill! Cast your eyes around and see if you can find a bit of rope anywheres in this blessed garden—and you, behind there, stop the women's screeching!" —for 'tis a fact that by this time two or three were falling about in the hysterics—"What! Not a loose end o' rope anywheres? Lord, how these landsmen do live unprovided! But never you mind, sir!—reach out a hand to me an' don't struggle—that is, if you're touching bottom. Strugglin' only makes it worse—"

"You silly fool!" shouted Clatworthy. "We're in no danger, I tell you! Begone, and take the women away with you. These grounds are private, once more!"

"Hey?" Mr. Jope by this time had one foot planted, very gingerly, on a flower-bed, and was reaching forth a hand to Clatworthy; and Clatworthy, squatting up to his chin in the warm mud, was lifting two naked arms to beat him off. "Private, hey?" says Mr. Jope, looking around and seeing the rest of the patients bobbing up and down in their baths between the rage of it and shame to show themselves too far. "Private? Then it oughtn't to be—that's all I say. But what in thunder are ye doing it for?"

"Oh, get you gone, man!" groaned Clatworthy. "I've an appointment to keep!"

"Not in that state, sure-ly?"

"No, sir! But how am I to get out of this and dress, till you lead off the women? And your cursed intrusion has made me fill my hair with mud, and to cleanse and dress it again will cost me half an hour at least. Man, man, for pity's sake get out of this and take your women with you! Sir, when I tell you that in less than twenty minutes I am due to be at Merry-Garden—if you know where that is—"

"*To* be sure," put in Mr. Jope.

"—To meet a company of ladies—"

"Avast there! Why, 'tis less than a half-hour ago they turned *me* out o' that very place. *You*—and in *that* state! Oh, be ashamed o' yourself!"

But just then a patient behind Clatworthy set up a yell so full of terror that even the doctor slewed round his head and splashed more mud over his hair, all combed as it was in full pigeon-wing style.

"Bill!" said Mr. Jope, sharp-like. "Bill Adams! What are you doin' with that there water-pot?"

"Helpin'," said Bill. "Helpin' 'em to grow!"

VI.

'Tis time, though, that we went back to Merry-Garden.

The rising tide—and I ought to have told you that the tides that day were close upon the top of the springs, with high-water at five o'clock or thereabouts—the rising tide had barely carried Mr. Jope and his party from Nandy's sight, round the bend, before another boatload of pleasure-seekers hove in sight at the mouth of the creek. They were twelve in all, and the boat a twenty-foot galley belonging to one of the war-ships in the Hamoaze. She had been borrowed for the afternoon by the ship's second lieutenant, a Mr. Hardcastle, and with him he had brought the third lieutenant, besides a score of young officers belonging to the garrison—a captain and two cornets of the 4th Dragoons, a couple of gunners—officers, that is, of the Artillery—an elderly major and an ensign of the Marines, and the rest belonging to the Thirty-second Regiment of Foot (one of 'em, if I recollect, the Doctor). The last of the party was a slip of an officer of the French Navy—Raynold by name— that had been taken prisoner by Mr. Hardcastle's ship, and bore no malice for it: a cheerful, good-natured lad, and (now that he hadn't an excuse for fighting 'em) as merry with these young Britons as they were glad to have him of their party.

Nandy, of course, knew no more about them than what his eyes told him, that they were a party of officers from Plymouth come to enjoy themselves at Merry-Garden. But the sight of them as they brought their boat to the quay and landed—the first customers of the afternoon—put him in mind that the time was drawing near for Miss Sophia to arrive with her class-mates, and that Dr. Clatworthy would soon be turning up to squire them around the orchard and entertain them at tea. He wickedly hoped that the doctor hadn't left home before Mr. Jope reached Hi-jeen Villa. But the thought of Mr. Jope reminded him of what Mr. Jope had said concerning his pimples; and this again reminded him of what his beloved Miss Sophia had said on the same subject. He had promised her to continue taking mud-baths on his own account, even after he had cut his lucky (as he put it) from Hi-jeen Villa.... To be sure, one bath wouldn't produce any immediate result. *That* wasn't to be expected. But it would be a guarantee of good faith, as they say in the newspapers: and though he hadn't time to dig a pit after the fashion of the baths in the doctor's garden, still there was plenty of mud along the lower foreshore to give him a nice soft roll; and a plenty of water for a swim, to wash himself clean: and lastly (as he reckoned, having no watch) a plenty of time to do this and be dressed again before the dear creature arrived. So Nandy, with a stomach full of virtue, turned his back on the quay and started to walk down the creek along the foreshore, to a corner where he might reckon on being free from observation.

Meantime the young officers, that had landed and strolled up to the cottage, were being received by Susannah, and in a twitter, poor soul! "Her mistress was out—called away upon sudden business. Still, if they would take the ups with the downs, she would do her best to have tea ready in half an hour's time: and meanwhile they might roam the orchards and eat as many cherries as they had a mind to, and all for sixpence a head. Thirteen sixpences came—yes, surely—to six-and-sixpence. She would rather they paid when Aunt Barbree returned. Or, if they preferred it, there was a skittle-alley at the end of the garden, with a small bowling-green..."

They preferred the bowling-green. Susannah conducted them to it, unlocked the box of bowls, and was returning to the house in a fluster, when, in the verandah before the front door, she came plump upon a bevy of young ladies, all as pretty as you please in muslin frocks and great summer hats to shield their complexions: whereof one, a little older than the rest (but pretty, notwithstanding), stepped forward and inquired, in a foreign-speaking voice, for Dr. Clatworthy.

"But he is in retard then!" this lady cried, when Susannah answered that, although she knew Dr. Clatworthy well, not a fur or feather of him had she seen that day (which was her way of putting it). "Ah, but how vexing! And Miss St. Maur was positive he would be beforehand!"

"Lor' bless you, my pretty!" said Susannah, "If the doctor promised to be here, you may be sure he will be here."

She went on to explain, as she had explained to the officers, that she was alone on the premises—her mistress had been called away upon sudden business—but if they would take the ups with the downs.... Then, her curiosity overcoming her—for, of course, she had heard gossip of the doctor's intentions—"And which of you," she asked, "is he going to marry, making so bold?"

"If Dr. Clatworthy is so ungallant—" began Miss Sophia, jabbing with the point of her parasol at a crevice in the flagstones of the verandah.

"Fie, dear!" cried Ma'amselle Julie, interrupting.

"Well, at any rate, the mazzards are ripe," said Miss Sophia, "and I see no fun in waiting."

"So *that's* the maid," said Susannah to herself, and pitied her—having herself no great admiration for Dr. Clatworthy, in spite of his riches: but she assured them that the doctor—the most punctual of men—would certainly arrive within a few minutes. And the mazzards were crying out to be eaten. If the young ladies would make free of the orchards while she fit and boiled the kettle…

"The fun of it is," said Miss Sophia to Ma'amselle Julie ten minutes later, as they were staining their pretty lips with the juice of the black mazzards, "that if Dr. Clatworthy doesn't appear—"

"But he will, dear."

"The fun of it is that we haven't, I believe, eighteenpence between us all."

"Miss St. Maur was positive that he would be punctual," said Ma'amselle Julie.

"But he isn't, you see: and—oh, my dear, is it so wicked?—you can't think how I wish he would never come—never, never, never!"

"Sophia!"

"Even," went on Miss Sophia, nodding her head, "if I've eaten all these cherries under false pretences, and have to go to prison for it!"

Well, somehow, in all this the young ladies had been drawing nearer and nearer to the bowling-green, where the young officers were skylarking and trundling the bowls at the fat major at three shots a penny, and the pool going to the player who caught him on the ankles. When they were tired of this they came strolling forth in a body, the most of them with arms linked, just as Susannah appeared at the end of the path carrying a tray piled with tea-things.

"Hallo! Petticoats, begad!" said the youngest ensign among them; and Ma'amselle Julie, linking an arm in Miss Sophia's, was turning away with a proper show of ignorance that any such thing as a party of young men existed in the world, when a voice cried out—

"Julie!"

"Eh?" the lady turned, all white in the face. "Eh? What—Edoo-ard? My cousin Edoo-ard?"

"Dear Julie!" It was the young French officer, and he ran and caught her by both hands and kissed them. "To think of meeting you, here in England! But let me introduce my friends—my friends the enemy." And here he rattled off their names in a hurry.

"Really, one would suppose that Dr. Clatworthy was lost!" said Miss Sophia with a cold-seeming bow and a glance along the path.

"You have ordered tea here?" asked the young naval lieutenant, Mr. Hardcastle.

"There *was* to have been tea."

"I do hope, miss," said he, "that we are not ousting you from your table?"

"To tell the truth," said Miss Sophia, "I know nothing about the arrangements. A gentleman was to have been here to receive us—indeed we have come at his invitation; but he is in no hurry, it seems."

"Indeed, miss," put in Susannah, "and I'm sure I don't know what to do! The gentlemen, here, have engaged the big summer-house, which holds forty at a pinch, and there's no other place that'll seat more than half a dozen. Of course," said she, "the two parties could sit at the long table, one at each end—"

But here young Mr. Hardcastle, after a glance at Miss Julie and her young Frenchman—that were already deep in talk together—cut Susannah short with a sly wink. He was a lad of great presence of mind, and rose in later life to be an Admiral.

"Ladies," said he, "I feel sure that if we leave the arrangements entirely to this good woman, your worthy squire—whenever he chooses to put in an appearance—will find nothing to complain of."

Well, well… I can't tell you just how it happened: but happen it did, and I daresay you've

seen enough of the ways of young folk to understand it. While Susannah bustled back to the house to fetch the relays, the two parties fell to talking of the weather and the pretty flowers, and from that to strolling little by little along the pathway; in a body at first; but afterwards, as one young lady stopped to smell at a carnation, and another to admire the splashes of colour on Aunt Barbree's York and Lancaster roses, the company got separated into twos and fours, and the fours broke up into twos, and the distance between pair and pair kept getting wider and wider. Ma'amselle Julie ought to have hindered it, overcome though she was with joy at meeting her kinsman. But she wasn't to blame for what followed, and for my part I've a kind of notion that Mr. Hardcastle must have found an opportunity and slipped half a crown into Susannah's hand.... At any rate when Susannah rang a bell along the lower path to announce that tea was ready, they came strolling back (and from the variousest corners of the garden) to find that the silly woman had gone and laid the tables, not in the big summer-house at all, but all along in a line of little arbours.

Then, Of course, began the prettiest confusion, Ma'amselle Julie protesting that she couldn't think of allowing such a thing, and Mr. Hardcastle pointing out what a shame it would be to overwork poor Susannah by making her lay the tables over again; and the young ladies in a flutter between laughing and making believe to be angry, and one or two couples agreeing that the dispute was all about nothing, and that they might as well find a quiet arbour and wait till it was over.

Yes, yes... you understand?... And in the midst of it all, and just as Mr. Hardcastle had carried his point and Ma'amselle Julie gave way, declaring that never in this world would she be able to look Miss St. Maur in the face again, who should come hurrying past the verandah but Dr. Clatworthy himself!

In the babel of talking and laughing no one had heard his footstep; and he came to a halt by a laylock-bush at the end of the verandah and stood staring: and while he stared his face went red, and then white, and he reeled back behind the bush and put both hands to his head.

What had he seen? His bride—his chosen Sophia—disappearing into an arbour with a young man! And her youthful companions—pupils of an establishment he had chosen with such care—making merry with a group of uniformed officers—of soldiers—well known to be the most profligate of men!

Oh, monstrous!

But what was to be done? Could he stalk into the midst of the party and raise a scene? The young men might laugh at him.... Even supposing he put them to rout, what next was he to do? He would find himself with those abandoned girls left on his hands. A pleasant tea-party, that! And Miss St. Maur might not be arriving for another hour. Could he spend all that time in lecturing them? Could he even trust himself to speak to Sophia? Dr. Clatworthy, still with his hands to his head, staggered down the steps and forth from the garden.

He had done with Sophia for ever! His first demand of a woman worthy to be his wife was that she should never have looked upon another man to make eyes at him, and he had distinctly seen (Oh, monstrous, monstrous, to be sure!).... He would go straight home and write Miss St. Maur a letter the like of which that lady had never received in her life.

With these terrible thoughts working in his head, the poor man had crossed a couple of fields on his way home when he looked up and saw Miss St. Maur herself coming towards him along the footpath over the knap of the hill.

"Dr. Clatworthy!" cried Miss St. Maur.

"Ma'am," said Dr. Clatworthy.

"Why—why, wherever have you left dear Sophia and the rest of my charges?"

"At Merry-Garden, ma'am—and in various summer-houses, ma'am—and making free, ma'am, with a vicious soldiery!"

"But it is impossible!" cried Miss St. Maur when he had told his tale of horror. "I refuse to believe it. Indeed, sir, I can only think you have taken leave of your senses!"

"Come and see for yourself, ma'am," said the doctor, cold as ice to look at, but with an inside like a furnace.

He was forced almost to a run to keep pace with Miss St. Maur: but at the steps leading up to the garden he made her promise him to go quiet, and the pair tiptoed up and through the verandah and peered around the laylock-bush.

"There!" cried Miss St. Maur, turning to him and pointing up the path with her parasol.

To and fro along the path a party of young ladies was strolling disconsolate. They walked in pairs, to be sure: and the hum of their voices reached to the laylock-bush as they bent and

discussed the flowers in Aunt Barbree's border. Not a uniform, not a man, was in sight.

"There!" said Miss St. Maur. "There, sir! What did I tell you?"

VII.

The cause of it all was Nandy. Nandy had found a nice out-of-the-way corner of the foreshore, with a patch of mud above the water's edge, and, after a good roll in it (it was a trifle smellier than the baths at Hi-jeen Villa, but nothing amiss), had waded out into the tide for a thorough wash. He was standing in water up to his armpits and rinsing the mud out of his hair, when, happening to glance shorewards, he caught a glimpse of scarlet, and rubbed his eyes to see a red-coated soldier standing on the beach and overhauling his clothes, which he had left there in a heap.

"Hi!" sang out Nandy. "You leave those clothes alone: they're mine!"

The soldier put up a hand and seemed to be beckoning, cautious-like.

Nandy waded nearer. "Looky-here, lobster—none of your tricks!" he said. "They-there clothes belong to me."

"I ain't goin' to be a lobster, as you put it, much longer," said the soldier. "I'm a-goin' to cast my shell." And with that he begins to unbutton his tunic. "If you try to interfere, young man, I'll wring your neck; and if you cry out, I carry a pistol upon me—" and sure enough he pulled a pistol from his pocket and laid it on the stones between his feet. "I'm a desperate man," he said.

"Hullo!" said Nandy, beginning to understand. "Desertin', eh?"

The soldier nodded as he flung the tunic down on the beach—and Nandy took note of the figures 32 in brass on the collar. "It's all along of a woman," said he.

"Ah!" said Nandy, sympathetic. "There's lots of us in the world taken that way."

"Looky-here," said the soldier, "if you try any sauce with me, you'll be sorry for it; and, what's more, you won't get this pretty suit o' scarlet clothes I was minded to leave you for a present."

"Thank you," said Nandy.

"They won't fit so badly if you turn up the bottoms o' the pantaloons: and you can't look worse than you do in a state o' nature."

"All right," said Nandy; "only make haste about it; for 'tis cold standin' here in the water."

To tell the truth a rare notion had crept into his head. This scarlet uniform—for scarlet it was, with white and yellow facings—had come as a godsend. He would walk home in it, and if it didn't frighten twenty shillings out of Aunt Barbree he must have lost the knack of lying.

"You can't be in more of a hurry than I am," answered the soldier, stripping to the very buff—for everything he wore, down to his shirt, carried the regimental mark. The only part of Nandy's wardrobe he spared were the boots, which wouldn't fit him at all.

"So long!" said the soldier, having lit his pipe: and with that he gave a shake to settle himself down in Nandy's clothes, picked up his pistol and scrambled up through the bushes. In thirty seconds he was over the cliff and out of sight, and Nandy left to stare at his new uniform.

He picked up the articles gingerly and slipped them on, one by one. There was a coarse flannel shirt with a leather stock, a pair of woollen socks, black pantaloons with a line of red piping, spatterdashes, a tunic such as I've described—with pipe-clayed belt and crossbelt—and last of all a great japanned shako mounted with a brass plate and chin-strap and a scarlet-and-white cockade like a shaving-brush. When his toilet was finished, Nandy stepped down to the edge of the tide to take a look at his own reflection. It seemed to him that he cut a fine figure; but somehow he couldn't fetch up stomach to wear that rory-tory shako, but took his way towards Merry-Garden carrying it a-dangle by the chin-strap. However, by the time he reached the gate he had begun to feel more accustomed to his grandeur, and likewise that in for a penny was in for a pound: so, clapping the blessed thing tight on his head and pulling down the strap, he marched up the steps with a bold face.

The verandah was empty, and he strode along it and past the laylock-bush where—

scarce ten minutes before—Dr. Clatworthy had received such a desperate shock. A little way beyond it was a path leading round to the back door, and Nandy was making for this when his ears caught the sound of laughing and the jingling of teacups from the line of arbours, and he spied Susannah coming towards the house with a teapot in one hand and an empty cream-dish in the other. For the moment she didn't recognise him.

"Attention! Stand at ease!" said Nandy, drawing himself up to the salute.

"The Lord deliver us!" screamed Susannah, dropping teapot and cream-dish together: and at the sound of it a dozen gentlemen in regimentals came rushing out from their arbours. Before Nandy knew whether he stood on his heels or his head one of these gentlemen had gripped him by the collar, and was requiring him to say instanter what the devil he meant by it.

"Why, damme," shouted someone, "if 'tisn't the uniform of the Thirty-second! Here! Shilston! Appleshaw!"

"What's wrong?"

"The fellow belongs to yours."

"The deuce he does! Slew him round and show his face."

"Oh, Nandy, Nandy!"—this was Miss Sophia's voice—"Have you really been and gone and enlisted!"

"No, miss, I ha'n't,"—by this time Nandy was blubbering for very fright. He tore himself loose and fell at Miss Sophia's feet. "But I was takin' a bath, miss—for my skin's sake, as advised by you—and a sojer came and took my clothes by main force,"—here Nandy sobbed aloud—"I—I think, miss, he must ha' meant to desert!"

"Hey!" One of the officers took him again by the collar. "What's that you're saying? A deserter... left you these clothes and bolted?... Oh, stop your whining and answer! When? Where?"

Nandy checked his tears—but not his sobs—and pointed. "Down by the foreshore, sir... not a quarter of an hour since... he took the way up the Lynher, towards St. Germans..."

"Here, Appleshaw, this is serious! Trehane, Drury—you'll help us? A man of ours, deserted.... You'll excuse us, ladies—we'll bring the fellow back to you if we catch him. Show us the way, youngster—down by the creek, did you say? Tallyho, boys! One and all! Yoicks forra'd! Go-one away!"—and, dragging Nandy with them, the pack pelted out of the garden.

VIII.

Now you understand how it was that Dr. Clatworthy and Miss St. Maur, entering the garden ten minutes later, saw but a bevy of disconsolate maidens strolling the paths, and no uniform nor sign of one.

"There!" said Miss St. Maur, pointing with her parasol. "There, sir! What did I tell you?"

Dr. Clatworthy stared about him and mopped the crown of his head. "But when I assure you, madam—"

"Oh, cruel, cruel!" Miss St. Maur burst into tears.

"Madam!" Dr. Clatworthy looked about him again. The young ladies had turned and were withdrawing slowly to the far end of the walk. By this time, you must know, the light had fallen dim, but with the moon rising and the sun not gone altogether. "Madam! Dear madam!" said Dr. Clatworthy, and was pressing her, polite as a lamb, towards the nearest arbour to seat her there and persuade her. But before he could pilot her past the laylock-bush, forth from that very arbour stepped a couple, and from the next arbour another couple, and both couples took the garden path, and in each couple the heads were closer together than necessary for ordinary talk, and the eyes of them seemingly too well occupied to notice the doctor and Miss St. Maur by the laylock-bush.

You see, Mr. Hardcastle, who belonged to the Navy, hadn't felt the need to trouble himself about a deserter from the sister service; and Mounseer Raynold had found a cousin, and naturally felt no concern in chasing a man to strengthen the British army.

"My dear madam!" said Dr. Clatworthy, and led Miss St. Maur towards the arbour. For certain he had recognised Miss Sophia; but maybe he let her go then and there from his

thoughts. And Miss St. Maur by his side was weeping bitterly.

Dr. Clatworthy wasn't used to a woman in tears. He took Miss St. Maur's hand, and by and by, finding her sobs didn't stop, he pressed it, and…

Well, that's all the story. I've heard my mother tell it a score of times, and always when she came to this point, she'd laugh and tell me to marry for choice before I came to fifty, or else trust to luck and buy a handkerchief.

THE BEND OF THE ROAD.

I.

Just outside the small country station of M— in Cornwall, a viaduct carries the Great Western Railway line across a coombe, or narrow valley, through which a tributary trout-stream runs southward to meet the tides of the L— River. From the carriage-window as you pass you look down the coombe for half a mile perhaps, and also down a road which, leading out from M— Station a few yards below the viaduct, descends the left-hand slope at a sharp incline to the stream; but whether to cross it or run close beside it down the valley bottom you cannot tell, since, before they meet, an eastward curve of the coombe shuts off the view.

Both slopes are pleasantly wooded, and tall beeches, interset here and there with pines —a pretty contrast in the spring—spread their boughs over the road; which is cut cornice-wise, with a low parapet hedge to protect it along the outer side, where the ground falls steeply to the water-meadows, that wind like a narrow green riband edged by the stream with twinkling silver.

For the rest, there appears nothing remarkable in the valley: and certainly Mr. Molesworth, who crossed and recrossed it regularly on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, on his way to and from his banking business in Plymouth, would have been puzzled to explain why, three times out of four, as his train rattled over the viaduct, he laid down his newspaper, took the cigar from his mouth, and gazed down from the window of his first-class smoking carriage upon the green water-meadows and the curving road. The Great Western line for thirty miles or so on the far side of Plymouth runs through scenery singularly beautiful, and its many viaducts carry it over at least a dozen coombes more strikingly picturesque than this particular one which alone engaged his curiosity. The secret, perhaps, lay with the road. Mr. Molesworth, who had never set foot on it, sometimes wondered whither it led and into what country it disappeared around the base of the slope to which at times his eyes travelled always wistfully. He had passed his forty-fifth year, and forgotten that he was an imaginative man. Nevertheless, and quite unconsciously, he let his imagination play for a few moments every morning—in the evening, jaded with business, he forgot as often as not to look—along this country road. Somehow it had come to wear a friendly smile, inviting him: and he on his part regarded it with quite a friendly interest. Once or twice, half-amused by the fancy, he had promised himself to take a holiday and explore it.

Years had gone by, and the promise remained unredeemed, nor appeared likely to be redeemed; yet at the back of his mind he was always aware of it. Daily, as the train slowed down and stopped at M— Station, he spared a look for the folks on the platform. They had come by the road; and others, alighting, were about to take the road.

They were few enough, as a rule: apple-cheeked farmers and country-wives with their baskets, bound for Plymouth market; on summer mornings, as likely as not, an angler or two, thick-booted, carrying rods and creels, their hats wreathed with March-browns or palmers on silvery lines of gut; in the autumn, now and then, a sportsman with his gun; on Monday mornings half a dozen Navy lads returning from furlough, with stains of native earth on their shoes and the edges of their wide trousers.… The faces of all these people wore an innocent friendliness: to Mr. Molesworth, a childless man, they seemed a childlike race, and mysterious as children, carrying with them like an aura the preoccupations of the valley from which they emerged. He decided that the country below the road must be worth exploring; that spring or early summer must be the proper season, and angling his pretext. He had been an accomplished fly-fisher in his youth, and wondered how much of the art

would return to his hand when, after many years, it balanced the rod again.

Together with his fly-fishing, Mr. Molesworth had forgotten most of the propensities of his youth. He had been born an only son of rich parents, who shrank from exposing him to the rigours and temptations of a public school. Consequently, when the time came for him to go up to Oxford, he had found no friends there and had made few, being sensitive, shy, entirely unskilled in games, and but moderately interested in learning. His vacations, which he spent at home, were as dull as he had always found them under a succession of well-meaning, middle-aged tutors—until, one August day, as he played a twelve-pound salmon, he glanced up at the farther bank and into a pair of brown eyes which were watching him with unconcealed interest.

The eyes belonged to a yeoman-farmer's daughter: and young Molesworth lost his fish, but returned next day, and again day after day, to try for him. At the end of three weeks or so, his parents—he was a poor hand at dissimulation—discovered what was happening, and interfered with promptness and resolution. He had not learnt the art of disobedience, and while he considered how to begin (having, indeed, taken his passion with a thoroughness that did him credit), Miss Margaret, sorely weeping, was packed off on a visit to her mother's relations near Exeter, where, three months later, she married a young farmer-cousin and emigrated to Canada.

In this way Mr. Molesworth's love-making and his fly-fishing had come to an end together. Like Gibbon, he had sighed as a lover, and (Miss Margaret's faithlessness assisting) obeyed as a son. Nevertheless, the sequel did not quite fulfil the hopes of his parents, who, having acted with decision in a situation which took them unawares, were willing enough to make amends by providing him with quite a large choice of suitable partners. To their dismay it appeared that he had done with all thoughts of matrimony: and I am not sure that, as the years went on, their dismay did not deepen into regret. To the end he made them an admirable son, but they went down to their graves and left him unmarried.

In all other respects he followed irreproachably the line of life they had marked out for him. He succeeded to the directorate of the Bank in which the family had made its money, and to those unpaid offices of local distinction which his father had adorned. As a banker he was eminently 'sound'—that is to say, cautious, but not obstinately conservative; as a Justice of the Peace, scrupulous, fair, inclined to mercy, exact in the performance of all his duties. As High Sheriff he filled his term of office and discharged it adequately, but without ostentation. Respecting wealth, but not greatly caring for it—as why should he?—every year without effort he put aside a thousand or two. Men liked him, in spite of his shyness: his good manners hiding a certain fastidiousness of which he was aware without being at all proud of it. No one had ever treated him with familiarity. One or two at the most called him friend, and these probably enjoyed a deeper friendship than they knew. Everyone felt him to be, behind his reserve, a good fellow.

Regularly thrice a week he drove down in his phaeton to the small country station at the foot of his park, and caught the 10.27 up-train: regularly as the train started he lit the cigar which, carefully smoked, was regularly three-parts consumed by the time he crossed the M— viaduct; and regularly, as he lit it, he was conscious of a faint feeling of resentment at the presence of Sir John Crang.

Nine mornings out of ten, Sir John Crang (who lived two stations down the line) would be his fellow-traveller; and, three times out of five, his only companion. Sir John was an ex-Civil Servant, knighted for what were known vaguely as 'services in Burmah,' and, now retired upon a derelict country seat in Cornwall, was making a bold push for local importance, and dividing his leisure between the cultivation of roses (in which he excelled) and the directorship of a large soap-factory near the Plymouth docks. Mr. Molesworth did not like him, and might have accounted for his dislike by a variety of reasons. He himself, for example, grew roses in a small way as an amateur, and had been used to achieve successes at the local flower-shows until Sir John arrived and in one season beat him out of the field. This, as an essentially generous man, he might have forgiven; but not the loud dogmatic air of patronage with which, on venturing to congratulate his rival and discuss some question of culture, he had been bullied and set right, and generally treated as an ignorant junior. Moreover, he seemed to observe—but he may have been mistaken— that, whatever rose he selected for his buttonhole, Sir John would take note of it and trump next day with a finer bloom.

But these were trifles. Putting them aside, Mr. Molesworth felt that he could never like the man who—to be short—was less of a gentleman than a highly coloured and somewhat aggressive imitation of one. Most of all, perhaps, he abhorred Sir John's bulging glassy eyeballs, of a hard white by contrast with his coppery skin—surest sign of the cold sensualist. But in fact he took no pains to analyse his aversion, which extended even to the smell of Sir John's excellent but Burmese cigars. The two men nodded when they met, and usually exchanged a remark or two on the weather. Beyond this they rarely conversed, even upon politics, although both were Conservatives and voters in the same electoral division.

The day of which this story tells was a Saturday in the month of May 188—, a warm and cloudless morning, which seemed to mark the real beginning of summer after an unusually

cold spring. The year, indeed, had reached that exact point when for a week or so the young leaves are as fragrant as flowers, and the rush of the train swept a thousand delicious scents in at the open windows. Mr. Molesworth had donned a white waistcoat in honour of the weather, and wore a bud of a Capucine rose in his buttonhole. Sir John had adorned himself with an enormous glowing Sénateur Vaisse. (Why not a Paul Neyron while he was about it? wondered Mr. Molesworth, as he surveyed the globular bloom.)

"Now in the breast a door flings wide—"

It may have been the weather that disposed Sir John to talk to-day. After commending it, and adding a word or two in general in praise of the West-country climate, he paused and watched Mr. Molesworth lighting his cigar.

"You're a man of regular habits?" he observed unexpectedly, with a shade of interrogation in his voice.

Mr. Molesworth frowned and tossed his match out of window.

"I believe in regular habits myself." Sir John, bent on affability, laid down his newspaper on his knee. "There's one danger about them, though: they're deadening. They save a man the bother of thinking, and persuade him he's doing right, when all the reason is that he's done the same thing a hundred times before. I came across that in a book once, and it seemed to me dashed sound sense. Now here's something I'd like to ask you—have you any theory at all about dreams?"

"Dreams?" echoed Mr. Molesworth, taken aback by the inconsequent question.

"There's a Society—isn't there?—that makes a study of 'em and collects evidence. Man wakes up, having dreamt that friend whom he knows to be abroad is standing by his bed; lights his candle or turns on the electric-light and looks at his watch; goes to sleep again, tells his family all about it at breakfast, and a week or two later learns that his friend died at such-and-such an hour, and the very minute his watch pointed to. That's the sort of thing."

"You mean the Psychical Society?"

"That's the name. Well, I'm a case for 'em. Anyway, I can knock the inside out of one of their theories, that dreams are a sort of memory-game, made up of scenes and scraps and suchlike out of your waking consciousness—isn't that the lingo? Now, I've never had but one dream in my life; but I've dreamt it two or three score of times, and I dreamt it last night."

"Indeed?" Mr. Molesworth was getting mildly interested.

"And I'm not what you'd call a fanciful sort of person," went on Sir John, with obvious veracity. "Regular habits—rise early and to bed early; never a day's trouble with my digestion; off to sleep as soon as my head touches the pillow. You can't call my dream a nightmare, and yet it's unpleasant, somehow."

"But what is it?"

"Well,"—Sir John seemed to hesitate—"you might call it a scene. Yes, that's it—a scene. There's a piece of water and a church beside it—just an ordinary-looking little parish church, with a tower but no pinnacles. Outside the porch there's a tallish stone cross—you can just see it between the elms from the churchyard gate; and going through the gate you step over a sort of grid—half a dozen granite stones laid parallel, with spaces between."

"Then it must be a Cornish church. You never see that contrivance outside the Duchy: though it's worth copying. It keeps out sheep and cattle, while even a child can step across it easily."

"But, my dear sir, I never saw Cornwall—and certainly never saw or heard of this contrivance—until I came and settled here, eight years ago: whereas I've been dreaming this, off and on, ever since I was fifteen."

"And you never actually saw the rest of the scene? the church itself, for instance?"

"Neither stick nor stone of it: I'll take my oath. Mind you, it isn't *like* a church made up of different scraps of memory. It's just that particular church, and I know it by heart, down to a scaffold-hole, partly hidden with grass, close under the lowest string-course of the tower, facing the gate."

"And inside?"

"I don't know. I've never been inside. But stop a moment—you haven't heard the half of it yet! There's a road comes downhill to the shore, between the churchyard wall—there's a heap of greyish silvery-looking stuff, by the way, growing on the coping—something like lavender, with yellow blossoms—Where was I? Oh yes, and on the other side of the road there's a tall hedge with elms above it. It breaks off where the road takes a bend around and in front of the churchyard gate, with a yard or two of turf on the side towards the water, and

from the turf a clean drop of three feet, or a little less, on to the foreshore. The foreshore is all grey stones, round and flat, the sort you'd choose to play what's called ducks-and-drakes. It goes curving along, and the road with it, until the beach ends with a spit of rock, and over the rock a kind of cottage (only bigger, but thatched and whitewashed just like a cottage) with a garden, and in the garden a laburnum in flower, leaning slantwise," —Sir John raised his open hand and bent his forefinger to indicate the angle—"and behind the cottage a reddish cliff with a few clumps of furze overhanging it, and the turf on it stretching up to a larch plantation …."

Sir John paused and rubbed his forehead meditatively.

"At least," he resumed, "I *think* it's a larch plantation; but the scene gets confused above a certain height. It's the foreshore, and the church and the cottage that I always see clearest. Yes, and I forgot to tell you—I'm a poor hand at description—that there's a splash of whitewash on the spit of rock, and an iron ring fixed there, for warping-in a vessel, maybe: and sometimes there's a boat, out on the water…."

"You describe it vividly enough," said Mr. Molesworth as Sir John paused and, apparently on the point of resuming his story, checked himself, tossed his cigar out of the window, and chose a fresh one from his pocket-case. "Well, and what happens in your dream?"

Sir John struck a match, puffed his fresh cigar alight, deliberately examined the ignited end, and flung the match away. "Nothing happens. I told you it was just a scene, didn't I?"

"You said that somehow the dream was an unpleasant one."

"So I did. So it is. It makes me damnably uncomfortable every time I dream it; though for the life of me I can't tell you why."

"The picture as you draw it seems to me quite a pleasant one."

"So it is, again."

"And you say nothing happens?"

"Well—" Sir John took the cigar from his mouth and looked at it— "nothing ever happens in it, definitely: nothing at all. But always in the dream there's a smell of lemon verbena—it comes from the garden—and a curious hissing noise—and a sense of a black man's being somehow mixed up in it all…."

"A black man?"

"Black or brown… in the dream I don't think I've ever actually seen him. The hissing sound—it's like the hiss of a snake, only ten times louder—may have come into the dream of late years. As to that I won't swear. But I'm dead certain there was always a black man mixed up in it, or what I may call a sense of one: and that, as you will say, is the most curious part of the whole business."

Sir John flipped away the ash of his cigar and leant forward impressively.

"If I wasn't, as I say, dead sure of his having been in it from the first," he went on, "I could tell you the exact date when he took a hand in the game: because," he resumed after another pause, "I once actually saw what I'm telling you."

"But you told me," objected Mr. Molesworth, "that you had never actually seen it."

"I was wrong then. I saw it once, in a Burmese boy's hand at Maulmain. The old Eastern trick, you know: palmful of ink and the rest of it. There was nothing particular about the boy except an ugly scar on his cheek (caused, I believe, by his mother having put him down to sleep in the fireplace while the clay floor of it was nearly red-hot under the ashes). His master called himself his grandfather—a holy-looking man with a white beard down to his loins: and the pair of them used to come up every year from Mergui or some such part, at the Full Moon of Taboung, which happens at the end of March and is the big feast in Maulmain. The pair of them stood close by the great entrance of the Shway Dagone, where the three roads meet, and just below the long flights of steps leading up to the pagoda. The second day of the feast I was making for the entrance with a couple of naval officers I had picked up at the Club, and my man, Moung Gway, following as close as he could keep in the crowd. Just as we were going up the steps, the old impostor challenged me, and, partly to show my friends what the game was like—for they were new to the country—I stopped and found a coin for him. He poured the usual dollop of ink into the boy's hand, and, by George, sir, next minute I was staring at the very thing I'd seen a score of times in my dreams but never out of them. I tell you, there's more in that Eastern hanky-panky than meets the eye; beyond that I'll offer no opinion. Outside the magic I believe the whole business was a put-up job, to catch my attention and take me unawares. For when I stepped back, pretty well startled, and blinking from the strain of keeping my attention fixed on the boy's palm, a man jumped forward from the crowd and precious nearly knifed me. If it hadn't been for Moung Gway, who tripped him up and knocked him sideways, I should have been a dead man in two

twos—for my friends were taken aback by the suddenness of it. But in less than a minute we had him down and the handcuffs on him; and the end was, he got five years' hard, which means hefting chain-shot from one end to another of the prison square and then hefting it back again. There was a rather neat little Burmese girl, you see—a sort of niece of Moung Gway's—who had taken a fancy to me; and this turned out to be a disappointed lover, just turned up from a voyage to Cagayan in a paddy-boat. I believed he had fixed it up with the venerable one to hold me with the magic until he got in his stroke. Venomous beggars, those Burmans, if you cross 'em in the wrong way! The fellow got his release a week before I left Maulmain for good, and the very next day Moung Gway was found, down by the quays, dead as a haddock, with a wound between the shoulder-blades as neat as if he'd been measured for it. Oh, I could tell you a story or two about those fellows!"

"It's easily explained, at any rate," Mr. Molesworth suggested, "why you see a dark-skinned man in your dream."

"But I tell you, my dear sir, he has been a part of the dream from the beginning... before I went to Wren's, and long before ever I thought of Burmah. He's as old as the church itself, and the foreshore and the cottage—the whole scene, in fact—though I can't say he's half as distinct. I can't tell you in the least, for instance, what his features are like. I've said that the upper part of the dream is vague to me; at the end of the foreshore, that is, where the cottage stands; the church tower I can see plainly enough to the very top. But over by the cottage— above the porch, as you may say—everything seems to swim in a mist: and it's up in that mist the fellow's head and shoulders appear and vanish. Sometimes I think he's looking out of the window at me, and draws back into the room as if he didn't want to be seen; and the mist itself gathers and floats away with the hissing sound I told you about...."

Sir John's voice paused abruptly. The train was drawing near the M— viaduct, and Mr. Molesworth from force of habit had turned his eyes to the window, to gaze down the green valley. He withdrew them suddenly, and looked around at his companion.

"Ah, to be sure," he said vaguely; "I had forgotten the hissing sound."

It was curious, but as he spoke he himself became aware of a loud hissing sound filling his ears. The train lurched and jolted heavily.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Sir John, half rising in his seat, "something's wrong." He was staring past Mr. Molesworth and out of the window. "Nasty place for an accident, too," he added in a slow, strained voice.

The two men looked at each other for a moment. Sir John's face wore a tense expression —a kind of galvanised smile. Mr. Molesworth closed his eyes, instinctively concealing his sudden sickening terror of what an accident just there must mean: and for a second or so he actually had a sensation of dropping into space. He remembered having felt something like it in dreams three or four times in his life: and at the same instant he remembered a country superstition gravely imparted to him in childhood by his old nurse, that if you dreamt of falling and didn't wake up before reaching the bottom, you would surely die. The absurdity of it chased away his terror, and he opened his eyes and looked about him with a short laugh....

The train still jolted heavily, but had begun to slow down, and Mr. Molesworth drew a long breath as a glance told him that they were past the viaduct. Sir John had risen, and was leaning out of the farther window. Something had gone amiss, then. But what?

He put the question aloud. Sir John, his head and shoulders well outside the carriage-window, did not answer. Probably he did not hear.

As the train ran into M— Station and came to a standstill, Mr. Molesworth caught a glimpse of the station-master, in his gold-braided cap, by the door of the booking-office. He wore a grave, almost a scared look. The three or four country-people on the sunny platform seemed to have their gaze drawn by the engine, and somebody ahead there was shouting. Sir John Crang, without a backward look, flung the door open and stepped out. Mr. Molesworth was preparing to follow—and by the cramped feeling in his fingers was aware at the same instant that he had been gripping the arm-rest almost desperately—when the guard of the train came running by and paused to thrust his head in at the open doorway to explain.

"Engine's broken her coupling-rod, sir—just before we came to the viaduct. Mercy for us she didn't leave the rails."

"Mercy indeed, as you say," Mr. Molesworth assented. "I suppose we shall be hung up here until they send a relief down?"

The guard—Mr. Molesworth knew him as 'George' by name, and by habit constantly polite—turned and waved his flag hurriedly, in acknowledgment of the shouting ahead, before answering—

"You may count on half an hour's delay, sir. Lucky it's no worse. You'll excuse me—

they're calling for me down yonder."

He ran on, and Mr. Molesworth stepped out upon the platform, of which this end was already deserted, all the passengers having alighted and hurried forward to inspect the damaged engine. A few paces beyond the door he met the station-master racing back to despatch a telegram.

"It seems that we've had a narrow escape," said Mr. Molesworth.

The station-master touched his hat and plunged into his office. Mr. Molesworth, instead of joining the crowd around the engine, halted before a small pile of luggage on a bench outside the waiting-room and absent-mindedly scanned the labels.

Among the parcels lay a fishing-rod in a canvas case and a wicker creel, the pair of them labelled and bearing the name of an acquaintance of his— a certain Sir Warwick Moyle, baronet and county magistrate, beside whom he habitually sat at Quarter Sessions.

"I had no idea," Mr. Molesworth mused, "that Moyle was an angler. It would be a fair joke, anyway, to borrow his rod and fill up the time.— How long before the relief comes down?" he asked, intercepting the station-master as he came rushing out from his office and slammed the door behind him.

"Maybe an hour, sir, before we get you started again. I can't honestly promise you less than forty minutes."

"Very well, then: I'm going to borrow Sir Warwick's rod, there, and fill up the time," said Mr. Molesworth, pointing at it.

The station-master apparently did not hear; at any rate he passed on without remonstrance. Mr. Molesworth slung the creel over his shoulder, picked up the rod, and stepped out beyond the station gateway upon the road.

II.

The road ran through a cutting, sunless, cooled by many small springs of water trickling down the rock-face, green with draperies of the hart's-tongue and common polypody ferns; and emerged again into warmth upon a curve of the hillside facing southward down the coombe, and almost close under the second span of the viaduct, where the tall trestles plunged down among the tree-tops like gigantic stilts, and the railway left earth and spun itself across the chasm like a line of gossamer, its criss-crossed timbers so delicately pencilled against the blue that the whole structure seemed to swing there in the morning breeze. Above it, in heights yet more giddy, the larks were chiming; and Mr. Molesworth's heart went up to those clear heights with a sudden lift.

In all the many times he had crossed the viaduct he had never once guessed—he could not have imagined—how beautiful it looked from below. He stood and gazed, and drew a long breath. Was it the escape from dreadful peril, with its blessed revulsion of feeling, that so quickened all his senses dulled by years of habit? He could not tell. He gave himself up to the strange and innocent excitement.

Why had he never till now—and now only by accident—obeyed the impulse to descend this road and explore? He was rich: he had not even the excuse of children to be provided for: the Bank might surely have waited for one day. He did not want much money. His tastes were simple—Was not the happiness at this moment thrilling him a proof that his tastes were simple as a child's? Lo, too, his eyes were looking on the world as freshly as a child's! Why had he so long denied them a holiday? Why do men chain themselves in prisons of their own making?

What had the station-master said? It might be an hour—certainly not less than forty minutes—before the train could be restarted. Mr. Molesworth looked at his watch. Forty minutes to explore the road: forty minutes' holiday! He laughed, pocketed the watch again, and took the road briskly, humming a song.

Suppose he missed his train? Why, then, the Bank must do without him to-day, as it would have to do without him, one of these days, when he was dead. He thought of his fellow-directors' faces, and laughed again. He felt morally certain of missing that train. What kind of world would it be if money grew in birds' nests, or if leaves were currency and withered in autumn? Would it include truant-schools for bankers?...

"He that is down needs fear no fall,
He that is low, no pride;

He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide."

"Fulness to such a burden is
That go on pilgrimage—"

Mr. Molesworth did not actually sing these words. The tune he hummed was a wordless one, and, for that matter, not even much of a tune. But he afterwards declared very positively that he sang the sense of them, being challenged by the birds calling in contention louder and louder as the road dipped towards the stream, and by the music of lapsing water which now began to possess his ear. For some five or six furlongs the road descended under beech-boughs, between slopes carpeted with last year's leaves: but by and by the beeches gave place to an oak coppice with a matted undergrowth of the whortleberry; and where these in turn broke off, and a plantation of green young larches climbed the hill, the wild hyacinths ran down to the stream in sheet upon sheet of blue.

Mr. Molesworth rested his creel on the low hedge above one of these sheets of blue, and with the music of the stream in his ears began to unpack Sir Warwick Moyle's fishing-rod. For a moment he paused, bethinking himself, with another short laugh, that, without flies, neither rod nor line would catch him a fish. But decidedly fortune was kind to him to-day: for, opening the creel, he found Sir Warwick's fly-book within it, bulging with hooks and flies by the score—nay, by the hundred. He unbuckled the strap and was turning the leaves to make his choice, when his ear caught the sound of footsteps, and he lifted his eyes to see Sir John Crang coming down the road.

"Hullo!" hailed Sir John. "I saw you slip out of the station and took a fancy that I'd follow. Pretty little out-of-the-way spot, this. Eh? Why, where on earth did you pick up those angling traps?"

"I stole them," answered Mr. Molesworth deliberately, choosing a fly. He did not in the least desire Sir John's company, but somehow found himself too full of good-nature to resent it actively.

"Stole 'em?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, they belong to a friend of mine. They were lying ready to hand in the station, and I borrowed them without leave. He won't mind."

"You're a cool one, I must say." It may be that the recent agitation of his feelings had shaken Sir John's native vulgarity to the surface. Certainly he spoke now with a commonness of idiom and accent he was usually at pains to conceal. "You must have a fair nerve altogether, for all you're such a quiet-looking chap. Hadn't even the curiosity—had you?—to find out what had gone wrong; but just picked up a handy fishing-rod and strolled off to fill up the time till damages were repaired. Look here. Do you know, or don't you, that 'twasn't by more than a hair's-breadth we missed going over that viaduct?"

"I knew we must have had a narrow escape."

"And you can be tying the fly there on to that gut as steady as a doctor picking up an artery! Well, I envy you. Look at *that!*" Sir John held out a brown, hairy, shaking hand. "And I don't reckon myself a coward, either."

Mr. Molesworth knew that the man's record had established at any rate his reputation for courage. He had, in fact, been a famous hunter-out of Dacoity.

"I didn't know you went in for that sort of thing," pursued Sir John, watching Mr. Molesworth, who, with a penknife, was trimming the ends of gut. "Don't mind my watching your first cast or two, I hope? I won't talk. Anglers don't like being interrupted, I know."

"I shall be glad of your company: and please talk as much as you choose. To tell the truth, I haven't handled a rod for years, and I'm making this little experiment to see if I've quite lost the knack, rather than with any hope of catching fish."

It appeared, however, that he had not lost the knack, and after the first cast or two, in the pleasure of recovered skill, his senses abandoned themselves entirely to the sport. Sir John had lit a cigar and seated himself amid the bracken a short distance back from the brink, to watch: but whether he conversed or not Mr. Molesworth could not tell. He remembered afterwards that at the end of twenty minutes or so—probably when his cigar was finished—Sir John rose and announced his intention of strolling some way farther down the valley—"to soothe his nerves a bit," as he said, adding, "So long! I see you're going to miss that train, to a certainty."

Yes, it was certain enough that Mr. Molesworth would miss his train. He fished down the stream slowly, the song and dazzle of the water filling his ears, his vision; his whole being soothed and lulled less by the actual scene than by a hundred memories it awakened or set stirring. He was young again—a youth of twenty with romance in his heart. The plants and grasses he trod were the asphodels, sundew, water-mint his feet had crushed—crushed into

fragrance—five-and-twenty years ago....

So deeply preoccupied was he that, coming to a bend where the coombe suddenly widened, and the stream without warning cast its green fringe of alders like a slough and slipped down a beach of flat pebbles to the head waters of a tidal creek, Mr. Molesworth rubbed his eyes with a start. Had the stream been a Naiad she could not have given him the go-by more coquettishly.

He rubbed his eyes, and then with a short gasp of wonder—almost of terror—involuntarily looked around for Sir John. Here before him was a shore, with a church beside it, and at the far end a whitewashed cottage— surely the very shore, church, cottage, of Sir John's dream! Yes, there was the stone cross before the porch; and here the grid-fashioned church stile; and yonder under the string-course the scaffold-hole with the grass growing out of it!

If Mr. Molesworth's hands had been steady when he tied on his May-fly, they trembled enough now as he hurriedly put up his tackle and disjointed his rod: and still, and again while he hastened across to the cottage above the rocky spit—the cottage with the larch plantation above and in the garden a laburnum aslant and in bloom—his eyes sought the beach for Sir John.

The cottage was a large one, as Sir John had described. It was, in fact, a waterside inn, with its name, The Saracen's Head, painted in black letters along its whitewashed front and under a swinging signboard. Looking up at the board Mr. Molesworth discerned, beneath its dark varnish, the shoulders, scimitar, and grinning face of a turbaned Saracen, and laughed aloud between incredulity and a sense of terror absurdly relieved. This, then, was Sir John's black man!

But almost at the same moment another face looked over the low hedge—the face of a young girl in a blue sun-bonnet: and Mr. Molesworth put out a hand to the gate to steady himself.

The girl—she had heard his laugh, perhaps—gazed down at him with a frank curiosity. Her eyes were honest, clear, untroubled: they were also extremely beautiful eyes: and they were more. As Mr. Molesworth to his last day was prepared to take oath, here were the very eyes, as here was the very face and here the very form, of the Margaret whom he had suffered for, and suffered to be lost to him, twenty-five years ago. It was Margaret, and she had not aged one day.

In Margaret's voice, too, seeing that he made no motion to enter, she spoke down to him across the hedge.

"Are you a friend, sir, of the gentleman that was here just now?"

"Sir John Crang?" Mr. Molesworth just managed to command his voice.

"I don't know his name, sir. But he left his cigar-case behind. I found it on the settle five minutes after he had gone, and ran out to search for him...."

Mr. Molesworth opened the gate and held out a hand for the case. Yes: he recognised it. It bore Sir John's monogram in silver.

"I will give it to him," he said. Without exactly knowing why, he followed her into the inn-kitchen. Yes, he would take a pint of her ale. "The home-brewed?" Yes, certainly, the home-brewed.

She brought it in a pewter tankard, exquisitely polished. The polish of it caught and cast back the sunlight in prismatic circles on the scoured deal table. The girl—Margaret—stood for a moment in the fuller sunlight by the window, lingering there to pick a dead leaf from a geranium on the ledge.

"Which way did Sir John go?"

"I *thought* he took the turning along the shore; but I didn't notice particularly which way he went. He said he had come down the valley, and I took it for granted he would be going on."

Mr. Molesworth drank his beer and stood up. "There are only two ways, then, out of this valley?"

"Thank you, sir—" As he paid her she dropped a small curtsey—"Yes, only two ways—up the valley or along the shore. The road up the valley leads to the railway station."

"By the way, there was an accident at the station this morning?"

"Indeed, sir?" Her beautiful eyes grew round. "Nothing serious, I hope?"

"It might have been a very nasty one indeed," said Mr. Molesworth, and paused. "I think

I'll take a look along the shore before returning. I don't want to miss my friend, if I can help it."

"You can see right along it from the rock beyond the garden," said the girl, and Mr. Molesworth went out.

As he reached the spit of rock, the sunlight playing down the waters of the creek dazzled him for a moment. Rubbing his eyes, he saw, about two hundred yards along the foreshore, a boat grounded, and two figures beside it on the beach: and either his sight was playing him a trick or these two were struggling together.

He ran towards them. Almost as he started, in one of the figures he recognised Sir John. The other had him by the shoulders, and seemed to be dragging him by main force towards the boat. Mr. Molesworth shouted as he rushed up to the fray. The assailant turned—turned with a loud hissing sound—and, releasing Sir John, swung up a hand with something in it that flashed in the sun as he struck at the newcomer: and as Mr. Molesworth fell, he saw a fierce brown face and a cage of white, gleaming teeth bared in a savage grin....

He picked himself up, the blood running warm over his eyes, and, as he stood erect for a moment, down over his white waistcoat. But the dusky face of his antagonist had vanished, and, with it, the whole scene. In place of the foreshore with its flat grey stones, his eye travelled down a steep green slope. The hissing sound continued in his ears, louder than ever, but it came with violent jets of steam from a locomotive, grotesquely overturned some twenty yards below him. Fainting, he saw and sank across the body of Sir John Crang, which lay with face upturned among the June grasses, staring at the sky.

III.

STATEMENT BY W. PITT FERGUSON, M.D., OF LOCKYER STREET, PLYMOUTH.

The foregoing narrative has been submitted to me by the writer, who was well acquainted with the late Mr. Molesworth. In my opinion it conveys a correct impression of that gentleman's temperament and character: and I can testify that in the details of his psychical adventures on the valley road leading to St. A—'s Church it adheres strictly to the account given me by Mr. Molesworth himself shortly after the accident on the M— viaduct, and repeated by him several times with insistence during the illness which terminated mortally some four months later. The manner in which the narrative is presented may be open to criticism: but of this, as one who has for some years eschewed the reading of fiction, I am not a fair judge. It adds, at any rate, nothing in the way of 'sensation' to the story as Mr. Molesworth told it: and of its improbability I should be the last to complain, who am to add, of my own positive observation, some evidence which will make it appear yet more startling, if not wholly incredible.

The accident was actually witnessed by two men, cattle-jobbers, who were driving down the valley road in a light cart or 'trap,' and were within two hundred yards of the viaduct when they saw the train crash through the parapet over the second span (counting from the west), and strike and plunge down the slope. In their evidence at the inquest, and again at the Board of Trade inquiry, these men agree that it took them from five to eight minutes only to alight, run down and across the valley (fording the stream on their way), and scramble up to the scene of the disaster: and they further agree that one of the first sad objects on which their eyes fell was the dead body of Sir John Crang with Mr. Molesworth, alive but sadly injured and bleeding, stretched across it. Apparently they had managed to crawl from the wreck of the carriage before Sir John succumbed, or Mr. Molesworth had managed to drag his companion out—whether dead or alive cannot be told—before himself fainting from loss of blood.

The toll of the disaster, as is generally known, amounted to twelve killed and seventeen more or less seriously injured. Help having been summoned from M— Station, the injured—or as many of them as could be removed— were conveyed in an ambulance train to Plymouth. Among them was Mr. Molesworth, whose apparent injuries were a broken hip, a laceration of the thigh, and an ugly, jagged scalp-wound. Of all these he made, in time, a fair recovery: but what brought him under my care was the nervous shock from which his brain, even while his body healed, never made any promising attempt to rally. For some time after the surgeon had pronounced him cured he lingered on, a visibly dying man, and died in the end of utter nervous collapse.

Yet even within a few days of the end his brain kept an astonishing clearness: and to me, as well as to the friends who visited him in hospital and afterwards in his Plymouth lodgings —for he never returned home again, being unable to face another railway journey—he would

maintain, and with astonishing vigour and lucidity of description, that he had actually in very truth travelled down the valley in company with Sir John Crang, and seen with his own eyes everything related in the foregoing paper. Now, as a record of what did undeniably pass through the brain of a cultivated man in some catastrophic moments, I found these recollections of his exceedingly interesting. As no evidence is harder to collect, so almost none can be of higher importance, than that of man's sensations at the exact moment when he passes, naturally or violently, out of this present life into whatever may be beyond. Partly because Mr. Molesworth's story, which he persisted in, had this scientific value; partly in the hope of diverting his mind from the lethargy into which I perceived it to be sinking; I once begged him to write the whole story down. To this, however, he was unequal. His will betrayed him as soon as he took pen and paper.

The entire veracity of his recollection he none the less affirmed again and again, and with something like passion, although aware that his friends were but humouring him while they listened and made pretence to believe. The strong card—if I may so term it—in his evidence was undoubtedly Sir John Crang's cigar-case. It was found in Mr. Molesworth's breast-pocket when they undressed him at the hospital, and how it came there I confess I cannot explain. It may be that it had dropped on the grass from Sir John's pocket, and that Mr. Molesworth, under the hallucination which undoubtedly possessed him, picked it up, and pocketed it before the two cattle-drovers found him. It is an unlikely hypothesis, but I cannot suggest a likelier.

A fortnight before his death he sent for a lawyer and made his will, the sanity of which no one can challenge. At the end he directed that his body should be interred in the parish churchyard of St. A—, 'as close as may be to the cross by the church porch.' As a last challenge to scepticism this surely was defiant enough.

It was my duty to attend the funeral. The coffin, conveyed by train to M— Station, was there transferred to a hearse, and the procession followed the valley road. I forget at what point it began to be impressed upon me, who had never travelled the road before, that Mr. Molesworth's 'recollections' of it had been so exact that they compelled a choice between the impossibility of accepting his story and the impossibility of doubting the assurance of so entirely honourable a man that he had never travelled the road in his life. At first I tried to believe that his recollections of it—detailed as they were—might one by one have been suggested by the view from the viaduct. But, honestly, I was soon obliged to give this up: and when we arrived at the creek's head and the small churchyard beside it, I confessed myself confounded. Point by point, and at every point, the actual scene reproduced Mr. Molesworth's description.

I prefer to make no comment on my last discovery. After the funeral, being curious to satisfy myself in every particular, I walked across the track to the inn—The Saracen's Head—which again answered Mr. Molesworth's description to the last detail. The house was kept by a widow and her daughter: and the girl—an extremely good-looking young person—made me welcome. I concluded she must be the original of Mr. Molesworth's illusion—perhaps the strangest of all his illusions—and took occasion to ask her (I confess not without a touch of trepidation) if she remembered the day of the accident. She answered that she remembered it well. I asked if she remembered any visitor, or visitors, coming to the inn on that day. She answered, None: but that now I happened to speak of it, somebody must have come that day while she was absent on an errand to the Vicarage (which lies some way along the shore to the westward): for on returning she found a fishing-rod and creel on the settle of the inn-kitchen.

The creel had a luggage-label tied to it, and on the label was written 'Sir W. Moyle.' She had written to Sir Warwick about it more than a month ago, but had not heard from him in answer. [It turned out that Sir Warwick had left England, three days after the accident, on a yachting excursion to Norway.]

"And a cigar-case?" I asked. "You don't remember seeing a cigar-case?"

She shook her head, evidently puzzled. "I know nothing about a cigar-case," she said. "But you shall see the rod and fishing-basket."

She ran at once and fetched them. Now that rod and that creel (and the fly-book within it) have since been restored to Sir Warwick Moyle. He had left them in care of the station-master at M—, whence they had been missing since the day of the accident. It was suspected that they had been stolen, in the confusion that day prevailing at the little station, by some ganger on the relief-train.

The girl, I am convinced, was honest, and had no notion how they found their way to the kitchen of The Saracen's Head: nor—to be equally honest—have I.

HI-SPY-HI!

AN EPISODE IN THE HISTORY OF THE LOOE DIE-HARDS.

Maybe you have never heard of the East and West Looe Volunteer Artillery— the famous Looe Die-hards? "The iniquity of oblivion," says Sir Thomas Browne, "blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity."

"Time," writes Dr. Isaac Watts—

> "Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
> Bears all its sons away!"

And this fine hymn was a favourite with Captain Æneas Pond, the commanding-officer of the Die-hards. Yet am I sure that while singing it Captain Pond in his heart excepted his own renowned corps. For were not the Die-hards an exception to every rule?

In the spring of the year 1803, when King George had to tell his faithful subjects that the Treaty of Amiens was no better than waste-paper, and Bonaparte began to assemble his troops and flat-bottomed boats in the camp and off the coast by Boulogne with intent to invade us, public excitement in the twin towns of East and West Looe rose to a very painful pitch. Of this excitement was begotten the East and West Looe Volunteer Artillery, which the Government kept in pay for six years and then reluctantly disbanded. The company on an average numbered sixty or seventy men, commanded by a Captain and two Lieutenants of their own choosing. They learned the exercise of the great guns and of small arms; they wore a uniform consisting of blue coat and pantaloons, with scarlet facings and yellow wings and tassels, and a white waistcoat; and the ladies of Looe embroidered two flags for them, with an inscription on each—'*Death or Victory*' on the one—on the other, '*We Choose the Latter.*'

They meant it, too. If the course of events between 1803 and 1809 denied them the chance of achieving victory, 'tis at least remarkable how they avoided the alternative. Indeed it was their tenacity in keeping death at arm's length which won for them their famous sobriquet.

The Doctor invented it. (He was surgeon to the corps as well as to its senior Lieutenant.) The Doctor made the great discovery, and imparted it to Captain Pond on a memorable evening in the late summer of 1808 as the two strolled homeward from parade—the Captain moodily, as became a soldier who for five years had carried a sword engraved with the motto, '*My Life's Blood for the Two Looes,*' and as yet had been granted no opportunity to flesh it.

"But look here, Pond," said the Doctor. "Has it ever occurred to you to reflect that in all these five years since you first enlisted your company, not a single man of it has died?"

"Why the devil should he?" asked Captain Pond.

"Why? Why, by every law of probability!" answered the Doctor. "Take any collection of seventy men the sum of whose ages divided by seventy gives an average age of thirty-four—which is the mean age of our corps, for I've worked it out: then by the most favourable rates of mortality three at least should die every year."

"War is a fearful thing!" commented Captain Pond.

"But, dammit, I'm putting the argument on a *civilian* basis! I say that even in time of peace, if you take any seventy men the sum of whose ages divided by seventy gives thirty-four, you ought in five years to average a loss of fifteen men."

"Then," murmured Captain Pond, "all I can say is that peace is a fearful thing too."

"Yes, yes, Pond! But my point is that in all these five years *we* have not yet lost a single man."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Captain Pond, after a moment's thought. "How do you account for it?"

Professionally the Doctor was the most modest of men. "I do not seek to account for it," said he. "I only know that you, my old friend, well deserve the distinction which you have characteristically overlooked—that of commanding the most remarkable company in the Duchy; nay, I will venture to say, in the whole of England."

They had reached the brow of the hill overlooking the town. Captain Pond halted and gazed for a moment on the veil of smoke above the peaceful chimneys, then into the sunset fading far down the Channel. A sudden moisture clouded his gaze, but in the moisture quivered a new-born light of pride.

Yes, it was true. He—he in five years' command—had never lost a man!

The discovery elated and yet humbled him. His was a simple soul, and took its responsibilities seriously. He sought not to inquire for what high purpose Providence had so signally intervened to stave off from the East and West Looe Artillery the doom of common men. He only prayed to be equal to it. The Doctor's statistics had, in fact, scared him a little. I am positive that he never boasted.

And yet—I will say this for the credit of us Cornishmen, that we rejoice one in another's good fortune. Captain Pond might walk humbly and 'touch wood' to avert Nemesis: he could not prevent the whisper spreading, nor, as it spread, could he silence the congratulations of his fellow-townsmen. 'One and All' is our motto, and Looe quickly made Captain Pond's singular distinction its own—

There's Horse, there's Foot, there's Artiller-y,
Yet none comes up with Looe;
For the rest of the Army never says die,
But our chaps never do!

You may realise something of the public enthusiasm when I tell you that it gave an entirely new trend to the small-talk on the Town Quay. Hitherto, the male population which resorted there had admitted but four subjects as worthy of sensible men's discussion—the weather, the shipping intelligence, religion, and politics: but in a few days the health of the 'Die-hards' took precedence of all these, and even threatened to monopolise public gossip. Captain Pond, as the first reward of notoriety, found himself severely criticised for having at the outset enlisted a dozen gunners of ripe age, although he had chosen them for no worse reason than that they had served in his Majesty's Navy and were by consequence the best marksmen in the two towns. Not even this excuse, however, could be pleaded on behalf of Gunner Israel Spettigew (commonly known as Uncle Issy), a septuagenarian who owed his inclusion entirely to the jokes he cracked. They had been greatly relished on parade: as indeed they had made him for forty years past the one indispensable man at Mayor-choosings, Church-feasts, Carol-practices, Guise-dancings, and all public occasions; and because they varied little with the years, no one had taken the trouble to remark until now that Uncle Issy himself was ageing. But now the poor old fellow found himself the object of a solicitude which (as he grumbled) made the Town Quay as melancholy as a house in a warren.

The change in the public attitude came on him with a sudden shock. "Good-mornin', Uncle," said Sergeant Pengelly of the Sloop Inn, as the veteran joined the usual group on the Quay for the usual 'crack' after breakfast. "There was a touch o' frost in the air this mornin'. I hope it didn't affect you."

"What?" said Uncle Issy.

"We're in for a hard winter this season," went on Sergeant Pengelly lugubriously. "A touch o' frost so early in October you may take as one o' Natur's warnings."

"Ay," chimed in Gunner Tripconey, shaking his head. "What is man, when all's said an' done? One moment he's gallivantin' about in beauty and majesty, an' the next—*phut!* as you might say." Uncle Issy stared at him with neighbourly interest. "Been eatin' anything to disagree with you, Tripconey?" he asked.

"I have not," Mr. Tripconey answered; "and what's more, though born so recent as the very year his Majesty came to the throne, I've ordained to be extry careful over my diet this winter an' go slow over such delicacies as fried 'taties for breakfast. If these things happen in the green tree, Mr. Spettigew, what shall be done in the dry?"

Mr. Spettigew cheerfully ignored the hint. "Talkin' of frost and 'taties," he said, "have you ever tried storin' them in hard weather under your bed-tie? 'Tis a bit nubbly till the sleeper gets used to it, but it benefits the man if he's anyway given to lumbago, an' for the 'taties themselves 'tis salvation. I tried it through the hard winter of the year 'five by the advice o' Parson Buller, and a better Christian never missed the point of a joke. 'Well, Israel,' says he that January, 'how be the potatoes getting along?' 'Your honour,' says I, 'like the Apostles themselves, thirteen to the dozen; and likewise of whom it was said that many are cold but few are frozen'—hee-hee!"

Nobody smiled. "If you go strainin' yourself over little witticisms like that," observed young Gunner Oke gloomily, "one of these days you'll be heving the Dead March played over you before you know what's happenin': and then, perhaps, you'll laugh on t'other side of your mouth."

Uncle Issy gazed around upon the company. They were eyeing him, one and all, in deadly earnest, and he crept away. Until that moment he had carried his years without feeling the burden. He went home, raked together the embers of the fire over which he had cooked his breakfast, drew his chair close to the hearth, and sat down to warm himself. Yes: Sergeant Pengelly had spoken the truth. There *was* an unnatural touch of frost in the air this

morning.

By and by, when William Henry Phippin's son, Archelaus, bugler to the corps (aged fifteen), took the whooping-cough, public opinion blamed Captain Pond no less severely for having enlisted a recruit who was still an undergraduate in such infantile disorders: and although the poor child took it in the mildest form, his father (not hitherto remarkable for parental tenderness) ostentatiously practised the favourite local cure and conveyed him to and fro for three days and all day long in the ferry-boat which plied under Captain Pond's windows. The demonstration, which was conducted in mufti, could not be construed as mutiny; but the spirit which prompted it, and the public feeling it evoked, galled the worthy Captain more than he cared to confess.

Still, and when all was said and done, the sweets of notoriety outflavoured the sours. The Troy Artillery, down the coast, had betrayed its envy in a spiteful epigram; and this neighbourly acid, infused upon the pride of Looe, had crystallised it, so to speak, into the name now openly and defiantly given to the corps. They were the Die-hards henceforth, jealous of the title and of all that it implied. The ladies of Looe, with whom Captain Pond (an unmarried man) had ever been a favourite, used during the next few weeks far severer language towards their neighbours of Troy than they had ever found for the distant but imminent Gaul and his lascivious advances.

All this was well enough; but Looe had a Thersites in its camp.

His name was Scantlebury; he kept a small general shop in the rear of the Town Quay, and he bore Captain Pond a grudge of five years' standing for having declined to enlist him on the pretext of his legs being so malformed that the children of the town drove their hoops between them.

In his nasty spite this Scantlebury sat down and indited a letter, addressed—

"TO THE RIGHT HON^{BLE} PERSON AS LOOKS AFTER THE ARTILLERY.
. HORSE GUARDS,
LONDON."

"HON^{BLE} SIR,—This comes hoping to find you well as it leaves me at present and I beg leave to tell you there be some dam funny goings-on, down here to Looe. The E. & W. Looe Volunteer Art^{llry} have took to calling themselves the Die-hards and the way they coddle is a public scandal, when I tell you that for six weeks there has been no drill in the fresh air and 16s 8d public money has been paid to T. Tripconey carpenter (a member of the corps) for fastening up the windows of the Town Hall against draughts. Likewise a number of sandbags have been taken from the upper battery and moved down to the said room (which they use for a drill hall) to stop out the wind from coming under the door. Likewise also to my knowledge for three months the company have not been allowed to move at the double because Gunner Spettigew (who owns to seventy-three) cant manage a step of thirty-six inches without his heart being effected.

"I wish you could see the place where they have been and moved the said upper Battery. It would make you laugh. They have put it round the corner to the eastward where it would have to blow away seven or eight hundred ton of Squire Trelawny's cliff before it could get a clear shot at a vessel entering the haven. Trusting you will excuse the length of this letter and come down and have a look for yourself, I remain yours truly.

A WELL WISHER."

The clerk in Whitehall who opened this unconventional letter passed it up to his chief, who in turn passed it on to the Adjutant-General, who thrust it into a pigeon-hole reserved for such curiosities. Now, as it happened, a week later the Adjutant-General received a visit from a certain Colonel Taubmann of the Royal Artillery, who was just leaving London for Plymouth, to make a tour of inspection through the West, and report on the state of the coast-defences; and during the interview, as the Adjutant-General glanced down the Colonel's list of batteries, his eye fell on the name 'Looe'; whereby being reminded of the letter, he pulled it out and read it for his visitor's amusement.

You may say then that Colonel Taubmann had fair warning. Yet it was far from preparing him for the welcome he received, three weeks later, when he drove down to Plymouth to hold his inspection, due notice of which had been received by Captain Pond ten days before.

"What the devil's the meaning of this?" demanded Colonel Taubmann as his post-boy reined up on the knap of the hill above the town. By 'this' he meant a triumphal arch, packed with evergreens, and adorned with the motto '*Death to the Invader*' in white letters on a scarlet ground.

He repeated the question to Captain Pond, who appeared a minute later in full regimentals advancing up the hill with his Die-hards behind him and a large and excited crowd in the rear.

"Good-morning, sir!" Captain Pond halted beneath the archway and saluted, beaming with pride and satisfaction and hospitable goodwill. "I am addressing Colonel Taubmann, I believe? Permit me to bid you welcome to Looe, Colonel, and to congratulate you upon this perfect weather. Nature, as one might say, has endued her gayest garb. You have enjoyed a pleasant drive, I hope?"

"What the devil is the meaning of this, sir?" repeated the Colonel.

Captain Pond looked up at the motto and smiled. "The reference is to Bonaparte. Dear me, I trust—I sincerely trust—you did not even for a moment mistake the application? You must pardon us, Colonel. We are awkward perhaps in our country way—awkward no doubt; but hearty, I assure you."

The Colonel, though choleric, was a good-natured man, and too much of a gentleman to let his temper loose, though sorely tried, when at the bottom of the hill the Die-hards halted his carriage that he might receive not only an address from the Doctor as Mayor, but a large bouquet from the hands of the Doctor's four-year-old daughter, little Miss Sophronia, whom her mother led forward amid the plaudits of the crowd. (The Doctor, I should explain, was a married man of but five years' standing, and his wife and he doted on one another and on little Miss Sophronia, their only child.) This item of the programme, carefully rehearsed beforehand, and executed pat on the moment with the prettiest air of impromptu, took Colonel Taubmann so fairly aback that he found himself stammering thanks before he well knew what had happened: and from that moment he was at the town's mercy. Before he could drop back in the chaise, and almost before the Mayor, casting off his robe and throwing it upon the arm of the town-crier, had exchanged his civic for his military rôle, the horses were unharnessed and a dozen able-bodied men tugging at the traces: and so, desperately gripping a stout bunch of scarlet geraniums, Colonel Taubmann was rattled off amid a whirl of cheering through the narrow streets, over the cobbles, beneath arches and strings of flags and flag-bedecked windows, from which the women leaned and showered rice upon him, with a band playing ahead and a rabble shouting astern, up the hill to the battery, where willing hands had wreathed Looe's four eighteen-pounders with trusses of laurel. The very mark moored off for a target had been decorated with an enormous bunch of holly and a motto—decipherable, as Captain Pond, offering his field-glass, pointed out—

Our compliments to Bonyparty:
He'll find us well and likewise hearty!

The moment for resistance, for effective protest, had passed. There was really nothing for the Colonel to do but accept the situation with the best face he could muster. As the chaise drew up alongside the battery, he did indeed cast one wild look around and behind him, but only to catch a bewitching smile from the Mayoress—a young and extremely good-looking woman, with that soft brilliance of complexion which sometimes marks the early days of motherhood. And Captain Pond, with the Doctor and Second Lieutenant Clogg at his elbow, was standing hat in hand by the carriage-step; and the weather was perfect, and every face in the crowd and along the line of the Die-hards so unaffectedly happy, that—to be brief—the Colonel lost his head for the moment and walked through the inspection as in a dream, accepting—or at least seeming to accept—it in the genial holiday spirit in which it was so honestly presented. Bang-Bang! went the eighteen-pounders, and through the smoke Colonel Taubmann saw the pretty Mayoress put up both hands to her ears.

"Damme!" said Gunner Spettigew that evening, "the practice, if a man can speak professionally, was a disgrace. Oke, there, at Number Two gun, must ha' lost his head altogether; for I marked the shot strike the water, and 'twas a good hundred yards short if an inch. 'Hullo!' says I, and glances toward the chap to apologise. If you'll believe me, I'd fairly opened my mouth to tell 'en that nine times out of ten you weren't such a blamed fool as you looked, when a glance at his eye told me he hadn' noticed. The man looked so pleased with everythin', I felt like nudgin' him under the ribs with a rammer: but I dessay 'twas as well I thought better of it. The regular forces be terrible on their dignity at times."

Colonel Taubmann had, however, made a note of the Die-hards' marksmanship, and attempted to tackle Captain Pond on the subject later in the afternoon—albeit gently—over a cup of tea provided by the Mayoress.

"There is a spirit about your men, Captain—" he began.

"You take sugar?" interposed Captain Pond.

"Thank you: three lumps."

"You find it agrees with you? Now in the Duchy, sir, you'll find it the rarest exception for anyone to take sugar."

"As I was saying, there is certainly a spirit about your men—"

"Health and spirits, sir! In my experience the two go together. Health and spirits—the first requisites for success in the military calling, and both alike indispensable! If a soldier enjoy bad health, how can he march? If his liver be out of order, if his hand tremble, if he see black spots before his eyes, with what accuracy will he shoot? Rheumatism, stone, gout in the system—"

Colonel Taubmann stared. Could he believe his eyes, or had he not, less than an hour ago, seen the Looe Artillery plumping shot into the barren sea a good fifty yards short of their target? Could he trust his ears, or was it in a dream he had listened, just now, to Captain Pond's reasons for marching his men home at a pace reserved, in other regiments, for funerals?—"In my judgment, sir, a step of twenty-four to thirty inches is as much as any man over sixty years of age can indulge in without risk of overstrain, and even so I should prescribe forty-eight steps a minute as the maximum. Some criticism has been levelled at me—not perhaps without excuse—for having enlisted men of that age. It is easy to be wise after the event, but at the time other considerations weighed with me—as for instance that the men were sober and steady-going, and that I knew their ways, which is a great help in commanding a company."

Colonel Taubmann stared and gasped, but held his tongue. There was indeed a breadth of simplicity about Captain Pond—a seriousness, innocent and absolute, which positively forbade retort.

"Nay!" went on the worthy man. "Carry the argument out to its logical conclusion. If a soldier's efficiency be reduced by ill-health, what shall we say of him when he is dead? A dead soldier—unless it be by the memory of his example—avails nothing. The active list knows him no more. He is gone, were he Alexander the Great and the late Marquis of Granby rolled into one. No energy of his repels the invader; no flash of his eye reassures the trembling virgin or the perhaps equally apprehensive matron. He lies in his place, and the mailed heel of Bellona—to borrow an expression of our Vicar's—passes over him without a protest. I need not labour this point. The mere mention of it bears out my theory, and justifies the line I have taken in practice; that in these critical times, when Great Britain calls upon her sons to consolidate their ranks in the face of the Invader, it is of the first importance to keep as many as possible of them alive and in health."

"Captain Pond has mounted his hobby, I see," said the pretty Mayoress, coming forward at the conclusion of this harangue. "But you should hear my husband, sir, on the health-giving properties of Looe's climate."

Colonel Taubmann bowed gallantly. "Madam, I have no need. Your own cheeks bear a more eloquent testimony to it, I warrant, than any he could compose."

"Well, and so they do, my love," said the Doctor that evening, when she repeated this pretty speech to him. "But I don't understand why you should add that anyone could tell he belonged to the regular service."

"They *have* a way with them," said the lady musingly, gazing out of window.

"Why, my dear, have I not paid you before now a score of compliments as neat?"

"Now don't be huffed, darling!—of course you have. But, you see, it came as pat with him as if he had known me all my life: and I'll engage that he has another as pat for the next woman he meets."

"I don't doubt it," agreed her spouse: "and if that's what you admire, perhaps you would like me to compliment and even kiss every pretty girl in the place. There's no saying what I can't do if I try."

"*Please* don't be a goose, dear! I never said a Volunteer wasn't more comfortable *to live with*. Those professionals are here to-day and gone tomorrow—sometimes even sooner."

"Not to mention," added the Doctor, more than half-seriously, "that life with them is dreadfully insecure."

"Oh! I would never *seriously* advise a friend of mine to marry a regular soldier. Hector dear, to be left a widow must be terrible!… But you *did* deserve to be teased, for never saying a word about my tea-party. How do you think it went off? And haven't you a syllable of praise for the way I had polished the best urn? Why, you might have seen your face in it!"

"So I might, my love, no doubt: but my eyes were occupied in following *you*."

Yes, the day had been a wonderful success, as Captain Pond remarked after waving good-bye to his visitor and watching his chaise out of sight upon the Plymouth road. The Colonel's manner had been so affable, his appreciation of Looe and its scenery and objects of interest so whole-hearted, he had played his part in the day's entertainment with so unmistakable a zest!

"We are lucky," said Captain Pond. "Suppose, now, he had turned out to be some cross-grained martinet... the type is not unknown in the regular forces."

"He was intelligent, too," chimed in the Doctor,—"unlike some soldiers I have met whose horizon has been bounded by the walls of their barrack-square. Did you observe the interest he took in my account of our Giant's Hedge? He fully agreed with me that it must be pre-Roman, and allowed there was much to be said for the theory which ascribes it to the Druids."

Alas for these premature congratulations! They were to be rudely shattered within forty-eight hours, and by a letter addressed to Captain Pond in Colonel Taubmann's handwriting:—

> "DEAR SIR,—The warmth of my reception on Tuesday and the hospitality of the good people of Looe—a hospitality which, pray be assured, I shall number amongst my most pleasant recollections—constrain me to write these few friendly words covering the official letter you will receive by this or the next post. In the hurry of leave-taking I had no time to discuss with you certain shortcomings which I was compelled to note in the gunnery of the E. and W. Looe Volunteer Artillery, or to suggest a means of remedy. But, to be brief, I think a fortnight's or three weeks' continuous practice *away from all local distractions*, and in a battery better situated than your own for the requirements of effective coast-defence, will give your company that experience for which mere enthusiasm, however admirable in itself, can never be an entirely satisfactory substitute.
>
> "On the 2nd of next month the company (No. 17) of the R.A. at present stationed at Pendennis Castle, Falmouth, will be sailing for Gibraltar on active service. Their successors, the 22nd Company, now at Chatham, will not be due to replace them until the New Year. And I have advised that your company be ordered down to the Castle to fill up the interval with a few weeks of active training.
>
> "May I say that I was deeply impressed by the concern you show in the health of your men? I agreed with well-nigh everything you said to me on this subject, and am confident you will in turn agree with me that nothing conduces more to the physical well-being of a body of troops, large or small, than an occasional change of air.
>
> "With kind regards and a request that you will remember me to the ladies who contributed so much to the amenities of my visit.— Believe me, dear sir, your obedient servant,
>
> "H. R. TAUBMANN (Lieut.-Colonel R.A.)."

I will dare to say that Colonel Taubmann never fired a shot in his life— round-shot, bomb or grenade, grape or canister—with a tithe of the effect wrought by this letter. For a whole day Looe was stunned, dismayed, desolated.

"And in Christmas week, of all holy seasons!" commented Gunner Spettigew. "And the very first Christmas the Die-hards have started a goose club!"

"And this," said Sergeant Pengelly, with bitter intonation, "is Peace on Earth and Good-will toward men, or what passes for such in the regulars. Wi' the carol-practisin' begun too, an' nobody left behind to take the bass!"

"Tis the Army all over!" announced William Henry Phippin, who had served as bo'sun's mate under Lord Howe. "I always was in two minds about belongin' to that branch o' the Service: for, put it how you will, 'tis a come-down for a fellow that has once known the satisfaction to march ahead of 'em. There was a sayin' we had aboard the old *Queen Charlotte*— 'A messmate afore a shipmate,' we said, 'an' a shipmate afore a dog, an' a dog, though he be a yellow dog, afore a sojer.' But what vexes me is the triumphant arches we wasted on such a chap."

"My love," said the Doctor to his spouse, "I congratulate you on your fancy for

professional soldiers. You are married to one, anyway."

"Dearest!"

"It comes to that, or very nearly." He groaned. "To be separated for three weeks from my Araminta! And at this time of all others!"—for the lady was again expecting to become a mother: as in due course (I am happy to say) she did, and presented him with a bouncing boy and was in turn presented with a silver cradle. But this, though the great event of the Doctor's mayoralty, will not excuse a longer digression.

Captain Pond kept his head, although upon his first perusal of the letter he had come near to fainting, and for a week after walked the streets with a tragic face. There was no appeal. Official instructions had followed the Colonel's informal warning. The die was cast. The Die-hards must march, must for three weeks be immured in Pendennis Castle, that infernal fortress.

To his lasting credit he pretermitted no effort to prepare his men and steel them against the ordeal, no single care for their creature-comforts. Short though the notice was, he interviewed the Mayoress and easily persuaded her to organise a working-party of ladies, who knitted socks, comforters, woollen gloves, etc., for the departing heroes, and on the eve of the march-out aired these articles singly and separately that they might harbour no moisture from the feminine tears which had too often bedewed the knitting. He raised a house-to-house levy of borrowed feather-beds. Geese for the men's Christmas dinner might be purchased at Falmouth, and joints of beef, and even turkeys (or so he was credibly informed). But on the fatal morning he rode out of Looe with six pounds of sausages and three large Christmas puddings swinging in bags at his saddle-bow.

What had sustained him was indignation, mingled with professional pride. He had been outraged, hurt in the very seat of local patriotism: but he would show these regulars what a Volunteer company could do. Yes, and (Heaven helping him) he would bring his men home unscathed, in health, with not a unit missing or sick or sorry. Out of this valley of humiliation every man should return—ay, and with laurels!

Forbear, my Muse, to linger over the scene of that departure! Captain Pond (I say) rode with six pounds of sausages and three puddings dangling at his saddle-bow. The Doctor rode in an ambulance-waggon crammed to the tilt with materials ranging from a stomach-pump to a backgammon-board; appliances not a few to restore the sick to health, appliances in far larger numbers to preserve health in the already healthy. Mr. Clogg, the second lieutenant, walked with a terrier and carried a bag of rats by way of provision against the dull winter evenings. Gunner Oke had strapped an accordion on top of his knapsack. Gunner Polwarne staggered under a barrel of marinated pilchards. Gunner Spettigew travelled light with a pack of cards, for fortune-telling and Pope Joan. He carried a Dream-Book and Wesley's Hymns in either hip-pocket (and very useful they both proved). Uncle Issy had lived long enough to know that intellectual comforts are more lasting than material ones, and cheaper, and that in the end folks are glad enough to give material comforts in payment for them.

It was in the dusk of the December evening—the day, to be precise, was Saturday, and the hour 5 p.m.—that our Die-hards, footsore and dispirited, arrived in Falmouth, and tramped through the long streets to Pendennis. The weather (providentially) was mild; but much rain had fallen, and the roads were heavy. Uncle Issy had ridden the last ten miles in the ambulance, and the print of a single-Glo'ster cheese adhered thereafter to the seat of his regimentals until the day when he handed them in and the East and West Looe Volunteer Artillery passed out of this transitory life to endure in memory.

They found the Castle in charge of a cross-grained, superannuated sergeant and his wife; of whom the one was partially deaf and the other totally. Also the regulars had marched out but three days before, and the apartments—the dormitories especially—were not in a condition to propitiate the squeamish. Also No. 17 Company of the Royal Artillery had included a notable proportion of absent-minded gunners who, in the words of a latter-day bard, had left a lot of little things behind them. Lieutenant Clogg, on being introduced to his quarters, openly and with excuse bewailed the trouble he had taken in carrying a bag of rats many weary miles. A second terrier would have been a wiser and less superfluous investment. As for the commissariat, nothing had been provided. The superannuated sergeant alleged that he had received no orders, and added cheerlessly that the shops in Falmouth had closed an hour ago. He wound up by saying incisively that he, for his part, had no experience of Volunteers nor of what they expected: and (to pass over this harrowing part of the business as lightly as may be) the Die-hards breakfasted next morning on hastily-cooked Christmas puddings.

The garrison clock had struck eleven before, dog-tired as they were, they had reduced the two dormitories to conditions of cleanliness in which it was possible for self-respecting men to lie down and take their sleep. And so they laid themselves down and slept, in their dreams remembering Looe and their families and rooms that, albeit small, were cosy, and beds that smelt of lavender. Captain Pond had apportioned to each man three fingers of rum, and in cases of suspected catarrh had infused a dose of quinine.

It was midnight before he lay down in his quarters, on bedding he had previously aired before a sullen fire. He closed his eyes—but only to sleep by fits and starts. How could his men endure three weeks of this? He must keep them occupied, amused.... He thought of amateur theatricals.... Good God! how unsatisfying a supper was biscuit, after a long day's ride! Was *this* how the regular army habitually lived?... What a pig's-sty of a barracks!... Well, it would rest upon Government, if he buried his men in this inhospitable hole. He raised himself on his pillow and stared at the fire. Strange, to think that only a few hours ago he had slept in Looe, and let the hours strike unheeded on his own parish clock! Strange! And his men must be feeling it no less, and he was responsible for them, for three weeks of *this*— and for their good behaviour!

Early next morning (Sunday) he was astir, and having shaved and dressed himself by lantern light, stepped down to the gate and roused up the superannuated sergeant with a demand to be conducted round the fortifications.

The sergeant—who answered to the incredible name of Topase—wanted to know what was the sense of worriting about the fortifications at this hour of the day: and, if his language verged on insubordination, his wife's was frankly mutinous. Captain Pond heard her from her bed exhorting her husband to close the window and not let in the draught upon her for the sake of any little Volunteer whipper-snapper in creation. "What next?" she should like to know, and "Tell the pestering man there's a bed of spring bulbs planted close under the wall, an' if he goes stampin' upon my li'l crocuges I'll have the law of him."

Captain Pond's authority, however, was not to be disobeyed, and a quarter of an hour later he found himself, with Sergeant Topase beside him, on the platform of the eighteen-pounder battery, watching the first rosy streaks of dawn as they spread and travelled across the misty sea at his feet. The hour was chilly, but it held the promise of a fine day; and in another twenty minutes, when the golden sunlight touched the walls of the old fortress and ran up the flagstaff above it in a needle of flame, he gazed around him on his temporary home, on the magnificent harbour, on the town of Falmouth climbing tier upon tier above the waterside, on the scintillating swell of the Channel without, and felt his chest expand with legitimate pride.

By this time the Doctor and Lieutenant Clogg had joined him, and their faces too wore a hopefuller, more contented look. Life at Pendennis might not prove so irksome after all, with plenty of professional occupation to relieve it. Captain Pond slipped an arm within the Doctor's, and together the three officers made a slow tour of the outer walls, plying Sergeant Topase with questions and disregarding his sulky hints that he, for his part, would be thankful to get a bite of breakfast.

"But what have we here?" asked Captain Pond suddenly, coming to a halt.

Their circuit had brought them round to the landward side of the fortress, to a point bearing south by east of the town, when through a breach—yes, a clean breach!—in the wall they gazed out across the fosse and along a high turfy ridge that roughly followed the curve of the cliffs and of the seabeach below. Within the wall, and backed by it,—save where the gap had been broken,—stood a group of roofless and half-dismantled outbuildings which our three officers studied in sheer amazement.

"What on earth is the meaning of this?"

"Married quarters," answered Sergeant Topase curtly. "You won't want 'em."

"Married quarters?"

"Leastways, that's what they was until three days ago. The workmen be pullin' 'em down to put up new ones."

"And in pulling them down they have actually pulled down twelve feet of the wall protecting the fortress?"

"Certainly: a bit of old wall and as rotten as touch. Never you fret: the Frenchies won't be comin' along whilst *you're* here!"—thus Sergeant Topase in tones of fine sarcasm.

"By whose orders has this breach been made?" Captain Pond demanded sternly.

"Nobody's. I believe, if you ask me, 'twas just a little notion of the contractor's, for convenience of getting in his material and carting away the rubbish. He'll fix up the wall again as soon as the job's over, and the place will be stronger than ever."

"Monstrous!" exclaimed Captain Pond. "Monstrous! And you tell us he has done this without orders and no one has interfered!"

"I don't see what there is to fret about, savin' your presence," the old sergeant persisted. "And, any way, 'twon't take the man three days at the outside to cart off the old buildings. Allow another four for getting in the new material—"

"Seven days! seven days! And Great Britain engaged at this moment in the greatest war of its history! Oh, Doctor, Doctor—these professionals!"

Sergeant Topase shrugged his shoulders, and, concluding that his duties as a cicerone were at an end, edged away to the gatehouse for his breakfast.

"Oh, these professionals!" ingeminated Captain Pond again, eyeing the breach and the dismantled married quarters. "A whole seven days! And for that period we are to rest exposed not only to direct attack, but to the gaze of the curious public—nay, perchance even (who knows?) to the paid spies of the Corsican! Doctor, we must post a guard here at once! Incredible that even this precaution should have been neglected! Nay,"— with a sudden happy inspiration he clapped the Doctor on the shoulder,— "did he say 'twould take three days to level this sorry heap?"

"He did."

"It shall not take us an hour! By George, sir, before daylight to-morrow we'll run up a nine-pounder, and have this rubbish down in five minutes! Yes, yes—and I'd do it to-day, if it weren't the Sabbath."

"I don't see that the Sabbath ought to count against what we may fairly call the dictates of national urgency," said the Doctor. " *Salus patriæ suprema lex*."

"What's that?"

"Latin. It means that when the State is endangered all lesser considerations should properly go to the wall. To me your proposal seems a brilliant one; just the happy inspiration that would never occur to the hidebound professional mind in a month of Sundays. And in your place I wouldn't allow the Sabbath or anything else—"

A yell interrupted him—a yell, followed by the sound of a scuffle and, after a moment's interval, by a shout of triumph. These noises came from the roofless married quarters, and the voice of triumph was Lieutenant Clogg's, who had stepped inside the building while his seniors stood conversing, and now emerged dragging a little man by the collar, while with his disengaged hand he flourished a paper excitedly.

"A spy! A spy!" he panted.

"Hey?"

"I caught him in the act!" Mr. Clogg thrust the paper into his Captain's hands and, turning upon his captive, shook him first as one shakes a fractious child, and then planted him vigorously on his feet and demanded what he had to say for himself.

The captive could achieve no more than a stutter. He was an extremely little man, dressed in the Sunday garb of a civilian—fustian breeches, moleskin waistcoat, and a frock of blue broadcloth, very shiny at the seams. His hat had fallen off in the struggle, and his eyes, timorous as a hare's, seemed to plead for mercy while he stammered for speech.

"Good Lord!" cried Captain Pond, gazing at the paper. "Look, Doctor—a plan!"

"A sketch plan!"

"A plan of our defences!"

"Damme, a plan of the whole Castle, and drawn to scale! Search him, Clogg; search the villain!"

"Wha-wha-*what*," stuttered the little man, "WHAT'S the m-m-meaning of this? S-somebody shall p-pay, as sure as I—I—I—"

"Pay, sir?" thundered Captain Pond as Mr. Clogg dragged forth yet another bundle of plans from the poor creature's pocket. "You have seen the last penny you'll ever draw in your vile trade."

"Wha-*what* have I—I—I DONE?"

"Heaven knows, sir—Heaven, which has interposed at this hour to thwart this treacherous design—alone can draw the full indictment against your past. Clogg, march him off to the guard-room: and you, Doctor, tell Pengelly to post a guard outside the door. In an hour's time I may feel myself sufficiently composed to examine him, and we will hold a full inquiry to-morrow. Good Lord!"—Captain Pond removed his hat and wiped his brow. "Good Lord! what an escape!"

"I'll—I'll have the l-l-law on you for t-th-this!" stammered the prisoner sulkily an hour later when Captain Pond entered his cell.

No other answer would he give to the Captain's closest interrogatory. Only he demanded that a constable should be fetched. He was told that in England a constable had no power of interference with military justice.

"Y-you are a s-s-silly fool!" answered the prisoner, and turned away to his bench.

Captain Fond, emerging from the cell, gave orders to supply him with a loaf of bread and a pitcher of water. Down in Falmouth the bells were ringing for church. In the Castle a Sabbath stillness reigned. Sergeant Topase, napping and reading his Bible by turns before the gatehouse fire, remarked to his wife that on the whole these silly amachoors were giving less trouble than he had expected.

At 7.45 next morning Gunner Israel Spettigew, having relieved guard with Gunner Oke at the breach, and advised him to exhibit a dose of black-currant wine before turning in (as a specific against a chill in the extremities), was proceeding leisurably to cut himself a quid of tobacco when he became aware of two workmen—carpenters they appeared to be in the dim light—approaching the entry.

"Who goes there?" he challenged. "'Tis no use my asking you for the countersign, because I've forgotten it myself: but there's No Admittance except on Business."

"That's what we've come upon," said one of the workmen. "By the looks of 'ee you must be one of the new Artillerymen from Looe that can't die however hard they want to. But didn' Jackson tell you to look out for us?"

"Who's Jackson?"

"Why, our Clerk of the Works. He's somewhere inside surely? He usually turns up half an hour ahead of anyone else, his heart's so set on this job."

"I haven't seen 'en go by, to my knowledge," said Uncle Issy.

The two men looked at one another. "Not turned up? Then there must be something the matter with 'en this morning: taken poorly with over-work, I reckon. Oh, you can't miss Jackson when once you've set eyes on him—a little chap with a face like a rabbit and a 'pediment in his speech."

"Hey?" said Uncle Issy sharply. "What? A stammerin' little slip of a chap in a moleskin waistcoat?"

"That's the man. Leastways I never see'd him wear a moleskin waistcoat, 'xcept on Sundays."

"But it *was* Sunday!"

"Hey?"

"Oh, tell me—tell me, that's dear souls! Makes a whistly noise in his speech—do he?—like a slit bellows?"

"That's Jackson, to a hair. But—but—then you *hev* seen 'en?"

"Seen 'en?" cried Uncle Issy. "A nice miss I ha'n't helped to bury 'en, by this time! Oh yes... if you want Jackson he's inside: an' what's more, he's a long way inside. But you can't want him half so much as he'll be wantin' you."

HIS EXCELLENCY'S PRIZE-FIGHT.

My grand-uncle pushed the decanter of brown sherry: a stout old-fashioned decanter, with shoulders almost as square as his own, and a silver chain about them bearing a silver label—not unlike the badge and collar which he himself wore on full ceremonial occasions.

"Three times round the world," he said, "and as yet only twice around the table. You must do it justice, gentlemen."

"A great wine, Admiral!" said the Rector, filling and sipping, with half-closed eyes. "They have a brown sherry at Christ Church which may challenge it, perhaps... The steward remembers my weakness when I go up to preach my afternoon sermon at St. Mary's. There was talk in Congregation, the other day, of abolishing afternoon sermons, on the ground that nobody attended them; but this, as one speaker feelingly observed, would deprive the country clergy of a dear privilege...." The Rector took another sip. "An heroic contest, between two such wines!"

"Talking of heroic contests, mine came to me by means of a prize-fight," said my grand-uncle, with a glance down the table at us two youngsters who were sipping and looking wise, as became connoisseurs fresh from the small beer of a public school. At the word 'prize-fight,' Dick and I pricked up our ears. To us the Admiral was at once a prodigiously fine fellow and a prodigiously old one—though he dated after Nelson's day, to us he reached well back to it, and in fact he had been a midshipman in the last two years of the Great War. Certainly he belonged to the old school rather than to the new. He had fought under Codrington at Navarino. He had talked with mighty men of the ring—Tom Cribb, Jem Mace, Belcher, Sayers.

"What is more," said he, "though paid late, the wine you're drinking is the first prize-money I ever took; in my first ship, lads, and within forty-eight hours of joining her.... Youth, youth!"—as the decanter came around to him he refilled his glass.—"And to think that I was a good two years younger than either of you!"

"A prize-fight? You'll tell us about it, sir?" ventured Dick eagerly.

"The Rector has heard the yarn before, I doubt?" said the old man, with a glance which told that he only needed pressing.

"That objection," the Rector answered tactfully, "has been lodged against certain of my sermons. I never let it deter me."

"There's a moral in it, too," said my grand-uncle, visibly reassured.

Well, as for the moral, I cannot say that I have ever found it, to swear by. But here is my grand-uncle's story.

If you want a seaman, they say, you must catch him young, and I will add that the first hour for him is the best. Eh? Young men have talked to me of the day when they first entered Oxford or Cambridge—of the moment, we'll say, when the London coach topped the Shotover rise in the early morning, and they saw all the towers and spires at their feet. I am willing to believe it good. And the first kiss,—when you and she are young fools and over head and ears in love,—you'll know what I mean, you boys, when you grow to it, and I am not denying that it brings heaven down to earth and knocks their heads together. But for bliss—sheer undiluted bliss—match me the day when a boy runs upstairs and sees his midshipman's outfit laid out on the bed—blue jacket, brass buttons, dirk, yes, and in my sea time a kind of top-hat that fined away towards the top, with a cockade. I tell you I spent an hour looking at myself in my poor mother's cheval-glass, and then walked out across the common to show myself to my aunts,—rest their souls!—who inhabited a cottage about a mile from ours, and had been used hitherto, when entertaining me, to ask one another in French if the offer of a glass of beer would, considering my age, be permissible. I drank sherry with them that afternoon, and left them (I make no doubt) with a kind of tacit assurance that, come what might, they were henceforward secure of protection.

The next day—though it blew a short squall of tears when I took leave of my mother and climbed aboard the coach—was scarcely less glorious. I wore my uniform, and nursed my toasting-fork proudly across my knees; and the passengers one and all made much of me, in a manner which I never allowed to derogate into coddling. At The Swan with Two Necks, Cheapside, when the coach set me down, I behaved as a man should; ordered supper and a bed; and over my supper discussed the prospects of peace with an affable, middle-aged bagman who shared my box. He thought well of the prospects of peace. For me, I knitted my brows and gave him to understand that circumstances might alter cases.

From The Swan with Two Necks I took coach next morning—proceeding from the bar to the door between two lines of smiling domestics—and travelled down to the Blue Posts, the famous Blue Posts, at Portsmouth. In the Blue Posts there was a smoking-room, and across the end of it ran a sofa on which (tradition said) you might count on finding a midshipman

asleep. I was not then aware of the tradition; but sure enough a midshipman reclined there when I entered the room. He was not asleep, but engaged in perusing something which he promptly, even hastily, stowed away in the breast of his tunic—a locket, I make no doubt. He sat up and regarded me; and I stared back at him, how long I will not say, but long enough for me to perceive that his jacket buttons were as glossy as my own. I noted this; but it conveyed little to me, for my imagination clothed in equal splendour everyone in his Majesty's service.

He appeared to be young, even delicately youthful; but I felt it necessary to assert my manhood before him, and rang for the waiter.

"A glass of beer, if you please," said I.

The waiter lifted his eyebrows and looked from me to the sofa.

"*One* glass of beer, sir?" he asked.

"I hardly like to offer—" I began lamely, following his glance.

"It is more usual, sir. *In* the Service. Between two young gentlemen as, by the addresses on their chestes, is both for the *Melpomeny*: and newly joined."

"Hulloa!" said I, turning round to the sofa, "are you in the same fix as myself?"

Reading in his face that it was so, I corrected my order, and waved the waiter to the door with creditable self-possession. As soon as he had withdrawn, "My name's Rodd," said I. "What's yours?"

"Hartnoll," he said; "from Norfolk."

"I come from the West—Devonshire," said I, and with an air of being proud of it; but added, on an afterthought, "Norfolk must be a fine county, though I've never seen it. Nelson came from there, didn't he?"

"His place is only six miles from ours," said Hartnoll. "I've seen it scores of times."

And with that he stuck his hands suddenly in his pockets, turned away from me, and stared very resolutely out of the dirty bow-window.

When the waiter had brought the drinks and retired again, Hartnoll confessed to me that he had never tasted beer. "You'll come to it in time," said I encouragingly: but I fancy that the tap at the Blue Posts was of a quality to discourage a first experiment. He tasted his, made a face, and suggested that I might deal with both glasses. I had, to begin with, ordered the beer out of bravado, and one gulp warned me that bravado might be carried too far. I managed, indeed—being on my mettle—to drain my own glass, and even achieved a noise which, with Hartnoll, might pass for a smacking of the lips: but we decided to empty his out of window, for fear of the waiter's scorn. We heaved up the lower sash—the effort it cost went some way to explaining the fustiness of the room—and Hartnoll tossed out the beer.

There was an exclamation below.

While we craned out to see what had happened, the waiter's voice smote on our ears from the doorway behind us, saying that young gentlemen would be young gentlemen all the world over, but a new beaver hat couldn't be bought for ten shillings. Everything must have a beginning, of course, but the gentleman below was annoyed, and threatened to come upstairs. It wasn't perhaps exactly the thing to come to the Port Admiral's ears: but if we left it to *him* (the waiter) he had a notion that ten shillings, with a little tact, might clear it, and no bones broken.

Hartnoll, somewhat white in the face, tendered the sum, and very pluckily declined to let me bear my share. "You'll excuse me, Rodd," said he politely, "but I must make it a point of honour." Pale though he was, I believe he would have offered to fight me had I insisted.

Our instructions, it turned out, were identical. We were to be called for at the Blue Posts, and a boat would fetch us off to the *Melpomene* frigate. Her captain, it appeared, was a kind of second cousin of Hartnoll's: for me, I had been recommended to him by a cousin of my father's, a member of the Board of Admiralty. Captain the Hon. John Suckling treated us, nearly or remotely as we might be connected with him, with impartiality that night. No boat came off for us. We learned that the *Melpomene* was lying at Spithead, waiting (so the waiter told us) to carry out a new Governor with his suite to Barbados; which possibly accounted for her captain's neglect of such small fry as two midshipmen. The waiter, however, advised us not to trouble ourselves. He would make it all right in the morning.

So Hartnoll and I supped together in the empty coffee-room; compared notes; drank a pint of port apiece; and under its influence became boastful. Insensibly the adventure of the beaver hat came to wear the aspect of a dashing practical joke. It encouraged us to exchange confidences of earlier deeds of derring-do, of bird-nesting, of rook-shooting, of

angling for trout, of encounters with poachers. I remember crossing my knees, holding up my glass to the light, and remarking sagely that some poachers were not at all bad fellows. Hartnoll agreed that it depended how you took 'em. We lauded Norfolk and Devon as sporting counties, and somehow it was understood that they respectively owed much of their reputation to the families of Hartnoll and Rodd. Hartnoll even hinted at a love-affair: but here I discouraged him with a frown, which implied that as seamen we saw that weakness in its proper light. I have wondered, since then, to what extent we imposed upon one another: in fact, I daresay, very little; but in spirit we gave and took fire. We were two ardent boys, and we meant well.

"Here's to the Service!" said I, holding up my glass.

"To the Service!" echoed Hartnoll; drained his, set it down, and looked across at me with a flushed face.

"With quick promotion and a plenty of prize-money!" said a voice in the doorway. It was that diabolical waiter again, entering to remove the cloth: and for a moment I felt my ears redden. Recovering myself, I told him pretty strongly not to intrude again upon the conversation of gentlemen; but added that since he had presumed to take part in the toast, he might fetch himself a tankard of beer and drink to it. Whereupon he thanked me, begged my pardon for having taken the liberty, and immediately took another, telling me that anyone having *his* experience of young gentlemen could see with half an eye that I was born to command.

"Tell you what," said I to Hartnoll when the waiter had left us, "that fellow has given me a notion, with his talk about prize-money. I don't half like owing you my share of that ten shillings, you know."

"I thought we were agreed not to mention it again," said Hartnoll, firing up.

Said I, "But there's my view of it to be considered. Suppose now we put it on to our first prize-money—whoever makes the first haul to pay the whole ten shillings, and if we make it together, then each to pay five?"

"That won't do," said Hartnoll. "My head don't seem able to follow you very clearly, but if we make our first haul together, the matter remains where it is."

"Very well," I yielded. "Then I must get ahead of you, to get quits."

"You won't, though," said Hartnoll, pushing back his chair, and so dismissing the subject.

Now the evening being young, I proposed that we should sally forth together and view the town—in other words (though I avoided them) that we should flaunt our uniforms in the streets of Portsmouth. Hartnoll demurred: the boat (said he) might arrive in our absence. I rang for the waiter again, and took counsel with him. The waiter began by answering that the Blue Posts, though open day and night, would take it as a favour if gentlemen patronising the house would make it convenient to knock-in before midnight, and, if possible, retire to their rooms before that hour. He understood our desire to see the town; "it was, in fact, the usual thing, under the circumstances." If I would not take it as what he might call (and did) call a libbaty, there was a good many bad characters knocking about Portsmouth, pickpockets included, and especially at fair-time.

"Fair-time?" I asked.

"At the back of the town—Kingston way—you will find it," said he, with a jerk of the thumb.

"But," said I, "the frigate might send off a boat for us."

"Not a chance of it to-night, sir," said the waiter. "The southerly breeze has been bringing up a fog these two hours past, and the inside of the harbour is thick as soup. More by token, I've already sent word to the chambermaid to fill a couple of warming-pans. You're booked with us, gentlemen, till to-morrow morning."

Sure enough, descending to the street, we found it full of fog; and either the fog was of remarkable density, or Portsmouth furnished with the worst street-lamps in the world, for we had not walked five hundred yards before it dawned on me that to find our hostelry again might not be an entirely simple matter. Maybe the port wine had induced a haze of its own upon my sense of locality. I fancied, too, that the fresh air was affecting Hartnoll, unless his gait feigned a sea-roll to match his uniform. I felt a delicacy in asking him about it.

Another thing that surprised me was the emptiness of the streets. I had always imagined Portsmouth to be a populous town… but possibly its inhabitants were congregated around the fair, towards which we set ourselves to steer, guided by the tunding of distant drums. It mattered little If we lost our bearings, since everybody in Portsmouth must know the Blue Posts.

"Tell you what it is, Rodd," said Hartnoll, pulling up in a by-street and picking his words deliberately,—"tell you what accounts for it,"—he waved a hand at the emptiness surrounding us. "It's the press. Very night for it; and the men all hiding within doors."

"Nonsense," said I. "It's a deal likelier to be the Fat Woman or the Two-headed Calf."

"It's the press," insisted Hartnoll: and for the moment, when we emerged out of a side lane upon a square filled with flaring lights, the crashing of drums and cymbals, and the voices of showmen yelling in front of their booths, I had a suspicion that he was right. One or two women, catching sight of our uniforms, edged away swiftly, and, as they went, peered back into the darkness of the lane behind us. A few minutes later, as we dodged around the circumference of the crowd in search of an opening, we ran up against one of the women with her man in tow. She was arguing with him in a low, eager sort of voice, and he followed sulkily. At sight of us again she fetched up with a gasp of breath, almost with a squeal. The man drew himself up defiantly and began to curse us, but she quickly interrupted him, thrusting her open hand over his mouth, and drew him away down a dark courtyard.

After this we found ourselves in the glare immediately under the platform of a booth; and two minutes later were mounting the rickety steps, less of our own choice than by pressure of the crowd behind. The treat promised us within was the Siege of Copenhagen with real fireworks, which as an entertainment would do as well as another. On the way up Hartnoll whispered to me to keep my hands in my breeches pockets, if I carried my money there; and almost on the same instant cried out that someone had stolen his dirk. He stood lamenting, pointing to the empty sheath, while a stout woman at a table took our entrance-money with an impassive face. The Siege of Copenhagen was what you youngsters nowadays would call a 'fizzle,' I believe: or maybe Hartnoll's face of woe and groanings over his lost dirk damped the fireworks for me. But these were followed by a performing pony, which, after some tricks, being invited by his master to indicate among the audience a gentleman addicted to kissing the ladies and running away, thrust its muzzle affectionately into my waistcoat; whereat Hartnoll recovered his spirits at a bound, and treacherously laughed louder than any of the audience. I thought it infernally bad taste, and told him so. But, as it happened, I had a very short while to wait for revenge: for in the very next booth, being invited to pinch the biceps of the Fat Woman, my gentleman-of-the-world blushed to the eyes, cast a wild look around for escape, and turned, to fall into the arms of a couple of saucy girls who pushed him forward to hold him to his bargain. His eyes were red—he was positively crying with shame and anger—when we found ourselves outside under the torchlights that made flaming haloes in the fog.

"Hang it, Rodd! I've had enough of this fair. Let's get back to the Posts."

"What's the time?" said I, and felt for my watch.

My watch had disappeared.

It had been my mother's parting gift, and somehow the loss of it made me feel, with a shock, utterly alone in the world. Why on earth had I not clung to the respectable shelter of the Blue Posts? What a hollow mockery were these brazen cymbals, these hoarse inviting voices, these coarse show-cloths, these lights!

Curiously enough, and as if in instant sympathy with my dejection, the cymbals ceased to clash. The showmen began to extinguish their torches. I had lost my watch; Hartnoll did not own one. But we agreed that, at latest, the hour could not be much more than ten. Yet the shows were closing, the populace was melting away into the fog.

"I've had enough of this. Let's get back to the Posts," Hartnoll repeated. His eyes told me that up to two days ago, when he left home, nine o'clock or thereabouts had been his regular bedtime. It had been mine also.

One of the two saucy girls, happening to pass an instant before the booth above us extinguished its lights, spied us in dejected colloquy, and came forward. Hartnoll turned from her, but I made bold to ask her the nearest way to the Blue Posts.

I will give you her exact answer. She said—"Turn up on your right hand at the next turning, but, at the next turning of all, on your left; marry, at the very next turning, turn of no hand, but turn down indirectly to the Blue Postesses."

I have it by heart, because years after I found it in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, where you may find it for yourselves, if you look, with the answer I might have made to her. She did not wait for one, however, but stood looking around in the fog as if for a guide. "Poor lads!" she went on, "you'll certainly never reach it without help, though everyone in Portsmouth knows the Blue Posts: and I'd go with you myself if I weren't due at the theatre in ten minutes' time. I have to call on the manager as soon as the house empties to-night; and if I miss it will mean losing an engagement." She puckered her brow thoughtfully, and her face in spite of the paint on it struck me as a lovely one, saucy no longer but almost angelically kind. I have never seen her again from that day to this, and I was a boy of fourteen, but I'll wager that girl had a good heart. "Your best plan," she decided, "is to step

along with me, and at the stage door, or inside the theatre at any rate, we'll soon find somebody to put you in the way."

But here a small figure stepped out against us from the shadow of the platform, and a small shrillish voice piped up—

"For a copper, miss—or a copper apiece if they'll trust me. Find the Blue Postesses? W'y, I'd walk there on my head with my eyes bound!"

We stared down at her—for it was a small girl, a girl so diminutive that Hartnoll and I, who were not Anaks by any means, topped her by head and shoulders. She wore no shoes, no stockings, no covering for her head. Her hair, wet with the fog, draggled down, half-hiding her face, which was old for its age (as they say), and chiefly by reason of her sharp, gipsy-coloured eyes.

"For a copper apiece, miss, and honour bright!" said the waif.

The young actress turned to us with a laugh. "Why not?" she asked. "That is, if you're not above being beholden to the child? But I warn you not to pay her till you get to the Blue Posts."

I answered that any port was good in a storm, and the child should have sixpence if she proved as good as her word.

"So long, then, my pair of seventy-fours. I'm late for the theatre already. Good-night! and when you tuck yourselves in to bye-low don't forget to dream of your mammies." Bending quickly, she kissed Hartnoll on the cheek, and was in the act to offer me a like salute when I dodged aside, angered by her last words. She broke into a laugh like a chime of bells, made a pretty pout at me with her lips and disappeared into the darkness. Then it struck me that I need not have lost my temper; but I was none the more inclined to let Hartnoll down easily.

"I call that pretty meek," said I, as we walked off together, the child pattering, barefoot, beside us.

"What's the matter?" asked Hartnoll.

"Why, to let that girl kiss you—like a baby!"

"Sure you're not thinking of sour grapes?"

"I take you to witness," said I, "that she tried it on and I wouldn't let her."

"The more fool you!" retorted Hartnoll, edging away from me in dudgeon— but I knew he was more than half ashamed. Just at that moment to my astonishment I felt the child at my side reach up and touch my hand.

"Ugh!" said I, drawing it away quickly. "Paws off, please! Eh?—what's this?" For she was trying to thrust something into it and to close my fingers upon it.

"Hush!" she whispered. "It's your watch."

I gave a whistle. "My watch? How the deuce did *you* come by my watch?"

"Prigged it," said the child in a business-like voice. "Don't know why I gave it back: seemed that I wanted to. That's why I offered to come with you: and now I'm glad. Don't care if I *do* get a hiding."

For the moment, while she plodded alongside, I could only feel the watch over in my hand, making sure that it was really mine.

"But," said I, after a long pause of wonder, "you don't suppose that *I* want to give you a hiding, eh?—and you a girl, too!"

"No."

"Then who's going to beat you?"

"Mother." After a moment she added reassuringly, "But I've got another inside o' my bodice."

I whistled again, and called up Hartnoll, who had been lagging behind sulkily. But he lost his sulks when I showed him the watch: and he too whistled, and we stood stock-still gazing at the child, who had halted with one bare foot on the edge of the gutter.

"She has another about her," said I. "She confessed it."

"Good Lord!" As the child made a motion to spring away, Hartnoll stepped out across the gutter and intercepted her. "I—I say," he stammered, "you don't by any chance happen to have my dirk?"

She fell to whimpering. "Lemme go... I took pity on yer an' done yer a kindness... put myself out o' the way, I did, and this is what I get for it. Thought you was kind-hearted, I did, and—if you don't lemme go, I'll leave you to find your way, and before mornin' the crimps'll get you." She threatened us, trembling with passion, shaking her finger at the ugly darkness.

"Look here," said I, "if you said anything about another watch, understand that I didn't hear. You don't suppose I want to take it from you? I'm only too glad to have my own again, and thank you."

"I thought *'e* might," she said, only half-reassured, jerking a nod towards Hartnoll. "As for his dirk, I never took it, but I know the boy as did. He lives the way we're going, and close down by the water; and if you spring a couple o' tanners maybe I'll make him give it up."

"I'd give all I possess to get back that dirk," said Hartnoll, and I believe he meant it.

"Come along, then,"—and we plunged yet deeper into the dark bowels of Portsmouth. The child had quite recovered her confidence, and as we went she explained to us quite frankly why her mother would be angry. The night—if I may translate out of her own language, which I forget— was an ideal one for pocket-picking, what with the crowd at the fair, and the fog, and (best of all, it seemed) the constables almost to a man drawn off to watch the roads around Fareham.

"But what," I asked, "is the matter with Fareham?"

My ignorance staggered her. "What? Hadn't we heard of the great Prize-fight?" We had not. "Not the great fight coming off between Jem Clark and the Dustman?" We were unfamiliar even with the heroes' names.

She found this hard—very hard—to believe. Why, Portsmouth was full of it, word having come down from London the date was to-morrow, and that Fareham, or one of the villages near Fareham, the field of battle. The constabulary, too, had word of it—worse luck—and were on their mettle to break up the meeting, as the sportsmen of Portsmouth and its neighbourhood were all on their mettle to attend it. This, explained the child in her thin clear voice,—I can hear it now discoursing its sad, its infinitely weary wisdom to us two Johnny Newcomes,—this was the reason why the fair had closed early. The show-folk were all waiting, so to speak, for a nod. The tip given, they would all troop out northward, on each other's heels, greedy for the aftermath of the fight. Rumour filled the air, and every rumour chased after the movements of the two principals and their trainers, of whom nothing was known for certain save that they had left London, and (it was said) had successfully dodged a line of runners posted for some leagues along the Bath and Portsmouth roads. For an hour, soon after sunset, the town had been stunned by a report that Brighton, after all, would be the venue: a second report said Newbury, or at any rate a point south-west of Reading. Fire drives out fire: a third report swore positively that Clark and the Dustman were in Portsmouth, in hiding, and would run the cordon in the small hours of the morning.

So much—and also that her own name was Meliar-Ann and her mother kept a sailor's lodging-house—the small creature told us, still trotting by our side, until we found ourselves walking alongside a low wall over which we inhaled strong odours of the sea and of longshore sewage, and spied the riding-lights of the harbour looming through the fog. At the end of this we came to the high walls of a row of houses, all very quiet and black to the eye, except that here and there a chink of light showed through a window-shutter or the sill of a street-door. Throughout that long walk I had an uncanny sensation as of being led through a town bewitched, hushed, but wakeful and expectant of something.... I can get no nearer to explaining. We must have passed a score of taverns at least; of that I have assured myself by many a later exploration of Portsmouth: and in those days a Portsmouth tavern never closed day or night, save for the death of a landlord, nor always for that. But to-night a murmur at most distinguished it from the other houses in the street.

Meliar-Ann solved the puzzle for us, with a wise nod of the head—

"There's a press out; or elst they're expecting one," she said.

I heard a distant clock chiming for midnight as we followed her along this row of houses. Ahead of us a door opened, throwing a thin line of light upon the roadway, and was closed again softly, after the person within had stood listening (as it seemed to me) for five seconds or so.

Meliar-Ann started suddenly in front of us, spreading her arms out, then slowly backwards, and so motioning us to halt under the shadow of the wall. Obeying, we saw her tiptoe forwards, till, coming to the door which had just been closed, she crept close and tapped on it softly, yet in a way that struck me as being deliberate. Afterwards, thinking it over, I felt pretty sure that the child knocked by code.

At all events the door opened again, almost at once and as noiselessly as before. Hartnoll

and I squeezed our bodies back in the foggy shadow, and I heard a voice ask, "Is that Smithers?" To this Meliar-Ann made some response which I could not catch, but its effect was to make the voice—a woman's—break out in a string of querulous cursings. "Drat the child!" it said (or rather, it said something much stronger which I won't repeat before the Rector. Eh, Rector—what's that you say? *Maxima debetur pueris*—oh, make yourself easy: I won't corrupt their morals). "Drat the child!" it said, then, or words to that effect. "Bothering here at this time of night, when Bill's been a-bed this hour and a half, and time you was the same." To this Meliar-Ann made, and audibly, the briefest possible answer. She said, "You lie." "Strike me dead!" replied the woman's voice in the doorway. "You lie," repeated the child; "and you'd best belay to that. Bill's been stealin' and got himself into trouble... a midshipman's dirk, it was, and he was seen taking it. I've run all this way to warn him...." The two voices fell to muttering. "You can slip inside if you like and tell him quietly," said the woman after a while. "He's upstairs and asleep too, for all I know. If he brought any such thing home with him *I* never saw it, and to that I'll take my oath."

But here another and still angrier voice—a virago's—broke in from the passage behind, demanding to know if the door was being kept open to invite the whole town. The child stood her ground on the doorstep. An instant later a hand reached out, clutched her—it seemed by the hair— and dragged her inside. Then followed a strangling sob and the thud of heavy blows—

"Rodd, I can't stand this," whispered Hartnoll.

I answered, "Nor I;" and together we made a spring for it and hurled into the passage, bearing back the woman who tried to hold the door against us.

At the rush of our footsteps the virago dropped Meliar-Ann and fled down the passage towards a doorway, through which she burst, screaming. The child, borne forward by our combined weight, tottered and fell almost across the threshold of this room, where a flight of stairs, lit by a dingy lamp, led up into obscure darkness. On the third stair under the lamp I caught a momentary vision of a dirty, half-naked boy standing with a drawn dirk in his hand, and with that, my foot catching against Meliar-Ann's body, I pitched past, head foremost, into the lighted room.

As I fell I heard, or seemed to hear, a scuffle of feet, followed by a shout from Hartnoll behind us—"My dirk! You dirty young villain!"—and another stampede, this time upon the stairway. Then, all of a sudden, the room was quiet, and I picked myself up and fell back against the door-post, face to face with half a dozen women.

They were assuredly the strangest set of females I had ever set eyes on, and the tallest-grown: nor did it relieve my astonishment to note that they wore bonnets and shawls, as if for a journey, and that two or three were smoking long clay pipes. The room, in fact, was thick with tobacco-smoke, through the reek of which my eyes travelled to a disorderly table crowded with glasses and bottles of strong waters, in the midst of which two tallow dips illuminated the fog; and beyond the table to the figure of a man stooping over a couple of half-packed valises; an enormously stout man swathed in greatcoats—a red-faced, clean-shaven man, with small piggish eyes which twinkled at me wickedly as I picked myself up, and he, too, stood erect to regard me.

"Press-gang be d—d!" he growled, answering the virago's call of warning. "More likely a spree ashore. And where might *you* come from, young gentleman? And what might be *your* business to-night, breakin' into a private house?"

I cast a wild look over the bevy of forbidding females and temporised, backing a little until my shoulder felt the door-post behind me.

"I was trying to find my way to the Blue Posts," said I.

"Then," said the stout man with obvious truth, "you ain't found it yet."

"No, sir," said I.

"And that bein' the case, you'll march out and close the door behind you. Not,"—he went on more kindly—"that I'd be inhospitable to his Majesty's uniform, 'specially when borne by a man of your inches; and to prove it I'll offer you a drink before parting."

He reached out a hand towards one of the black bottles. I was about to thank him and decline, withdrawing my eyes from a black-bonneted female with (unless the shadow of her bonnet played me false) a stiff two-days' beard on her massive chin, when a noise of feet moving over the boards above, and of a scuffle, followed by loud whimpering, reminded me of Hartnoll.

"I don't go without my mate," I answered defiantly enough.

"And what the '—' have I to do with your mate?" demanded the stout man. "I tell you," said he, losing his temper and striding to the stairway, as the sounds of a struggle recommenced overhead, "if your mate don't hold the noise he's kicking up this instant,

bringing trouble on respectable folks, I'll cut his liver out and fling it arter you into the street."

He would have threatened more, though he could hardly have threatened worse, but at this moment a door opened in the back of the room and a bullet-head thrust itself forward, followed by a pair of shoulders naked and magnificently shaped.

"Time to start, is it?" demanded the apparition. "Or elst what in thunder's the meanin' o' this racket, when I was just a-gettin' of my beauty sleep?"

The stout man let out a murderous oath, and, rushing back, thrust the door close upon the vision; but not before I had caught a glimpse of a woman's skirt enwrapping it from the waist down. The next moment one of the females had caught me up: I was propelled down the passage at a speed and with a force that made the blood sing in my ears, and shot forth into the darkness; where, as I picked myself up, half-stunned, I heard the house-door slammed behind me.

I take no credit for what I did next. No doubt I remembered that Hartnoll was still inside; but for aught I know it was mere shame and rage, and the thought of my insulted uniform, that made me rush back at the door and batter it with fists and feet. I battered until windows went up in the houses to right and left. Voices from them called to me; still I battered: and still I was battering blindly when a rush of footsteps came down the street and a hand, gripping me by the collar, swung me round into the blinding ray of a dark lantern.

"Hands off!" I gasped, half-choked, but fighting to break away.

"All right, my game-cock!" A man's knuckles pressed themselves firmly into the nape of my neck. "Hullo! By gosh, sir, if it ain't a midshipman!"

"A midshipman?" said a voice of command. "Slew him round here.... So it is, by George!... and a nice time of night! Hold him up, bo'sun—you needn't be choking the lad. Now then, boy, what's your name and ship?"

"Rodd, sir—of the *Melpomene*—and there's another inside—" I began.

"The *Melpomene!*"

"Yes, sir: and there's my friend inside, and for all I know they're murdering him.... A lot of men dressed up as women.... His name's Hartnoll—" I struggled to make away for another rush at the door, and had my heel against it, when it gave way and Hartnoll came flying out into the night. The officer, springing past me, very cleverly thrust in a foot before it could be closed again.

"Men dressed as women, you say?"

"It's an old trick, sir," panted the bo'sun, pushing forward. "I've knowed it played ever since I served on a press. If you'll let the boys draw covert, sir... they've had a blank night, an' their tempers'll be the better for it."

He planted his shoulder against the door, begging for the signal, and the crew closed up around the step with a growl.

"My dirk!" pleaded Hartnoll. "I was getting it away, but one of 'em half-broke my arm and I dropped it again in the passage."

"Hey? Stolen your dirk—have they? That's excuse enough.... Right you are, men, and in you go!"

He waved his cocked hat to them as a huntsman lays on his hounds. In went the door with a crash, and in two twos I was swept up and across the threshold and surging with them down the passage. By reason of my inches I could see nothing of what was happening ahead. I heard a struggle, and in the midst of it a hand went up and smashed the lamp over the stairway, plunging us all in total darkness. But the lieutenant had his lantern ready, and by the rays of it the sailors burst open the locked door at the end and flung themselves upon the Amazons before the candles could be extinguished. At the same moment the lieutenant called back an order over my head to his whippers-in, to find their way around and take the house in the rear.

The women, though overmatched, fought like cats—or like bull-dogs rather. They were borne down to the floor, but even here for a while the struggle heaved and swayed this way and that, and I had barely time to snatch up one of the candles before table, bottles, glasses, went over in a general ruin. Above the clatter of it and the cursing, as I turned to stick the candle upright in a bottle on the dresser, I heard a cheer raised from somewhere in the back premises, and two men came rushing from the inner room—two men in feminine skirts, the one naked to the waist, the other clad about his chest and neck with a loose flannel shirt and a knotted Belcher handkerchief.

They paused for just about the time it would take you to count five; paused while they drew themselves up for the charge; and the lieutenant, reading the battle in their faces—and no ordinary battle either—shouted to close the door. He shouted none too soon. In a flash the pair were upon us, and at the first blow two sailors went down like skittles. There must have been at least twenty sailors in the room, and all of them willing, yet in that superb charge the pair drove them like sheep, and the naked man had even time to drag the dresser from the clamps fastening it to the wall and hurl it down between himself and three seamen running to take him in flank. The candle went down with it: but the lieutenant, skipping back to the closed door, very pluckily held up his lantern and called on his men, in the same breath forbidding them to use their cutlasses yet. In the circumstances this was generous, and I verily believe he would have been killed for it—the pair being close upon him and their fists going like hammers—had not one of the seamen whipped out a piece of rope and, ducking low, dived under the naked man's guard and lassoed him by the ankles. Two others, who had been stretched on the floor, simultaneously grabbed his companion by the skirts and wound their arms about his knees: and so in a trice both heroes were brought to ground. Even so they fought on until quieted by two judicious taps with the hilt of the boatswain's cutlass. I honestly thought he had killed them, but was assured they were merely stunned for the time. The boatswain, it appeared, was an expert, and had already administered the same soothing medicine to two or three of the more violent among the ladies; though loath to do so (he explained), because it sometimes gave the crowd a wrong impression when the bodies in this temporary state of inanition were carried out.

The small crowd in the street, however, seemed in no mind to hinder us. Possibly experience had taught them composure. At any rate they were apathetic, though curious enough to follow us down to the quay and stand watching whilst we embarked our unconscious burdens. A lamp burned foggily at the head of the steps by which we descended to the waterside, and looking up I saw the child who had called herself Meliar-Ann standing in the circle of it, and gazing down upon the embarkation with dark unemotional eyes. Hartnoll spied her too, and waved his recovered dirk triumphantly. She paid him no heed at all.

"But look here," said the lieutenant, turning on me, "we can't take you on board to-night—and without your chests. Oh yes—I have your names; Rodd and Hartnoll... and a deuced lucky thing for you we tumbled upon you as we did. But Captain Suckling's orders were—and I heard him give 'em, with my own ears—to fetch you off to-morrow morning. From the Blue Posts, eh? Well, just you run back, or Blue Billy,"—by this irreverent name, as I learned later, the executive officers of his Majesty's Navy had agreed to know Mr. Benjamin Sheppard, proprietor of the Blue Posts: a solid man, who died worth sixty thousand pounds—"or Blue Billy will be sending round the crier."

"But, sir, we don't know where to find the Blue Posts!"

He stared at me, turning with his foot on the boat's gunwale. "Why, God bless the boy! you've only to turn to your left and follow your innocent nose for a hundred and fifty yards, and you'll run your heads against the doorway."

We watched the boat as it pushed off. A few of the crowd still lingered on the quay's edge, and it has since occurred to me to wonder that, as Hartnoll and I turned and ascended the steps, no violence was offered to us. We had come out to flaunt our small selves in his Majesty's uniform. Here, if ever, was proof of the respect it commanded; and we failed to notice it. Meliar-Ann had disappeared. The loungers on the quay-head let us pass unmolested, and, following the lieutenant's directions, sure enough within five minutes we found ourselves under the lamp of the Blue Posts!

The night-porter eyed us suspiciously before admitting us. "A man might say that you've made a pretty fair beginning," he ventured; but I had warned Hartnoll to keep his chin up, and we passed in with a fine show of haughty indifference.

At eight o'clock next morning Hartnoll and I were eating our breakfast when the waiter brought a visitor to our box—a tallish midshipman about three years our senior, with a face of the colour of brickdust and a frame that had outgrown his uniform.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said he; "and I daresay you guess my business. I'm to take you on board as soon as you can have your boxes ready."

We asked him if he would do us the honour to share our breakfast: whereupon he nodded.

"To tell you the truth, I was about to suggest it myself. Eh? What have we? Grilled kidneys? Good."

I called to the waiter to fetch another dish of kidneys.

"*And* a spatchcock," added our guest. "They're famous, here, for spatchcock. *And*, yes, I think we'll say an anchovy toast. Tea? Well, perhaps, at this time of the morning—with a poker in it."

This allusion to a poker we did not understand; but fortunately the waiter did, and brought a glassful of rum, which Mr. Strangways—for so he had made himself known to us—tipped into his tea, assuring us that the great Nelson had ever been wont to refer to this—his favourite mixture—as "the pride of the morning."

"By the way," he went on, with his mouth full of kidney, "the second lieutenant tells me you were in luck's way last night."

To this we modestly agreed, and hoped that the prisoners had arrived safely on board.

He grinned. "You may lay to that. We had to club half a dozen of them as soon as they were lifted aboard. When I say 'we' I ought to add that I was in my hammock and never heard a word of it, being a heavy sleeper. *That,*" said Mr. Strangways pensively, "is my one fault."

We attempted to convey by our silence that Mr. Strangways' single fault was a trifling, a venial one.

"It'll hinder my prospects, all the same." He nodded. "You mark my words." He nodded again, and helped himself to a round of buttered toast. "But I'm told," he went on, "there was an unholy racket. They couldn't do much, having the jollies on both pair of paws; but a party in mother-o'-pearl buttons made a speech about the liberty of the subject, in a voice that carried pretty nearly to Gosport: and the first lieutenant, being an old woman, and afraid of the ship's losing reputation while he was in charge, told them all to be good boys and he would speak to the Captain when he came aboard; and served them out three fingers of rum apiece, which the bo'sun took upon himself to hocus. By latest accounts, they're sleeping it off and—I say, waiter, you might tell the cook to devil those kidneys."

"But hasn't Captain Suckling returned yet?" I ventured to ask.

"He hasn't," said Mr. Strangways. "The deuce knows where he is, and the first lieutenant, not being in the deuce's confidence, is working himself into the deuce of a sweat. What's worse, His Excellency hasn't turned up yet, nor His Excellency's suite: though a boat waited for 'em five solid hours yesterday. All that arrived was His Excellency's valet and about a score of valises, and word that the great man would follow in a shore-boat. Which he hasn't."

From this light gossip Mr. Strangways turned and addressed himself to the devilled kidneys, remarking that in his Britannic Majesty's service a man was hungry as a matter of course; which I afterwards and experimentally found to be true.

Well—not to protract the tale—an hour later we took boat with our belongings, under Mr. Strangways' escort, and were pulled on a swift tide down to the ship. It so happened that the first and second lieutenants were standing together in converse on the break of the poop when we climbed on board and were led aft to report ourselves. The second lieutenant, Mr. Fraser (in whom we recognised our friend of the night before) stepped to the gangway and shook hands with a jolly smile. His superior offered us no such cheerful welcome, but stuck his hands behind him and scowled.

"H'm," said he, "are these your two infants? They look as if they had been making a night of it."

I could have answered (but did not) that we must be looking pasty-faced indeed if his gills had the advantage of us: for the man was plainly fretting himself to fiddle-strings with anxiety. He turned his back upon us and called forward for one of the master's mates, to whom he gave orders to show us our hammocks. We saluted and took leave of him, and on our way below fell in with Strangways again, who haled us off to introduce us to the gun-room.

Of the gun-room and its horrors you'll have formed—if lads still read their Marryat nowadays—your own conception; and I will only say that it probably bears the same relation to the *Melpomene's* gun-room as chalk to cheese. The *Melpomene's* gun-room was low—so low that Strangways seldom entered it but he contused himself—and it was also dark as the inside of a hat, and undeniably stuffy.

Yet to me, in my first flush of enthusiasm, it appeared eminently cosy: and the six midshipmen of the *Melpomene*—Walters, de Havilland, Strangways, Pole, Bateman, Countisford—six as good fellows as a man could wish to sail with. Youth, youth! They had their faults: but they were all my friends till the yellow fever carried off two at Port Royal; and two are alive yet and my friends to-day. I tell their six names over to-day like a string of beads, and (if the Lord will forgive a good Protestant) with a prayer for each.

Our next business was to become acquainted with the two marines who had carried our chests below, and who (as we proudly understood) were to be our body-servants. We were on deck again, and luckily out of hearing of our fellow-midshipmen, when these two menials came up to report themselves: and Hartnoll and I had just arrived at an amicable choice between them.

"Here, Bill," said the foremost, advancing and pointing at me with a forefinger, "which'll it be? If you *don't* mind, I'll take the red-headed one, to put me in mind o' my gal."

So on the whole we settled ourselves down very comfortably aboard the *Melpomene*: but the ship was not easy that day as a society, nor could be, with her commanding officer pacing to and fro like a bear in a cage. You will have seen the black bear at the Zoo, and noticed the swing of his head as he turns before ever reaching the end of his cage? Well just so— or very like it—the *Melpomene's* first lieutenant kept swinging and chafing on the quarter-deck all that afternoon—or, to be precise, until six o'clock, when Captain Suckling came aboard in a shore-boat, and in his shore-going clothes.

He was a pleasant-faced man; clean-shaven, rosy-complexioned, grey-haired, with something of the air and carriage of a country squire; a pleasant-tempered man too, although he appeared to be in a pet of some sort, and fairly fired up when the first lieutenant (a little sarcastically, I thought) ventured to hope that he had been enjoying himself.

"Nothing of the sort, sir! It's the first—" Captain Suckling checked himself. "I was going to say," he resumed more quietly, "that it's the first prize-fight I have ever attended and will be the last. But in point of fact there has been no fight."

"Indeed, sir?" I heard the first lieutenant murmur compassionately.

"The men did not turn up; neither they nor their trainers. The whole meeting, in fact, was what is vulgarly called a bilk. But where is Sir John?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"His Excellency—you have made him comfortable?"

"His Excellency, sir, has not turned up. In fact," said the first lieutenant prettily, "I fancy that His Excellency, too, must have done what is—er—vulgarly termed a bilk."

Captain Suckling stared from his lieutenant to the shore, and from the shore to the horizon.

"The boat waited no less than five hours for him yesterday, and in the end brought off his valet with some luggage. He gave us to understand that Sir John and his Secretary would follow in a shore-boat. This was twenty-four hours ago, and they have not appeared."

"Extraordinary!"

"I have to report also," said the first lieutenant, "that at seven o'clock, in accordance with orders, Mr. Fraser took a party ashore. The press has been active of late, and at first they found the whole town shy: in fact, sir, they met with no success at all until midnight, when, just as they were on the point of returning, they raided a house and brought off eight able-bodied fellows—as fine a lot, sir, physically, as you could wish to see. For their seamanship I am unable to answer, having had no opportunity to question them. To judge from his report Mr. Fraser handled the affair well, and brought them off expeditiously; and I am relieved to tell you that, so far, we have had no trouble from shore—not so much as an inquiry sent."

"That is luck, indeed," said Captain Suckling approvingly; "and a comfort to hear at the end of a day when everything has gone wrong. Fetch them up—that is, if they are sufficiently recovered; fetch them up, and when I've shifted these clothes I'll have a look at them while daylight serves."

The Captain went below: and five minutes later I saw the first of the prisoners haled up through the hatchway. It was the man in the double overcoat; but he had lost his colour, and he no sooner reached the deck than he lurched and sat down with a thud. Since no one helped him to rise, he remained seated, and gazed about him with a drugged and vacuous stare, while the light of the approaching sunset shimmered over his mother-of-pearl buttons.

The next to emerge was my friend of the splendid torso, handcuffed and fettered. When he, too, lurched and fell, I became aware for the first time that the frigate was rocking on a gentle south-westerly swell, and I turned to the bulwarks for a glance overside at the water which, up to an hour ago, had been smooth as a pond. I had scarcely reached the bulwarks when a voice forward sang out that a boat was approaching and hailing us.

Sure enough, a boat there was: and in the stern-sheets, with a couple of watermen pulling, sat two men of whom the portliss was promptly and confidently proclaimed by the midshipmen gathered around me to be no other than His Excellency.

The boat approached and fell alongside the ladder suspended a few yards aft of the ship's waist. The first lieutenant, having sent word to the Captain, hurried forward to receive our distinguished guest, who climbed heavily on his Secretary's arm. Arriving thus at the sally-way, he nodded graciously in answer to the first lieutenant's salute, pulled out a

handkerchief to mop his brow, and in the act of mopping it cast a glance across the deck.

"Captain Suckling has asked me to present his excuses to your Excellency—" began the first lieutenant in his best tone of ceremony; and, with that, took a step backward as His Excellency flung out a rigid arm.

"The Dustman! for a fiver!"

"I—I beg your Excellency's pardon—your Excellency was pleased to observe—"

"The Dustman, for a hundred pounds! Jem Clark, too! Oh, catch me, Winyates!" and His Excellency staggered back, clutching at a man-rope with one hand, pointing with the other. His gaze wavered from the prisoners amidships to the first lieutenant, and from the first lieutenant to the poop-ladder, at the head of which Captain Suckling at this instant appeared, hastily buttoning his uniform coat as he came.

"A thousand pardons, your Excellency!"

"A thousand pounds, sir!"

"Hey?"

"If that's not the very pair of scoundrels I've been hunting the length and breadth of Hampshire. Fareham was the venue, Captain Suckling—if I am addressing Captain Suckling —"

"You are, sir. I—I think you said Fareham—"

"I did, sir. I don't mind confessing to you—here on the point of departing from England—that I admire the noble art, sir: so much so that I have wasted a whole day in the neighbourhood of Fareham, hunting for a prize-fight which never came off."

"But—but I don't mind confessing to your Excellency," gasped Captain Suckling, "that *I* too have been at Fareham and have—er—met with the same disappointment."

"Disappointment, sir! When you have kidnapped the scoundrels—when you have them on board at this moment!" Sir John pointing a shaking forefinger again at the pressed men.

Captain Suckling stared in the direction where the finger pointed. "You don't mean to tell me—" he began weakly, addressing the first lieutenant.

"Mr. Fraser brought them aboard, sir," said the first lieutenant.

"And we'll have the law of you for it," promised the man in the pearl buttons from amidships, but in a weakening voice.

Captain Suckling was what they call an officer and a gentleman. He drew himself up at once.

"In my absence my officers appear to have made a small mistake. But I hope your Excellency may not be disappointed after all. I have never set eyes on either of these men before, but if that naked man be the Dustman I will put up a hundred pounds upon him, here and now; or on the other if that runs counter to your Excellency's fancy—"

"Jem Clark's my man," said Sir John. "I'll match your stake, sir."

"—And liberty for all if they show a decent fight, and a boat to set them ashore," went on Captain Suckling. "Is that a fair offer, my men?"

The man in the pearl buttons raised his head to answer for the two pugilists, who by this time were totally incapable of answering for themselves. He showed pluck, too; for his face shone with the colour of pale marble.

"A hundred pounds! Oh, go to blazes with your hundred pounds! When I tell you the Prince Regent himself had five hundred on it.... Oh! prop 'em up, somebody! and let the fools see what they've done to poor Jem, that I'd a-trained to a hair. And the money of half the fancy depending on his condition...."

"Prop 'em up, some of you!" echoed Captain Suckling. "Eh? God bless my soul—"

He paused, staring from the yellow faces of the pugilists to the battered and contused features of his own seamen.

"God bless my soul!" repeated Captain Suckling. "Mr. Fraser!"

"Sir!" The second lieutenant stepped forward.

"You mean to tell me that—that these two men—inflicted—er—*all this?*"

"They did, sir. If I might explain the unfortunate mistake—"

"You describe it accurately, sir. I could say to you, as Sir Isaac Newton said to his dog Diamond, 'Oh, Mr. Fraser, Mr. Fraser, you little know what you have done!'"

"Indeed, sir, I fear we acted hastily. The fact is we found the two new midshipmen, Rodd and Hartnoll, in something of a scrape with these people. ..." The second lieutenant told how he had found me battering at the door, and how he had effected an entrance: but the Captain listened inattentively.

"Your Excellency," he said, interrupting the narrative and turning on the Governor, "I really think these men will give us little sport here."

"They are going to be extremely ill," said His Excellency, "and that presently."

"I had better send them ashore."

"Decidedly; and before they recover. Also, if I might advise, I would not be too hasty in knocking off their handcuffs."

"We are short-handed," mused Captain Suckling; "but really the situation will be a delicate one unless we weigh anchor at once."

"You will be the laughing-stock of all the ships inside the Wight, and the object of some indignation ashore."

"There is nothing to detain us, for doubtless I can pick up a few recruits at Falmouth.... But what to do with these men?"

"May I suggest that I have not yet dismissed my shore-boat?"

"The very thing!" Captain Suckling gazed overside, and then southward towards the Wight, whence a light sea-fog was drifting up again to envelop us.

"I never thought," he murmured, "to be thankful for thick weather to weigh anchor in!"

He turned and stared pensively at the line of prisoners who had staggered one by one to the bulwarks, and leaned there limply, their resentment lost for the time in the convulsions of nature.

"It seems like taking advantage of their weakness," said he pensively.

"It does," agreed His Excellency; "but I strongly advise it."

A moment, and a moment only, Captain Suckling hesitated before giving the order.... Then in miserable procession the strong men were led past us to the ladder, each supported by two seamen. The gangway was crowded, and my inches did not allow me to look over the bulwarks: but I heard the boatswain knocking off their irons in the boat below, and the objurgating voice of the man in the pearl buttons.

"Give way!" shouted someone. I edged towards the gangway and stooped; and then, peering between the legs of my superior officers, I saw the boat glide away from the frigate's side. Our friends lay piled on the bottom-boards and under the thwarts like a catch of fish. One or two lifted clenched fists: and the boatmen, eyeing them nervously, fell to their oars for dear life.

As the fog swallowed them, someone took me by the ear.

"Hullo, young gentlemen," said His Excellency, pinching me and reaching out a hand for Hartnoll, who evaded him, "it seems to me you deserve a thrashing apiece for yesterday and a guinea apiece for to-day. Will you take both, or shall we call it quits?"

Well, we called it quits for the time. But twenty years later, happening upon me at Buckingham Palace at one of King William's last levees, he shook hands and informed me that the balance sheet at the time had been wrongly struck: for I had provided him with a story which had served him faithfully through half his distinguished career. A week later a dray rumbled up to the door of my lodgings in Jermyn Street, and two stout men delivered from it a hogshead of the sherry you are now drinking. He had inquired for Hartnoll's address, but Hartnoll, poor lad, had lain for fifteen years in the British burial-ground at Port Royal.

THE BLACK JOKE.

A REPORTED TALE OF TWO SMUGGLERS.

I.

My mother's grandfather, Dan'l Leggo, was the piousest man that ever went smuggling, and one of the peaceablest, and scrupulous to an extent you wouldn't believe. He learnt his business among the Cove boys at Porthleah—or Prussia Cove as it came to be called, after John Carter, the head of the gang, that was nicknamed the King o' Prussia. Dan'l was John Carter's own sister's son, trained under his eye; and when the Carters retired he took over the business in partnership with young Phoby Geen, a nephew by marriage to Bessie Bussow that still kept the Kiddlywink at Porthleah, and had laid by a stockingful of money.

These two, Dan'l Leggo and Phoby Geen (which was short for Deiphobus), lived together and worked the business for five years in boundless harmony; until, as such things happen, they both fell in love with one maid, which brought out the differences in their natures to a surprising degree, converting Dan'l into an Early Christian for all to behold, while Phoby turned to envy and spite, and to a disgraceful meanness of spirit. The reason of this to some extent was that the girl—Amelia Sanders by name—couldn't abide him because of the colour of his hair and his splay feet: yet I believe she would have married him (her father being a boat-builder in a small way at Porthleven, and beholden to the Cove for most of his custom) if Dan'l hadn't come along first and cast eyes on her; whereby she clave to Dan'l and liked him better and better as time brought out the beautiful little odds-and-ends of his character; and when Phoby made up, she took and told him, in all the boldness of affection, to make himself scarce, for she wouldn't have him—no, not if he was the last man in the world and she the last woman. I daresay she overstated the case, as women will. But what appeared marvellous to all observers was that the girl had no particular good looks that wouldn't have passed anywhere in a crowd, and yet these two had singled her out for their addresses.

Dan'l (that had been the first in the field) pointed this out to his partner in a very reasonable spirit; but somehow it didn't take effect. "If she's as plain-featured as you allow," said Phoby, "why the dickens can't *you* stand aside?"

"Because of her affectionate natur'," answered Dan'l, "and likewise for her religious disposition, for the latter o' which you've got no more use than a toad for side-pockets."

"We'll see about that," grumbled Phoby; and Dan'l, taking it for a threat, lost no time in putting up the banns.

Apart from this he went on his way peaceably never doubting at all that, when the knot was tied, Phoby would let be bygones and pick up with another maid; whereby he made the mistake of judging other folks' dispositions by his own. The smuggling, too, was going on more comfortably than ever it had in John Carter's time, by reason that a new Collector had come to Penzance—a Mr. Pennefather, a nice little, pleasant-spoken, round-bellied man that asked no better than to live and let live. Fifteen years this Pennefather held the collectorship, with five-and-twenty men under him, besides a call on the military whenever he wanted 'em; and in all that time he never made an enemy. Every night of his life he stepped over from his lodgings in Market Jew Street for a game of cards with old Dr. Chegwidden, who lived whereabouts they've built the Esplanade since then, on the Newlyn side of Morrab Gardens; and after their cards—at which one would lose and t'other win half a crown, maybe— the doctor would out with a decanter of pineapple rum, and the pair would drink together and have a crack upon Natural History, which was a hobby with both. Being both unmarried, they had no one to call bedtime; but the Collector was always back at his lodgings before the stroke of twelve.

With such a Collector, as you may suppose, the free trade in Mount's Bay found itself in easy circumstances; and the Covers (as they were called) took care in return to give Mr. Pennefather very little trouble. In particular, Dan'l had invented a contrivance which saved no end of worry and suspicion, and was worked in this way:—Of their two principal boats Dan'l as a rule commanded the *Black Joke*, a Porthleven-built lugger of about forty tons, as we measure nowadays (but upon the old plan she would work out nearer a hundred and forty); and Phoby a St. Ives ketch, the *Nonesuch*, of about the same size. But which was the *Black Joke* and which the *Nonesuch* you never could be sure, for the lugger carried fids, topmast, crosstrees, and a spare suit of sails to turn her into a ketch at twenty minutes' notice; and likewise the ketch could ship topmast, shift her rigging, and hoist a spare suit of lug-sails in no longer time. The pair of them, too, had false quarter-pieces to ship and unship for disguise, and each was provided with movable boards painted with the other's name, to cover up her own. The tale went that once when the pair happened to be lying together in

New Grimsby Sound in the Scillies, during an eclipse of the sun, Dan'l and Phoby took it into their heads to change rigs in the darkness, just for fun; and that the Revenue Officer, that had gone over to the island of Bryher to get a better view of the eclipse, happening to lower his telescope on the vessels as the light began to grow again, took fright, waded across to Tresco for his life (the tide being low), and implored the Lord Proprietor's agent to lock him up; "for," said he, "either the world or my head has turned round in the last twenty minutes, and whichever 'tis, I want to be put in a cool place out of temptation." But the usual plan was, of course, for the two to change rigs at night-time when on a trip, and by agreement, and for the one to slock off suspicion while the other ran the cargo. Yes, yes; Dan'l Leggo and Phoby Geen were both very ingenious young men, though by disposition so different: and when John Carter in his retirement heard of the trick, he slapped his leg and said in his large-hearted way that dammy he couldn't have invented a neater; and at the same time fined himself sixpence for swearing, which had been his rule when he was Cove-master. I once saw a bill of his made out in form, and this was how it ran:—

John CARTER in account with ROGER TRISCOTT otherwise CLICKPAW.

To 1 weeks arnins	ten shillin
Item share on 40 ankers at sixpence per anker	one pound
less two dams at 6d. and a worse word at (say) 1s. but more if it hapn again.	two shillin
Balance due to R.T.	One pound eight or value rec. as per margin

But the mildest of men will have their whimsies; and for some reason or other this same trick of the two boats—though designed, as you might argue, to save him trouble—made Pennefather as mad as a sheep. He couldn't hear tell of the *Black Joke* or the *Nonesuch* but the blood rushed into his head. He swore to old Dr. Chegwidden that the Covers, by making him an object of derision, were breaking all bounds of neighbourly understanding: and at last one day, getting information that Dan'l Leggo was at Roscoff and loading-up to run a cargo into St. Austell Bay on the east side of the Blackhead, he so far let his temper get the better of him as to sit down and warn the Collector at Fowey, telling him the when and how of the randivoo, and bidding him look out as per description for that notorious lugger the *Black Joke*.

The letter was scarcely sent before the good soul began to repent. He had an honest liking for Dan'l Leggo, and would be sorry (even in the way of duty) to see him in Bodmin Gaol. He believed in Mount's Bay keeping its troubles to itself; and in short, knowing the Collector at Fowey to be a pushing fellow, he had passed two days in a proper sweat of remorse, when to his great relief he ran up against Phoby Geen, that was walking the pavement with a scowl on his face and both hands deep in his trousers, he having been told that very morning by Amelia Sanders, and for the twentieth time of asking, that sooner than marry him she would break stones on the road.

'Tis a good job, I reckon, that folks in a street can't read one another's inside. Old Pennefather pulled up in a twitter, tapping his stick on the pavement. What he wanted to say was, "Your partner, Dan'l Leggo, has a cargo for St. Austell Bay. He'll get into trouble there, and I'm responsible for it; but I want you to warn him before 'tis too late." What he did was to put on a frown, and, said he, "Looky here, Mr. Geen, I've been wanting to see you or Leggo for some days, to give you fair notice. I happen to have lost sight of the *Nonesuch* for some days; though I conclude, from meeting you, that she's back at Porthleah at her moorings. But I know the movements of the *Black Joke*, and I've the best reason to warn you that she had best give up her latest game, or she must look out for squalls."

Well, this was a plain hint, and in an ordinary way Phoby Geen would have taken it. But the devil stirred him up to remember the insult he'd received from Amelia Sanders that very day; and by and by, as he walked home to Porthleah, there came into his mind a far wickeder thought. Partners though he and Dan'l were, each owned the boat he commanded, or all but a few shares in her. The shares in the *Black Joke* stood in Dan'l's name, and if anything went wrong with her the main loss would be Dan'l's. All the way home he kept thinking what a faithful partner he'd been to Dan'l in the past, and this was Dan'l's gratitude, to cut him out with Amelia Sanders and egg the girl on to laugh at the colour of his hair. She would laugh to another tune if he chose to hold his tongue on Mr. Pennefather's warning, and let Dan'l run his head into the trap. The Fowey Collector was a smart man, capable of using his information. (Phoby, who could see a hole through a ladder as quick as most men, guessed at once that Pennefather had laid the trap, and then repented and spoken to him in hope to undo the mischief.) Like as not, St. Austell Bay would be patrolled by half a dozen man-of-war's boats in addition to the water-guard: and this

meant Dan'l's losing the lugger, losing his life too, maybe, or at the least being made prisoner. Well, and why not? Wasn't one man master enough for Porthleah Cove? And hadn't Dan'l and the girl deserved it?

I believe the miserable creature wrestled against his temptation: and I believe that when he weighed next morning and hoisted sail in the *Nonesuch* for Guernsey, where the *Black Joke* was to meet him in case of accident, he had two minds to play fair after all. 'Twas told afterwards that, pretty well all the way, he locked himself in his cabin, and for hours the crew heard him groaning there. But it seems that Satan was too strong for him; for instead of bearing straight up for Guernsey, where he well knew the *Black Joke* would be waiting, he stood over towards the French coast, and there dodged forth and back, under pretence of picking her up as she came out of Roscoff. His crew took it for granted he was following out the plan agreed upon. All they did was to obey orders, and of course they knew naught of Mr. Pennefather's warning.

To be short, Dan'l Leggo, after waiting the best part of two days at St. Peter's Port and getting no news to the contrary, judged that the coast must be clear, and stood across with a light sou'-westerly breeze, timing it so as to make his landfall a little before sunset: which he did, and speaking the crew of a Mevagissey boat some miles off the Deadman, was told he might take the lugger in and bring her up to anchor without fear of interruption. (But whether or no they had been bribed to give this information he never discovered.) They told him, too, that his clients—a St. Austell company—had the boats ready at Rope Hauen under the Blackhead, and would be out as soon as ever he dropped anchor. So he crept in under darkness and brought up under the loom of the shore— having shifted his large lug for a trysail and leaving that set, with his jib and mizzen—and gave orders at once to cast off the hatches. While this was doing, sure enough he heard the boats putting off from the beach a cable's length away, and was just congratulating himself on having to deal with such business-like people, when his mate, Billy Tregaskis, caught hold of him by the elbow.

"Hark to them oars, sir!" he whispered.

"I hear 'em," said Dan'l.

"You never heard that stroke pulled by fishermen," said Billy, straining to look into the darkness. "They're man-o'-war's boats, sir, or you may call me a Dutchman!"

"Cut the cable!" ordered Dan'l, sharp and prompt.

Billy whipped out his knife, ran forward, and cut loose in a jiffy; but before the *Black Joke* could gather headway the two boats had run up close under her stern. The bow-man of the first sheared through the mizzen-sheet with his cutlass, and boarding over the stern with three or four others, made a rush upon Dan'l as he let go the helm and turned to face them; while the second boat's crew opened with a dozen musket-shots, firing high at the sails and rigging. In this they succeeded: for the second or third shot cut through the trysail tack and brought the sail down with a run; and almost at the same moment the boarders overpowered Dan'l and bore him down on deck, where they beat him silly with the flat of their cutlasses and so passed on to drive the rest of the lugger's crew, that were running below in a panic.

The struggle had carried Dan'l forward, so that when he dropped 'twas across the fallen trysail. This served him an ill turn: for one of the cutlasses, catching in a fold of it, turned aslant and cut him cruelly over the bridge of the nose. But the sail being tanned, and therefore almost black in the darkness, it served him a good turn too; for after his enemies had passed on and were busy making prisoners of the rest of the crew, he lay there unperceived for a great while, listening to the racket, but faint and stunned, so that he could make neither head nor tail of it. At length a couple of men came aft and began handling the sail; and "Hullo!" says one of them, discovering him, "here's one as dead as a haddock!"

"Put him below," says the other.

"What's the use?" asks the other, pulling Dan'l out by the legs and examining him; "the poor devil's head is all jelly." Just then a cry was raised that one of the boats had gone adrift, the boarders having forgotten to make her fast in their hurry, and someone called out an order to man the other and pull in search of her. The two fellows that had been handling Dan'l dropped him and ran aft, and Dan'l—all sick and giddy as he was—crawled into the scuppers and, pulling himself up till his eyes were level with the bulwarks, tried to measure the distance between him and shore. Now the lugger (you'll remember) was adrift when the Navymen first boarded her, through Billy Tregaskis having cut the cable; and with the set of the tide she must been carried close in-shore during the scrimmage before they brought her up: for, to Dan'l's amazement, she lay head-to-beach, and so close you could toss a biscuit ashore. There the shingle spread, a-glimmering under his nose, as you might say; and he put up a thanksgiving when he remembered that a minute ago his only hope had been to swim ashore—a thing impossible in his weak state; but now, if he could only drop overside without being observed, he verily believed he could wade for it—that is, after the first few yards—for the *Black Joke* drew from five to six feet of water, and since she lay afloat 'twas certain the water right under him must be beyond his depth. Having made up his mind to the risk—for anything was better than Bodmin prison—he heaved a leg across the bulwarks, and so very

cautious-like rolled over and dropped. His toes—for he went down pretty plump—touched bottom for a moment: but when he came to strike out he found he'd over-calculated his strength, and gave himself up for lost. He swallowed some water, too, and was on the point of crying out to be taken aboard again and not left to drown, when the set of the tide swept him forward, so that he fetched up with his breast against a shore-line that someone had carried out from the bows: and hauling on this he dragged himself along till the water reached no higher than his knees. Twice he tried to run, and twice he fell through weakness, but he came ashore at last at a place where the beach ended in a low ridge of rock covered with ore-weed. Between the rocks ran stretches of whity-grey shingle, and he lay still for a while and panted, considering how on earth he could cross these without being spied by the Navymen, that had recovered their boat by this time and were pulling back with her to the lugger. While he lay there flat on his stomach, thinking as hard as his bruised head would let him, a voice spoke out of the darkness close by his ear, and said the voice, "You belong aboard the lugger, if I'm not mistook?"—which so terrified Dan'l that he made no answer, but lifted himself and stared, with all his teeth chattering. "You stay still where you are," the voice went on, "till the coast is a bit clearer, as 'twill be in a minute or two. There's a two-three friends up the beach, that were hired for this business; but the Preventive men have bested us this time. Hows'ever, you've had luck to get ashore—'tis better be lucky than rich, they say. Hutted, are 'ee?" The boats being gone by this time, the man that owned the voice stepped out of the darkness, lifted him—big-boned man though he was—and hefted him over the rocks. A little higher up the foreshore he was joined by two others, and the three between 'em took hold of Dan'l and helped him up the cliff and through a furze-drake till they brought him to a cottage, where, in a kitchen full of people, he found half a dozen of the Cove-boys that had dropped overboard at the first alarm and swam for shore—the lot gathered about a young doctor from St. Austell that was binding up a man whose shoulder had been ripped open by a musket-ball.

Poor Dan'l's injury being more serious, and his face a clot of blood from the cutlass-wound over his nose, the doctor turned to him at once and plastered him up for dear life; after which his friends, well knowing that a price would be set on him as skipper of the *Black Joke*, carried him off to St. Austell in a cart that had been brought for the tubs; and at St. Austell hired a chaise to carry him home to Marazion, taking the precaution to wrap his head round with bandages, so that the post-boys might not be able to swear to his looks. A Cover called Tummels drove with him, bandaged also; and stopping the chaise a mile outside Marazion, lifted Dan'l out, managed to hire a cart from a farm handy-by the road, and so brought him, more dead than alive, home to Porthleah.

But though more dead than alive, Dan'l had not lost his wits. Except for the faithful Tummels and Bessie Bussow at the Kiddlywink, the Cove was all deserted—the *Nonesuch* and her crew being yet on the high seas. The very next day he sent Tummels over to Porthleven to tell Amelia Sanders of his mishap, and that he was going into hiding for a time, but would send her word of his movements; and on Tummels' return the pair sat down and cast about where the hiding had best be, Dan'l being greatly uplifted by Tummels' report that the girl had showed herself as plucky as ginger, in spite of the loss of the lugger, declaring that, come what might, she would rather have Dan'l with all his Christian virtues than a fellow like Phoby Geen with all his riches and splay feet. Moreover—and such is the wondrous insight of woman—she maintained that Phoby Geen must be at the bottom of the whole mischief.

Dan'l didn't pay much heed to this, but set it down to woman's prejudice. After talking the matter well out, he and Tummels decided on a very pretty hiding-place and a fairly comfortable one. This was a tenantless house on the coast near St. Ives. A Bristol merchant had built it, meaning to retire there as soon as he'd made his fortune: but either the cost had outrun his plans or the fortune didn't come quite so soon as he expected. At any rate, neither he nor his family had ever taken up abode there. A fine house it was, too, and went in the neighbourhood by the name of Stack's Folly. It stood in the middle of a small farm of about a hundred and fifty acres, besides moor and waste; and, as luck would have it, a brother-in-law of Tummels, by name William Sleep, rented the farm and kept the keys of the house, being supposed to look after it in the family's absence.

Across to Stack's Folly, then, Dan'l was driven in a cart, under a great pile of ore-weed; and William Sleep not only gave over the keys and helped to rig up a bed of straw for him—for the house hadn't a stick of furniture—but undertook to keep watch against surprise and get a supply of food carried up to him daily from the farmhouse, which stood in the valley below, three-quarters of a mile away. So far so good: yet now a new trouble arose owing to Dan'l's wounds showing signs of inflammation and threatening to set up wildfire. Tummels and Sleep put their heads together, and determined that a doctor must be fetched.

Now Dr. Chegwidden, who was getting up in years, had engaged an assistant to take over the St. Ives part of his practice; a young fellow called Martyn, a little on the right side of thirty, clever in his profession, and very well spoken of by all. (Indeed, Dr. Chegwidden, that had taken a fancy to him first-along for his knowledge of Natural History, in due time promoted him to be partner, so that when the old man died, five or six years later, Dr. Martyn stepped into the whole practice.) William Sleep at first was for fetching this young doctor boldly; but Tummels argued that he was a new-comer from the east part of the

Duchy, if not from across Tamar, and they didn't know enough of him to warrant the risk. So in the end, after many *pros* and *cons*, they decided to trust themselves first to Dr. Chegwidden.

That same night, as the old doctor, after his game of cards with Mr. Pennefather, sat finishing his second glass of rum and thinking of bed, there came a ring at the night-bell, which of all sounds on earth was the one he most abominated. He went to the front door and opened it in a pretty bad temper, when in walked Tummels and William Sleep together and told their business. "A man—no need to give names—was lying hurt and in danger—no matter where. They had a horse and trap waiting, a little above Chyandour, and, if the doctor would come and ask no questions, the same horse and trap should bring him home before morning."

The old doctor asked no questions at all, but fetched his greatcoat, tobacco-pouch, tinder-box, and case of instruments, and walked with them to the hill over Chyandour, where he found the trap waiting, with a boy at the horse's head. Tummels dismissed the boy, and in they all climbed; but before they had driven half a mile the doctor was asked very politely if he'd object to have his eyes blindfolded.

He chuckled for a moment. "Of course I object," said he; "for—you may believe it or not—if a man can't *see* that his pipe's alight he loses half the enjoyment of it. But two is stronger than one," said he; "and if you insist I shall submit." So they blindfolded him.

In this way they brought him to Stack's Folly, helped him down from the cart, and led him into the bare room where Dan'l lay in the straw; and there by lantern-light the old man did his job very composedly.

"You're not altogether a pair of fools," said he, speaking for the first time as he tied the last bandage. "If you hadn't fetched someone, this man would have been dead in three days from now. But you're fools enough if you think I'm going to take this jaunt every night for a week and more—as someone must, if Dan'l's to recover; and you're bigger fools if you imagine I don't know the inside of Stack's Folly. My advice is that in future you save yourselves trouble and call up my assistant from St. Ives; and further, that you don't try his temper with any silly blindfolding, but trust him for the gentleman and good sportsman I know him to be. If 'tis any help to you, he'll be stepping over to Penzance to-day on business, and I'll take the opportunity to drop him a hint of warning."

They thanked him, of course. "And sorry we are, doctor," said Tummels, "to have put you to this inconvenience. But there's no friend like an old friend."

"Talking of friends," answered Dr. Chegwidden, "I think it well to set you on your guard." He pulled out a handbill from his pocket. "I had this from Mr. Pennefather to-night," said he; "and by to-morrow it will be posted all over the country: an offer for the apprehension of Daniel Leggo; the reward, two hundred and fifty pounds."

"Two hundred and fifty pounds!" Weak as he was, Dan'l sat upright in the straw, and the other two stared at the doctor with their jaws dropping— which Dan'l's jaw couldn't, by reason of the bandages.

"And you ask us to trust this young furriner, with two hundred and fifty pounds for his hand to close on!" groaned Tummels.

"I do," said the doctor. "The man I would warn you against is a man you'd be ten times apter to trust; and that is your partner, Deiphobus Geen. I understand he's away from home just now; but—reward or no reward—when he returns I advise you to watch that fellow closer than any of the Preventive men: for to my certain knowledge he had ample warning of what was to happen, and I leave you to judge if 'twas by accident he let his friend Dan'l, here, run into the trap."

Tummels made a motion to draw out a musket from under the straw where Dan'l lay. "If I thought that," he growled, "I'd walk straight over to Porthleah, wait for him, and blow his scheming brains out."

"You'd be a bigger fool, then, than I take ye for," answered the doctor quietly, "and I know you've but wits enough for one thing at a time. Your business now is to keep Dan'l hidden till you can smuggle him out of the country: and if Dr. Martyn or I can help, you may count on us, for I hate such foul play as Deiphobus Geen's, and so, I believe, does my assistant."

With that the doctor took his leave of Dan'l and was driven home by Tummels, William Sleep remaining to stand guard: and next day, according to promise, Dr. Martyn was told the secret and trusted with the case.

II.

Sure enough, Dr. Martyn turned out to be most clever and considerate; a man that Dan'l

took to and trusted from the first. His one fault was that when Dan'l began to converse with him on religious matters, he showed himself a terrible free-thinker. The man was not content to be a doctor: night after night he'd sit up and tend Dan'l like a nurse, and would talk by the hour together when the patient lay wakeful. But his opinions were enough to cut a religious man to the heart.

Dan'l had plenty of time to think over them, too. From daybreak (when the young doctor took his leave), till between ten and eleven at night (when he came again) was a terrible lonely while for a man shut in an empty house and unable to move for pain. As the days wore on and his wound bettered, he'd creep to the door and sit watching the fields and the ships out at sea and William Sleep moving about the slope below. Sometimes he would spend an hour in thinking out plans for his escape; but his money had gone with the lugger, and without money no plan seemed workable. Sometimes he'd think upon the girl Amelia Sanders. But that was crueller pain; for if he could not even escape, how on earth was he to get married? So he fell back on thoughts of religion and in making up answers to the doctor's terrible arguments; and these he would muster up at night, tackling the young man finely, till the two were at it like a pair of wrestlers. But when Dan'l began to grow flushed and excited, and stammered in his speech, the talk would be turned off somehow to smuggling, or sport, or natural history—in all of which the doctor had a hundred questions to ask. I believe these discussions worked the cure faster than any ointments or lotions: but Dan'l used to say afterwards that the long days came nigh to driving him mad; and mad they would have driven him but for a small bird—a wheatear—that perched itself every day on the wall of the court and chittered to him by the hour together like an angel.

Tummels, all this while, kept quiet at Porthleah, like a wise man, and sat watching Phoby Geen like a cat before a mousehole. Phoby had turned up at the Cove in the *Nonesuch* on the fourth day after the lugger was lost, and at once began crying out, as innocent as you please, upon the mess that Dan'l had made through his wrongheadedness. Also the crew of the *Nonesuch* couldn't make out where the plan had broken down. But Tummels, piecing their information with what Dr. Chegwidden had told him, saw clearly enough what trick had been played. Also by pumping old Bessie Bussow (who had already been pumped by Phoby) he learned that Phoby knew of Dan'l's return to the Cove and disappearance into hiding. Tummels scratched his head. "The fellow knows that Dan'l is alive," he reasoned. "He knows, too, there's a price on his head. Moreover he knows my share in hiding the man away. Then why, if he's playing honest even now, doesn't he speak to me?... But no: he's watching to catch me off my guard, in the hope that I'll give him the clue to Dan'l's hiding." Thus Tummels reasoned, and, though it went hard with him to get no news, he decided that 'twas safer to trust in no news being good news than, by making the smallest move, to put Phoby Geen on the track. In this he did wisely; but he'd have done wiser by not breathing a word to Amelia Sanders of where he'd stowed her sweetheart. For what must the lovesick woman do—after a week's waiting and no news—but pack a basket and set out for St. Ives, under the pretence of starting for Penzance market? She carried out the deception very neatly, too; actually went into Penzance and sold two couple of fowls, besides eggs of her own raising; and then, having spent the money in a few odds-and-ends her sweetheart would relish, slipped out of the town and struck away north.

What mischief would have followed but for a slant of luck, there's no knowing: for Master Phoby had caught sight of her on the Helston Road (where he kept a watch), pushed after her hot-foot, worked her through the market like a stoat after a rabbit, and more than half-way to St. Ives (laughing up his sleeve), when his little design went pop! and all through the untying of a shoe-lace!

On the road after you pass Halsetown there's a sharp turn; and, a little way farther, another sharp turn. For no reason that ever she discovered, 'twas just as she passed the first of these that her shoe-string came untied, and she sat down by the hedge to tie it; and here in tying it she broke the lace, and, while mending it, looked up into Phoby Geen's face— that had come round the corner like the sneak he was and pulled up as foolish as a sheep.

In my experience a woman may be a fool, but 'tis within limits. Amelia Sanders, looking Phoby Geen in the face, went on tying her shoe; and, while she looked, she saw not only how terrible rash she had been, but also—without a guess at the particulars—that this man had been at the bottom of the whole mischief and meant to be at the bottom of more. So, said she, very innocent-like—

"Aw, good-afternoon, Mr. Geen!"

"Good-afternoon!" responded Phoby. "Who'd ever ha' thought to meet you here, Miss Sanders?"

"'Tis a tiring way from Porthleah to St. Ives, Mr. Geen."

"Or from Porthleven, for that matter, Miss Sanders."

"Especially when you walk it on tippy-toe, which must be extra-wearisome to a body on feet shaped like yours, Mr. Geen."

Phoby saw that he was fairly caught. "Look here," said he roughly, "you're bound on a randivoo with Dan'l Leggo, and you can't deny it."

"I don't intend to," she answered. "And you be bound on much the same errand, though you'd deny it if your face could back up your tongue."

"Dan'l Leggo has a-been my partner in business for five years, Miss Sanders. Isn't it nat'ral enough I should want to visit and consult him?"

"Nothing more natural," answered the girl cheerfully. "I was just wonderin' where they'd hidden him: but since you know, my trouble's at an end. You can show me the way. Which is it, Mr. Geen—north, south, east, or west?"

Phoby understood that she was laughing at him. "Don't you think, Miss Sanders," he suggested, "that 'twas pretty rash of you to give folks a clue as you've a-done to-day, and everybody knowing that you've been asked in church with Dan'l?"

"I do," said she. "I've behaved foolish, Mr. Geen, and thank you for reminding me. He won't thank a *second* partner for putting him in a trap," she went on, speaking at a venture; but her words caught Phoby Geen like a whip across the face, and, seeing him blanch, she dropped a curtsey. "I'll be going home, Mr. Geen," she announced. "I might ha' walked farther without finding out so much as you've told me; and you may walk twenty miles farther without finding out half so much."

He glowered at her and let out a curse; but the girl was his match, though timmersome enough in an ordinary way.

"Iss, iss," she said scornful-like; "I know the kind of coward you are, Mr. Phoby Geen. But I bless this here corner of the road twice over; first because it has given me a look into your sneaking heart, and next because 'tis within earshot of Halsetown, where I've a brace of tall cousins living that would beat you to a jelly if you dared lift a hand against me. I'm turning back to ask one of them to see me home; and he'll not deny me, as he'll not be backward to pound every bone in your ill-shapen body if he hears what I've to tell."

Phoby Geen glowered at her for half a minute longer, and then snapped his fingers.

"As it happens," said he, "you're doing me a cruel injustice; but we needn't talk of that. A man o' my savings—though you've sneezed at 'em— doesn't want to be searching the country for two-hundred-and-fifty pound."

He swung on his heel and walked off towards St. Ives. Amelia Sanders watched him round the next bend, and turning, began to run homewards for dear life, when, just at the corner, she fell into the arms of Tummels.

"A nice dance you've led me," grunted Tummels, as she fought down her hysterics. "I've been pulling hot-foot after the man all the way from Penzance. I tracked him there; but you and he between you gave me the slip in the crowd. 'Tis the Lord's mercy you didn' lead him all the way to Stack's Folly: for if I'd a-caught up with him there I must have committed murder upon him."

"Oh, take me home!" sobbed Amelia Sanders.

"Take you home? How the dickens be I to take you home?" Tummels demanded. "I've got to follow that villain into St. Ives if he goes so far, and stick to him like a shadow."

So Amelia Sanders trudged it back to Porthleven, calling herself every name but what she was christened: and Phoby Geen trudged it fore to St. Ives, cursing his luck, but working out a problem in his wicked little mind. At the top of the hill over the town he stood quiet for a minute and snapped his fingers again. Since 'twas near St. Ives that Dan'l lay in hiding, what could the hiding-place be but Stack's Folly! Tummels had hidden him: Tummels' brother-in-law rented the farm of Stack's Folly and kept the keys of the house. Why, the thing fitted in like a child's puzzle! Why hadn't he thought of it before?

None the less he did not turn aside towards the great desolate barrack, though he eyed it as he went down the slope between it and the sea. He had not yet begun to think out a plan of action. He wanted Dan'l disposed of without showing his hand in the business. As it was, the girl (and he cursed her) had guessed him to blame for the loss of the lugger. Was it more than a guess of hers? He couldn't say. He had told her at parting that he was walking to St. Ives on business. On a sudden thought he halted in the main street and turned to walk up towards Tregenna, the great house overlooking the town. Its owner, Squire Stephens, was an old client of his.

Squire Stephens was at home, and Phoby Geen sat closeted with him for an hour and more. Nothing was talked of save business, and when the Squire mentioned Dan'l Leggo and the price on his head, Phoby waved a hand mute-like, as much as to beg off being questioned.

Twilight was falling as he took the road back to Porthleah; and Tummels, who had been waiting behind a hedge above the town, dogged him home through the dusk and through the dark.

Phoby's call on the Squire had begun and ended with business. The *Nonesuch* had made another trip to Roscoff, and he had one hundred and fifty pounds' worth of white cognac to dispose of, all sunk—for Mr. Pennefather had put on a sudden activity—off Old Lizard Head. He had reason to believe that the Preventive men were watching his usual routes inland. Since the accident to Dan'l he had felt, in his cunning way, a new watchfulness in the air.

The day after his journey to St. Ives, the *Nonesuch* sailed again for Roscoff. At the last moment he decided not to command her this trip; but turned the business over to his mate, Seth Rogers—a very dependable man, though not clever at all. So away she went, leaving the Cove empty but for himself only and Bessie Bussow and Tummels, that lived in a freehold cottage on his savings and didn't draw a regular wage, but only took a hand in a run when he chose. Moreover, Tummels had never sailed for years past but in the *Black Joke*, and the *Black Joke* was taken and her crew in prison or in hiding.

Phoby would lief enough have seen Tummels' back. For the job he meditated the man was not only worse than useless, but might even spy on him and carry warning. His plan was to get the sunk crop of brandy round to St. Ives, deliver it to Squire Stephens, and, at the same time, under cover of the business, make sure of Dan'l's being at Stack's Folly, and treat with him, under threats, to give up claim upon his sweetheart. To this end, one night while Tummels was sleeping, he unmoored the *Fly* tender—a twenty-foot open boat carrying two sprit-sails, owned by him and Dan'l in common, and used for all manner of odd jobs—worked her down to Old Lizard Head single-handed, and crept up to the sunk crop of brandy. Back-breaking work it was to heave the kegs on board; but in an hour before midnight he had stowed the lot and was steering for St. Ives with a stiffish breeze upon his port quarter. The weather couldn't have served him better. By daylight the *Fly* was rounding in for St. Ives Quay, having sunk her crop again off the mouth of a handy cave on the town side of Treryn Dinas; and Phoby Geen stepped ashore and ordered breakfast at the George and Dragon before stepping up to talk with Squire Stephens.

In the meantime, Tummels, waking up at four in the morning, as his custom was, and taking a look out of window, missed the *Fly* from her moorings, which caused him to scratch his head and think hard for ten minutes. Then he washed and titivated himself and walked down to the Kiddlywink.

"Hullo, Tummels!" said Bessie Bussow, hearing his footstep on the pebbles, and popping her old head out of window, nightcap and all. "What fetches you abroad so early?"

"Dress yourself, that's a dear woman! Dress yourself and come down!" Tummels waited in a sweat of impatience till the old woman opened her front door.

"What's the matter with the man?" she asked. "Thee'rt lookin' like a thing hurried in mind."

"I wants the loan of your horse and trap, missus," said Tummels.

"Sakes alive, is *that* all? Why on the wide earth couldn't you ha' gone fore to stable an' fetched 'em, without spoilin' my beauty-sleep?" asked Bessie.

"No, missus. To be honest with 'ee that's not nearly all." Tummels rubbed the back of his head. "Fact is, I'm off in s'arch of your nephew Phoby Geen, that has taken the *Fly* round to St. Ives, unless I be greatly mistaken; and what's more, unless I be greatly mistaken, he means to lay information against Dan'l."

"If you can prove that to me," says Bessie, "he's no nephew o' mine, and out he goes from my will as soon as you bring back the trap, and I can drive into Helston an' see Lawyer Walsh."

"Well, I'm uncommon glad you look at it in that reasonable light," says Tummels; "for, the man being your own nephew, so to speak, I didn' like to borry your horse an' trap to use against 'en without lettin' 'ee know the whole truth."

"I wish," says Bessie, "you wouldn' keep castin' it in my teeth—or what does dooty for 'em—that the man's my nephew. You'll see how much of a nephew he is if you can prove what you charge against 'en. But family is family until proved otherwise; and so, Mr. Tummels, you shall harness up the horse and bring him around, and I'll go with you to St. Ives to get to the bottom o' this. On the way you shall tell me what you do know."

She was a well-plucked woman for seventy-five, was Bessie Bussow; and had a head on

her shoulders too. While Tummels was harnessing, she fit and boiled a dish o' tea to fortify herself, and after drinking it nipped into the cart as spry as a two-year-old. Off they drove, and came within sight of Stack's Folly just about the time when Phoby Geen was bringing the *Fly* into St. Ives harbour.

They pulled up at the farmhouse under the hill, and out came William Sleep to welcome them. He listened to their errand and stood for a minute considering.

"There's only one thing to be done," he announced; "and that is to fetch up Dr. Martyn. We're workin' that young man hard," said he; "for he only left the patient a couple of hours ago." He invited Bessie to step inside and make herself at home; and while Tummels stalled the horse, he posted down in search of the doctor.

About an hour later the two came walking back together, William Sleep with news that the *Fly* was lying alongside St. Ives Quay. He had seen nothing of Phoby Geen, and hadn't risked inquiring. The young doctor, though grey in the cheeks and worn with nursing, rang cheerful as a bell.

"If you'd told me this a month ago," said he, "I might have pulled a long face about it; but now the man's strong enough to bear moving. You, Mr. Sleep, must lend me a suit of clothes, with that old wideawake of yours. There's not the fellow to it in this parish. After that, all you can do at present is to keep watch here while I get Dan'l down to the sea. You, Mr. Tummels, by hook or crook, must beg, borrow, or steal a boat in St. Ives, and one that will keep the sea for three or four days at a push."

"If the fellow comes sneaking round the Folly here, William Sleep and I can knock him on the head and tie him up. And then what's to prevent my making use of the *Fly* hersel'?"

"That's not a bad notion, though we'll avoid violence if we can. The point is, you must bring along a boat, and as soon after nightfall as may be."

"You may count on it," Tummels promised. "Next question is, where be I to take the poor chap aboard? There's good landing, and quiet too, at Cawse Ogo, a little this side of Treryn Dinas." Tummels suggested it because he knew the depths there close in-shore, the spot being a favourite one with the Cove boys for a straight run of goods.

"Cawse Ogo be it," said the doctor. "I know the place, and I think the patient can walk the distance. Unless I'm mistaken it has a nice handy cave, too; though I may think twice about using it. I don't like hiding with only one bolt-hole."

"You haven't found any part for me in your little plans," put in Bessie Bussow. "Now, I'm thinkin' that when he finds himself on the high seas and wants to speak a foreign-bound ship, this here may come in handy." She pulled out a bag from her under-pocket and passed it over to Tummels.

"Gold?" said he. "Gold an' notes? 'Tis you have a head on your shoulders, missus."

"Thank 'ee," said she. "There's twenty pound, if you'll count it. An' 'tis only a first instalment; for the lad shall have the rest in time, if I live to alter my will."

From the farmhouse Dr. Martyn walked boldly up to Stack's Folly with the bundle under his arm: and in twenty minutes had Dan'l rigged up in William Sleep's clothes. The day was turning bright and clear, and away over the waste land towards Zennor you could see for miles. Tis the desolatest land almost in all Cornwall, and by keeping to the furze-brakes and spying from one to the next, he steered his patient down for the coast and brought him safe to the cliffs over Cawse Ogo. There in a lew place in the middle of the bracken-fern they seated themselves, and the doctor pulled out his pocket spyglass and searched the coast to left and right. By and by he lowered the glass with a start, seemed to consider for a moment, and looked again.

"See here," said he, passing over the spyglass, "if you can keep comfortable I've a notion that a bathe would do me good."

Dan'l let him go. Ten minutes later, without help of the glass—his hand being too shaky to hold it steady—he saw the doctor in the water below him, swimming out to sea with a strong breast-stroke. Three hundred yards, maybe, he swam out in a straight line, appeared to float and tread water for a minute or two, and so made back for shore. In less than half an hour he was back again at Dan'l's side, and his face changed from its grey look to the picture of health.

"I want you to answer me a question if you can," said he. "Does your friend, Mr. Phoby Geen, wear a peewit's wing-feather in his hat?"

"He does, or did," answered Dan'l; "in one of his hats, at least. Did you meet the man down there?"

"No; and I've never set eyes on him in my life," said the doctor. "I just guessed." He

laughed cheerful-like, enjoying Dan'l's wonder. "But this guess," he went on, "changes the campaign a little; and I'll have to ask you to lie here alone for some while longer—maybe an hour and more."

He nodded and walked off, cautious at first, but with great strides as soon as he struck into the cliff-path. When he came in sight of the Folly he spied a man's figure on the slope there among the furze, and the man was working up towards the Folly on the side of the hill hidden from William Sleep's farm.

"Lend me a gun," panted the doctor, running into the farmhouse. "A gun and a powder-horn, quick! And a lantern and wads, and a spare flint or two—never mind the shot-flask—" He told what he had seen. "I'll keep the fellow under my eye now, and all you have to do, Mr. Tummels, is to take out his boat after sunset and bring her down to Cawse Ogo."

He caught up the gun and ran out of the cottage, clucking under the hedges until he came round again to the farther side of the hill; and there he saw Master Phoby Geen come slamming out of the empty Folly and post down the slope at a swinging pace towards Cawse Ogo. "And a pretty rage he's carrying with him I'll wager," said the doctor to himself. "The Lord send he doesn't stumble upon Dan'l, or I may have to hurt him, which I don't want, and lose the fun of this. I wouldn't miss it now for five pounds."

His heart jumped for joy when, still following, he saw the man turn down towards the shore by a track a good quarter of a mile to the right of the spot where Dan'l lay. He was satisfied now; and creeping back to Dan'l, he dropped his full length in the bracken and lay and laughed.

"But what's the gun for?" Dan'l demanded.

"You've told me often enough about the seals on this bit of coast. Well, to-night, my friend, we're going to have some fun with them."

"Doctor, doctor, think of the risk! Besides, I ben't strong enough for seal-hunting."

"There's no risk," the doctor promised him; "and all the hunting you'll be called upon to do is to sit still and smile. Have I been a good friend to you, or have I not?"

"The best friend in the world," Dan'l answered fervent-like.

"On the strength of that you'll have to trust me a little longer. I can't afford you more than a little while longer, for my practice is going to the dogs already. I've sent word home by Tummels that if anyone in St. Ives falls sick to-day he'll have to send over to Penzance."

The greater part of the afternoon Dan'l slept, and the doctor smoked his pipe and kept watch. At six o'clock they finished the loaf that had been packed up with William Sleep's clothes, emptied the doctor's flask, and fell to discoursing for the last time upon religion. They talked of it till the sun went down in their faces, and then, just before darkness came up over the sea, the doctor rose.

There was just light enough for them to pick their way down over the cliff, treading softly; and just light enough to show that the beach beneath them was empty. On the edge of the sand the doctor chose a convenient rock and called a halt behind it. Peering round, he had the mouth of the cave in full view till the darkness hid it.

"Now's the time!" said he. He took off his coat and lit the lantern under it, muffling the light. "Seals? Come along, man; I promise you the cave is just full of sport!"

He crept for the cave, and Dan'l at his heels, the sand deadening all sound of their footsteps. Close by the cave's mouth he crouched for a moment, felt the hammer of his gun, and, uncovering the lantern with a quick turn of the hand, passed it to Dan'l and marched boldly in.

The soft sand made a floor for the cave for maybe sixty feet within the entrance. It ended on the edge of a rock-pool a dozen yards across, and deep enough to reach above a man's knees. As the doctor and Dan'l reached the pool they heard a sudden splashing on the far side of it.

"Hold the lantern high!" sang out the doctor. Dan'l obeyed, and the light fell full not only on his face, but on the figure of a man that cowered down before it on the patch of shingle where the cave ended.

"Seals?" cried the doctor, lifting his gun. "What did I promise you?"

With a scream, the poor creature flung himself on his knees.

"Don't shoot! Oh, don't shoot!" His voice came across the pool to them in a squeal like a rabbit's.

"Eh? Hullo!" said the doctor, but without lowering his gun. "Mr. Deiphobus Geen, I

believe?"

"Don't shoot! Oh, don't shoot me!"

"Be so good as to step across here," the doctor commanded.

"You won't hurt me? Dan'l, make him promise he won't hurt me!"

"Come!" the doctor commanded again, and Phoby Geen came to them through the pool with his knees knocking together. "Put out your hands, please. Thank you. Dan'l, search, and you'll find a piece of cord in my pocket. Take it, and tie up his wrists."

"I never meant you no harm," whined Phoby; but he submitted.

"And now,"—the doctor turned to Dan'l—"leave him to me, step outside and bring word as soon as you hear or glimpse a boat in the offing. At what time, Mr. Geen, are the carriers coming for the tubs out yonder? Answer me: and if I find after that you've answered me false, I'll blow your brains out."

"Two in the morning," answered Phoby.

"And Tummels will be here in an hour," sighed the doctor, relieved in his mind on the one point he had been forced to leave to chance. "Step along, Dan'l; and don't you strain yourself in your weak state by handling the tubs: Tummels can manage them single-handed. You see, Mr. Geen, plovers don't shed their feathers hereabouts in the summer months; and a feather floating on a tideway doesn't, as a rule, keep moored to one place. I took a swim this morning and cleared up those two points for myself. Step along, Dan'l, my friend; I seemed to hear Tummels outside, lowering sail."

Twelve hours later, Dan'l, with a pocketful of money, was shipped on the high seas aboard a barque bound out of Bristol for Georgia; and there, six months later, Amelia Sanders followed him out and married him. Not for years did they return to Porthleven and live on Aunt Bussow's money, no man molesting them. The Cove had given up business, and Government let bygones be bygones, behaving very handsome for once.

WHERE THE TREASURE IS.

I.

In Ardevora, a fishing-town on the Cornish coast not far from the Land's End, lived a merchant whom everybody called 'Elder' Penno, or 'The Elder'—not because he had any right, or laid any claim, to that title. His father and grandfather had worn it as office-bearers in a local religious sect known as the Advent Saints; and it had survived the extinction of that sect and passed on to William John Penno, an orthodox Wesleyan, as a family sobriquet.

He was sixty-three years old, a widower, and childless. His fellow-townsmen supposed him to be rich because he had so many irons in the fire and employed, in one way and another, a great deal of labour. He held a number of shares in coasting vessels, and passed as owner of half a dozen—all of them too heavily in debt to pay dividends. He managed (ostensibly as proprietor, but actually in dependence on the local bank) a shipbuilding-yard to which the fishermen came for their boats. He had an interest in the profit of most of these boats when they were launched, as also in a salt-store, a coal-store, a company for the curing of pilchards, and an agency for buying and packing of fish for the London market. He kept a retail shop and sold almost everything the town needed, from guernseys and hardware to tea, bacon, and tallow candles. He advanced money, at varying rates of interest, on anything from a ship to a frying-pan; and by this means had made himself accurately acquainted with his neighbours' varying degrees of poverty. But he was not rich, although

generally reputed so: for Ardevora's population was not one out of which any man could make his fortune, and of poor folk who borrow or obtain goods on credit quite a large number do not seriously mean to pay— a fact often overlooked, and always by the borrowers themselves.

Still, and despite an occasional difficulty in keeping so many balls in the air at one time, Elder Penno was—as a widower, a childless man, and in comparison with his neighbours—well-to-do. Also he filled many small public offices—district councillor, harbour commissioner, member of the School Board, and the like. They had come to him—he could not quite tell how. He took pride in them and discharged them conscientiously. He knew that envious tongues accused him of using them to feather his nest, but he also knew that they accused him falsely. He was thick-skinned, and they might go to the devil. In person he was stout of habit, brusque of bearing, with a healthy, sanguine complexion, a double chin, shrewd grey eyes, and cropped hair which stood up straight as the bristles on a brush. He lived abstemiously, rose at six, went to bed at nine, and might be found, during most of the intervening hours, hard at work at his desk in the little office behind his shop. The office had a round window, and the window overlooked the quay, the small harbour (dry at low water), and the curve of a sandy bay beyond.

One morning Elder Penno looked up from his desk and saw, beyond the masts of the fishing-boats lying aslant as the tide had left them, a small figure—a speck, almost—on the sandy beach, about three furlongs away.

He was engaged at the moment in adding up a column of figures. Having entered the total, he looked up again, laid down his pen, frowned with annoyance, and picked up an old pair of field-glasses that stood ready to hand on the sill of his desk beside the ink-well. He glanced at the clock on his chimney-piece before throwing up the window-sash.

The hour was eleven—five minutes after eleven, to be exact; the month April; the day sunny, with a humming northerly wind; the tide drawing far out towards low-ebb, and the air so clear that the small figure standing on the edge of the waves could not be mistaken.

As he threw up the sash Elder Penno caught sight of Tom Hancock, the school attendance officer, lounging against a post on the quay below.

"You're the very man I want," said the Elder. "Isn't that Tregenza's grandchild over yonder?"

"Looks like her," said the A.O., withdrawing a short clay pipe from his mouth, and spitting.

"Then why isn't she at school at this hour?"

"'Tis a hopeless case, if you ask me." The A.O. announced this with a fine air of resignation. His pay was 2s. 6d. a week, and he never erred on the side of zeal.

"Better fit you was lookin' up such cases than idlin' here and wastin' baccy. That's if you ask *me*," retorted the Elder.

"I've a-talked to the maid, an' I've a-talked to her gran'father, till I'm tired," said Hancock, and spat again. "She'll be fourteen next May, an' then we can wash our hands of her."

"A nice look-out it'd be if the eddication of England was left in your hands," said the Elder truthfully, if obviously.

"You can't do nothin' with her." The A.O. was used to censure and wasted no resentment on it. "Nothin'. I give 'ee leave to try."

The Elder stood for a moment watching the small figure across the sands. Then, with a snort of outraged propriety, he closed the window, reached down his hat from its peg, marched out of his office—through the shop— and forth upon the sunny quay. A flight of stone stairs led down to the bed of the harbour, now deserted by the tide; and across this, picking his way among the boats and their moorings, he made for the beach where the sea broke and glittered on the firm sand in long curves of white.

A tonic northerly breeze was blowing, just strongly enough to lift the breakers in blue-green hollows against the sunshine and waft a delicate film of spray about the figure of the child moving forlornly on the edge of the foam. She was not playing or running races with the waves, but walking soberly and anon halting to scan the beach ahead. Her legs were bare to the knee, and she had hitched up her short skirt high about her like a cockle-gatherer's. In the roar and murmur of the surf she did not hear the Elder approaching, but faced around with a start as he called to her.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

For answer she held up a billet of wood, bleached and frayed with long tossing on the

seas, worthless except for firewood, and almost worthless for that. The Elder frowned. "Look here," he said, "you ought to be in school at this moment instead of minchin[1] idle after a few bits o' stick, no good to anyone. A girl of your age, too! What's your name?"

"Please, sir, Liz," the child stammered, looking down.

"You're Sam Tregenza's grandchild, hey?"

"Please, sir."

"Then do you go home an' tell your grandfather, with my compliments, he ought to know better than to allow it. It's robbin' the ratepayers, that's what it is."

"Yes, sir," she murmured, glancing down dubiously at the piece of wood in her hand.

"You don't understand me," said the Elder. "The ratepayers spend money on a school here that the children of Ardevora mayn't grow up into little dunces. Now, if the children go to school as they ought, the Government up in London gives the ratepayers—me, for instance—some of their money back: so much money for each child. If a child minches, the money isn' paid. 'Tisn' the wood you pick up—that's neither here nor there—but the money you're takin' out of folks' pockets. Didn' you know that?"

"No, sir."

"Your grandfather knows it, anyway—not," went on the Elder with sudden anger in his voice, "that Sam Tregenza cares what folks he robs!" He pulled himself up, slightly ashamed of this outburst. The child, however, did not appear to resent it, but stood thoughtful, as if working out the logic of his argument.

"It's the money," he insisted. "As for the wood, why you might come to my yard and steal as much as you can carry, an' 'twouldn' amount to what you rob by playin' truant like this; no, nor half of it. That's one thing for you to consider; and here's another: There's a truant-school, up to Plymouth; a sort of place that's half a school and half a prison, where the magistrates send children that won't take warning. How would you like it, if a policeman came, one of these days, and took you off to that kind of punishment?"

He looked down on the child, and saw her under-lip working. She held back her tears bravely, but was shaking from head to foot.

"There now!" said the Elder, in what for him was a soothing voice. "There's no danger if you behave an' go to school like other children. You just attend to that, an' we'll say no more about it."

He turned back to his office. On the quay he paused to tell Tom Hancock that he reckoned the child would be more careful in future: he had given her something to think over.

II.

A week later, at nine o'clock, Elder Penno was retiring to rest in his bedroom, which overlooked his boat-building yard, when a clattering noise broke on the night without, and so startled him that he all but dropped his watch in the act of winding it.

The noise suggested an avalanche of falling boxes. The Elder blew out his candle, lit a bull's-eye lantern which he kept handy by his bed, and, throwing up the window, challenged loudly—"Who's there?"

For the moment the ray of the bull's-eye revealed no one. He turned it upon the corner of the yard where, as a rule, stood a pile of empty packing-cases from the shop, 'empties' waiting to be sorted out and returned, old butter-barrels condemned to be knocked to pieces for kindling-wood. Yes: the sound had come from there, for the pile had toppled over and lay in a long moraine across the entrance gate. "Must ha' been built up top-heavy," said the Elder to himself: and with that, running his lantern-ray along the yard wall, he caught sight of a small bare leg and a few inches of striped skirt for an instant before they slid into darkness across the coping. He recognised them.

"This beats Old Harry!" muttered the Elder. "Bringin' up the child to be a gaol-bird now—and on my premises! As if Sam Tregenza hadn' done me injury enough without that!"

For two years the Elder had been unable to think of Sam Tregenza or to hear his name mentioned, but a mixture of rage and indignation boiled up within him. To be sure, the old man was ruined, had fallen on evil days, subsisted now with the help of half a crown a week parish relief. But he had behaved disgracefully, and his fall was a signal vindication of God's justice. How else could one account for it? The man had been a wise fisherman, as knowledgable as any in Ardevora. He had been bred to the fishing, and had followed it all his life, but always—until his sixtieth year—as a paid hand, with no more than a paid hand's share of the earnings. For this his wife had been to blame—an unthrifty woman, always out

at heel and in debt to the shop; but with her death he started on a new tack, began to hoard, and within five years owned a boat of his own—the *Pass By* lugger—bought with his own money, save for a borrowed seventy-five pounds. He worked her with his one son Seth, a widow-man of forty, and Seth's son, young Eli, aged fifteen, Liz's father and brother. The boat paid well from the first, and the Tregenzas—the three generations—took a monstrous pride in her.

It was Elder Penno who had advanced the borrowed seventy-five pounds, of course taking security in the boat and upon an undertaking that Tregenza kept her insured. But on the morrow of the black day when she foundered, drowning Seth and Eli, and leaving only the old man to be picked up by a chance drifter running for harbour, it was discovered that the Tregenzas had missed by two months the date of renewing her premium of insurance. The boat was gone, and with it the Elder's seventy-five pounds.

To think of recovering it upon Tregenza's sticks of furniture was idle. The Elder threatened it, but the whole lot would not have fetched twenty pounds, and there were other creditors for small amounts. The old man, too, was picked up half crazy. He had been clinging to a fish-box for five and twenty minutes in the icy-cold water; but whether his craziness came of physical exhaustion or the shock of losing boat, son, and grandchild all in a few minutes, no one could tell. He never set foot on board a boat again, but sank straight into pauperism and dotage.

The Elder, for his part, considered such an end no more than the due of one who had played him so inexcusable a trick over the insurance. From the first he had suspected this weakening of Tregenza's intellect to be something less than genuine—a calculated infirmity, to excite public compassion and escape the blame his dishonest negligence so thoroughly deserved.

As he closed the window that night and picked up his watch to resume the winding of it, the Elder felt satisfied that there were depths in Tregenza's craziness which needed sounding. He would pay him a visit to-morrow. He had not exchanged a word with him for two years. Indeed, the old scoundrel seldom or never showed his face in the street.

At eleven o'clock next morning he rapped at the door of Tregenza's hovel, which lay some way up the hill above the harbour, in a nexus of mean alleys and at the back of a tenement known as Ugnot's. His knock appeared to silence a hammering in the rear of the cottage. By and by the door opened—but a very little way—and through the chink old Tregenza peered out at him—gaunt, shaggy, grey of hair and of face, his beard and his very eyebrows powdered with sawdust.

"Kindly welcome," said Tregenza, blinking against the light.

"You won't say that when I've done wi' you," said the Elder to himself.

III.

"Won't you step inside?" asked Tregenza.

"Yes," said the Elder, "I will. I've a-got something serious to talk about."

The sight of Tregenza irritated him more than he had expected, and irritated him the worse because the old man appeared neither confused with shame nor contrite.

"I've a-got something serious to talk about," the Elder repeated in the kitchen; "though, as between you and me, any talk couldn't well be pleasant. No, I won't sit down—not in this house. 'Tis only a sense o' duty brings me to-day, though I daresay you've wondered often enough why I ha'n't been here before an' told you straight what I think o' you."

"No," said Tregenza simply, as the Elder paused for an answer. "I ha'n't wondered at all. I knowed 'ee better."

"What's that you're sayin'?"

"I knowed 'ee better. First along—" the old man spoke as if with a painful effort of memory—"first along, to be sure, I reckined you might ha' come an' spoke a word o' comfort; not that speakin' comfort could ha' done any good, an' so I excused 'ee."

"You excused me? Word of comfort! Word of comf—" The Elder gasped for a moment, his mouth opening and shutting without sound. "An' what about my seventy-five pounds?—all lost to me through your not keepin' up the insurance!"

"Ay," assented old Tregenza. "Ay, to be sure. Terrible careless, that was."

For a moment the Elder felt tempted to strike him. "Look here," he said, tapping his stick sharply on the floor; "as it happens, I didn' come here to lose my temper nor to talk about your conduct—leastways, not that part of it. 'Tis about your granddaughter. She've been stealin' my wood."

"Liz?"

"Yes; I caught her in my yard at nine o'clock last night. No mistakin' what she was after. There, in the dark—she was stealin' my wood."

"What sort o' wood?"

"Man alive! Does it matter what sort o' wood, when I tell you the child was thievin'. You encourage her to play truant, defyin' the law; an' now she's doin' what'll bring her to Bodmin Gaol, as sure as fate. A child scarce over thirteen—an' you're makin' a gaol-bird o' her! The Lord knows, Sam Tregenza, I think badly enough of you, but will you stand there an' tell me 'tis no odds to you that your grandchild's a thief?"

"Liz wouldn' steal your wood, nor nobody's-else's, unless some person had put her up to it," answered the old man, knitting his brows to which the sawdust still adhered. "Come to think, now, the maid told me the other day that you'd been speakin' to her, sayin' that minchin' from school was robbin' the public, an' she'd do honester to be stealin' it from you than pickin' it up along the foreshore durin' school-hours. You may depend that's what put it into her head. She's a very well-meanin' child."

The Elder shook like a ship in stays. The explanation was monstrous—yet it was obviously the true one. What could he say to it? What could any sane man say to it?

While he stood and cast about for words, his face growing redder and redder, a breeze of air from the hill behind the cottage blew open the upper flap of its back door—which Tregenza had left on the latch—and passing through the kitchen, slammed-to the door leading into the street. The noise of it made the Elder jump. The next moment he was gasping again, as his gaze travelled out to the back-court.

"Good Lord, what's that?"

"Eh?"—Tregenza followed his gaze—"You mean to tell me you ha'n't heard? Well, well.... You live too much alone, Elder; you take my word. That's the terrible thing about riches. They cut you off from your fellows. But only to think you never heard tell o' my boat!"

The old man led the way out into the yard; and there, indeed, amid an indescribable litter of timber—wreckwood in balks and boards, worthless lengths of deck-planking, knees, and transoms, stem-pieces and stern-posts, and other odds and ends of bygone craft, condemned spars, barrel-staves, packing-cases—a boat reposed on the stocks; but such a boat as might make a sane man doubt his eyesight. The Elder stared at her slowly, incapable of speech; stared and pulled out a bandanna handkerchief and slowly wiped the back of his neck. She measured, in fact, nineteen or twenty feet over-all, but to the eye she appeared considerably longer, having (as the Elder afterwards put it) as many lines in her as a patchwork quilt. Her ribs, rising above the unfinished top-strakes, claimed ancestry in a dozen vessels of varying sizes; and how the builder had contrived to fix them into one keelson passed all understanding or guess. For over their unequal curves he had nailed a sheath of packing-boards, eked out with patches of sheet-tin. Here and there the eye, roaming over the structure, came to rest on a piece of scarfing or dovetailing which must have cost hours of patient labour and contrivance, cheek-by-jowl with work which would have disgraced a boy of ten. The whole thing, stuck there and filling the small back-court, was a nightmare of crazy carpentry, a lunacy in the sun's eye.

"Why, bless your heart!" said Tregenza, laying a hand on the boat's transom with affectionate pride, "you must be the only man in Ardevora that don't know about her. Scores of folk comes here, Sunday afternoons, an' passes me compliments upon her." He passed a hand caressingly over her stern board. "There's a piece o' timber for you! Inch-an'-a-quarter teak, *an*' seasoned! That's where her name's to go—the *Pass By*. No; I couldn't fancy any other name."

The Elder was dumb. He understood now, and pitied the man, who nevertheless (he told himself) deserved his affliction.

"No, I couldn' fancy any other name," went on Tregenza in a musing tone. "If the Lord has a grievance agen me for settin' too much o' my heart on the old *Pass By*, He've a-took out o' me all the satisfaction He's likely to get. 'Tisn' like the man that built a new Jericho an' set up the foundations thereof 'pon his first-born an' the gates 'pon his youngest. The cases don't tally; for my son an' gran'son went down together in th' old boat, an' *I* got nobody left."

"There's your gran'daughter," the Elder suggested.

"Liz?" Tregenza shook his head. "I reckon she don't count."

"She'll count enough to get sent to gaol," said the Elder tartly, "if you encourage her to be a thief. And look here, Sam Tregenza, it seems to me you've very loose notions o' what punishment means, an' why 'tis sent. The Lord takes away the *Pass By*, an' your son an' gran'son along with her, an' why? (says you). Because (says you) your heart was too much set 'pon the boat. Now to my thinkin' you was a deal likelier punished because you'd forgot

your duty to your neighbour an' neglected to pay up the insurance."

Tregenza shook his head again, slowly but positively. "'Tis curious to me," he said, "how you keep harkin' back to that bit o' money you lost. But 'tis the same, I've heard, with all you rich fellows. Money's the be-all and end-all with 'ee."

The Elder at this point fairly stamped with rage; but before he could muster up speech the street-door opened and the child Lizzie slipped into the kitchen. Slight noise though she made, her grandfather caught the sound of her footsteps. A look of greed crept into his face, as he made hurriedly for the back-doorway.

"Liz!" he called.

"Yes, gran'fer."

"Where've yer been?"

"Been to school."

"Brought any wood?"

"How could I bring any wood when—" Her voice died away as she caught sight of the Elder following her grandfather into the kitchen; and in a flash, glancing from her to Tregenza, the Elder read the truth—that the child was habitually beaten if she failed to bring home timber for the boat.

She stood silent, at bay, eyeing him desperately.

"Look here," said the Elder, and caught himself wondering at the sound of his own voice; "if 'tis wood you want, let her come and ask for it. I'm not sayin' but she can fetch away an armful now an' then—in reason, you know."

IV.

The longer Elder Penno thought it over, the more he confessed himself puzzled, not with Tregenza, but with his own conduct.

Tregenza was mad, and madness would account for anything.

But why should he, Elder Penno, be moved to take a sudden interest, unnecessary as it was inquisitive, in this mad old man, who had fooled him out of seventy-five pounds?

Yet so it was. The Elder came again, two days later, and once again before the end of the week. By the end of the second week the visit had become a daily one. What is more, day by day he found himself looking forward to it.

That Tregenza also looked forward to it might be read in the invariable eagerness of his welcome; and this was even harder to explain, because the Elder never failed to harp—seldom, indeed, relaxed harping—on old misdeeds and the lost insurance money. Nay, perhaps in scorn of his own weakness, he insisted on this more and more offensively; rehearsing each day, as he climbed the hill, speeches calculated to offend or hurt. But in the intervals he would betray—as he could not help feeling—some curiosity in the boat.

One noonday—a few minutes after the children had been dismissed from school—he walked out into the yard, in the unconfessed hope of finding Lizzie there: and there she was, engaged in filling her apron with wood.

"Listen to me," he said—for the two by this time had, without parley, grown into allies. "Your grandfather'll get along all right till he've finished buildin'. But what's to happen when the boat's ready to launch? Have you ever thought 'pon that?"

"Often an' often," said Lizzie.

"If 'twould even float—which I doubt—" said the Elder—"the dratted thing couldn' be got down to the water, without pullin' down seven feet o' wall an' the butt-end of Ugnot's pigsty."

"We must lengthen out the time," said the practical child. "Please God, he'll die afore it's finished."

"You mustn' talk irreligious," said her elderly friend. "Besides, there's nothin' amiss with him, settin' aside his foolishness. I've a-thought sometimes, now, o' buildin' a boat down here, an', when the time came, makin' believe to exchange. Boat-buildin' is slack just now, but I might trust to tradin' her off on someone—when he'd done with her—which in the natur' of things can't be long. I've a model o' the old *Pass By* hangin' up somewhere in the passage behind the shop. We might run her up in two months, fit to launch, an' finish her at leisure, call her the *Pass By*, and I daresay the Lord'll send along a purchaser in good time."

Lizzie shook her head. She would have liked to call Mr. Penno the best man in the world; but luckily—for it would have been an untruth—she found herself unequal to it.

V.

Their apprehensions were vain. The whole town had entered into the fun of Tregenza's boat, and she was no sooner felt to be within measureable distance of completion than committees—composed at first of the younger fishermen (but, by and by, the elders joined shamefacedly), held informal meetings, and devised a royal launch for her. What though she could not, as Mr. Penno had foreseen, be extricated from the yard but at the expense of seven feet of wall and the butt-end of Ugnot's pigsty? Half a dozen young masons undertook to pull the wall down and rebuild it twice as strong as before; and the landlord of Ugnot's, being interviewed, declared that he had been exercised in mind for thirty years over the propinquity of the pigsty and the dwelling-house, and would readily accept thirty shillings compensation for all damage likely to be done.

Report of these preparations at length reached Elder Penno's ears, and surprised him considerably. He sent for the ringleaders and remonstrated with them.

"I've no cause to be friends with Tregenza, the Lord knows," he said. "Still, the man's ailin' and weak in his mind. Such a shock as you're makin' ready to give 'en, as like as not may land the fellow in his grave."

"Land 'en in his grave?" they answered. "Why the old fool knows the whole programme! He've a-sent down to the Ship Inn to buy a bottle o' wine for the christenin' an' looks forward to enjoyin' hisself amazin'."

The Elder went straight to Tregenza, and found this to be no more than the truth.

"And here have I been lyin' awake thinkin' how to spare your feelin's!" he protested.

"'Tis a very funny thing," answered Tregenza, "that you, who in the way o' money make it your business to know every man's affairs in Ardevora, should be the last to get wind of a little innercent merrymakin'. That's your riches, again."

After this one must allow that it was handsome of the Elder to summon the committee again and point out to them the uncertainty of the *Pass By*'s floating when they got her down to the water. Had they considered this? They had not. So he offered them five hundredweight of lead to ballast and trim her; more, if it should be needed; and suggested their laying down moorings for her, well on the outer side of the harbour, where from his garden the old man would have a good sight of her. He would, if the committee approved, provide the moorings gratis.

On the day of the launch Ardevora dressed itself in all its bunting. A crowd of three hundred assembled in and around Tregenza's backyard and lined the adjacent walls to witness the ceremony and hear the speeches; but Elder Penno was neither a speech-maker nor a spectator. He could not, for nervousness, leave the quay, where he stood ready beside a cauldron of bubbling tar and a pile of lead pegs, to pay the ship over before she took the water, and trim her as soon as ever she floated. But when, amid cheers and to the strains of the Temperance Brass Band, she lay moored at length upon a fairly even keel, with the red ensign drooping from a staff over her stern, he climbed the hill to find Tregenza contemplating her with pride through the gap in his ruined wall.

"I missed 'ee at the christ'nin'," said the old man. "But it went off very well. Lev' us go into the house an' touch pipe."

"It surprises me," said the Elder, "to find you so cheerful as you be. An occupation like this goin' out o' your life—I reckoned you might feel it, a'most like the loss of a limb."

"A man o' my age ought to wean hisself from things earthly," said the old man; "an' besides, I've a-got *you*."

"Hey?"

"Henceforth I've a-got you, an' all to yourself."

"Seems a funny thing," mused the Elder; "an' you at this moment owin' me no less than seventy-five pound!"

Sam Tregenza settled himself down in his chair and nodded as he lit pipe. "Nothin' like friendship, after all," he said. "Now you're talkin' comfortable!"

[1] Playing truant.

A JEST OF AMBIALET.

He who has not seen Ambialet, in the Albigeois, has missed a wonder of the world. The village rests in a saddle of crystalline rock between two rushing streams, which are yet one and the same river; for the Tarn (as it is called), pouring down from the Cevennes, is met and turned by this harder ridge, and glances along one flank of Ambialet, to sweep around a wooded promontory and double back on the other. So complete is the loop that, while it measures a good two miles in circuit, across the neck of it, where the houses cluster, you might fling a pebble over their roofs from stream to stream.

High on the crupper of this saddle is perched a ruined castle, with a church below it, and a cross and a graveyard on the cliff's edge; high on the pommel you climb to another cross, beside a dilapidated house of religion, the Priory of Notre Dame de l'Oder.

From the town—for Ambialet was once a town, and a flourishing one—you mount to the Priory by a Via Crucis, zigzagging by clusters of purple marjoram and golden St. John's wort. Above these come broom and heather and bracken, dwarf oaks and junipers, box-trees and stunted chestnut-trees; and, yet above, on the summit, short turf and thyme, which the wind keeps close-trimmed about the base of the cross.

The Priory, hard by, houses a number of lads whom Père Philibert does his best to train for the religious life; but its church has been closed by order of the Government, and tall mulleins sprout between the broad steps leading to the porch. Père Philibert will tell you of a time when these steps were worn by thousands of devout feet, and of the cause which brought them.

A little below the summit you passed a railed box-tree, with an image of the Virgin against it. Here a palmer, travelling homeward from the Holy Land, planted his staff, which took root and threw out leaves and flourished; and in time the plant, called *oder* in the Languedoc, earned so much veneration that Our Lady of Ambialet changed her title and became Our Lady of the Oder.

This should be Ambialet's chief pride. But the monks of the Priory boast rather of Ambialet's natural marvel—the river looped round their demesne.

"There is nothing like it, not in the whole of France!"

Père Philibert said it with a wave of the hand. Brother Marc Antoine's pig, stretched at ease with her snout in the cool grass, grunted, as who should say *Bien entendu!*

We were three in the orchard below the Priory; or four, counting the pig— who is a sow, by the way, and by name Zephirine. Brother Marc Antoine looks after her; a gleeful old fellow of eighty, with a twinkling eye, a scandalously dirty soutane, and a fund of anecdote not always sedate. The Priory excuses him on the ground that his intellectuals are not strong —he has spent most of his life in Africa, and there taken a couple of sunstrokes. Zephirine follows him about like a dog. The pair are mighty hunters of truffles, in the season.

"—Not in the whole of France!" repeated Père Philibert with conviction, nodding from the dappled shade of the orchard-boughs towards the river, where it ran sparkling far below, by grey willows and a margin of mica-strewn sand; not 'apples of gold in a network of silver,' but a landscape all silver seen through a frame of green foliage starred with golden fruit.

The orchard-gate clicked behind us. Brother Marc Antoine, reclining beside the sow with his back against an apple-tree bole, slewed himself round for a look. Père Philibert and I, turning together, saw a man and a woman approaching, with hangdog looks, and a priest between them—the Curé of Ambialet—who seemed to be exhorting them by turns to keep up their courage.

"Pouf!" said the Curé, letting out a big sigh as he came to a standstill and mopped his brow. "Had ever poor man such trouble with his flock?— and the thermometer at twenty-eight, too! Advance, my children—you first, Maman Vacher; and Heaven grant the good

father here may compose your differences!"

Here the Curé—himself a peasant—flung out both hands as if resigning the case. Père Philibert, finger on chin, eyed the two disputants with an air of grave abstraction, waiting for one or the other to begin. Brother Marc Antoine leaned back against the apple-tree, and took snuff. His eyes twinkled. Clearly he expected good sport, and I gathered that this was not the first of Ambialet's social difficulties to be brought up to the Priory for solution.

But for the moment both disputants hung back. The woman—an old crone, with a face like a carved nutcracker—dropped an obeisance and stood with her eyes fixed on the ground. The man shifted his weight from foot to foot while he glanced furtively from one to the other of us. I recognised him for Ambialet's only baker, a black-avised fellow on the youthful side of forty. Clearly, the grave dignity of Père Philibert abashed them. "*Mais allez, donc! Allez!*" cried the Curé, much as one starts a team of horses.

Père Philibert turned slowly on his heel, and, waving a hand once more toward the river, continued his discourse as though it had not been interrupted.

"One might say almost the whole world cannot show its like! To be sure, the historian Herodotus tells us that, when Babylon stood in danger of the Medes, Queen Nitocris applied herself to dig new channels for the Euphrates to make it run crookedly. And in one place she made it wind so that travellers down the river came thrice to the same village on three successive days."

"*Té-té!*" interrupted Brother Marc Antoine, with a chuckle. "Wake up, Zephirine—wake up, old lady, and listen to this." Zephirine, smitten affectionately on the ham, answered only with a short squeal like a bagpipe, and buried her snout deeper in the grass.

"I like that," the old man went on. "To think of travelling down a river three days' journey, and putting up each night at the same *auberge! Vieux drôle d'Hèrodote!* But does he really pitch that yarn, my father?"

"The village, if I remember, was called Arderica, and doubtless its inhabitants were proud of it. Yet we of Ambialet have a better right to be proud, since the wonder that encircles us is not of man's making but a miracle of God: although,"—and here Père Philibert swung about and fixed his eyes on the baker—"our local pride in Ambialet and its history, and its institutions and its immemorial customs, are of no moment to M. Champollion, who comes, I think, from Rodez or thereabouts."

In an instant the old woman had seized on this cue.

"*Té!* Listen, then, to what the good father calls you!" she shrilled, advancing on the baker and snapping finger and thumb under his nose; "an interloper, a scoundrel from the Rouergue, where all are scoundrels! You with your yeast from Germany! It is such fellows as you that gave the Prussians our provinces, and now you must settle here, turning our stomachs upside down—honest stomachs of Ambialet."

"Bah!" exclaimed Champollion defiantly. "You!—a *sage femme—qui ne fonctionne pas, d'ailleurs!*"

So the storm broke, and so for ten good minutes it raged. In the hurly-burly, from the clash and din of winged words, I disengaged something of the true quarrel. Champollion (it seemed) had bought a business and settled down as baker in Ambialet. Now, his predecessor had always bought yeast from the Widow Vacher, next door, who prepared it by an ancient family recipe; but this new-comer had introduced some new yeast of commerce —*levûre viennoise*—and so deprived her of her small earnings. In revenge—so he asserted, and she did not deny it—she had bribed a travelling artist from Paris to decorate the bakery sign with certain scurrilities, and the whole village had conned next morning a list of the virtues of the Champollion yeast and of the things—mostly unmentionable—it was warranted *à faire sauter*. There were further charges and counter-charges—as that the widow's Cochin-China cock had been found with its neck wrung; and that she, as *sage femme*, and the only one in Ambialet, had denied her services to Madame Champollion at a time when humanity should override all private squabbles. Brother Marc Antoine rubbed his hands and repeatedly smote Zephirine on the flank.

"The pity of it—the treat you are missing!"—but Zephirine snored on, contemptuous.

After this had lasted, as I say, some ten minutes, Père Philibert held up a hand.

"I was about to tell you," said he, "something of this Ambialet of which you two are citizens. It is a true tale; and if you can pierce to the instruction it holds for you both, you will go away determined to end this scandal of our town and live in amity. Shall I proceed?"

Champollion twirled his cap uneasily. The widow fell back a pace, panting from her onslaught. Neither broke the sudden peace that had fallen on the orchard.

"Very well! You must know, then, to begin with, that this Ambialet—which you occupy

with your petty broils—was once an important burg with its charters and liberties, its consul and council of *prud'hommes* and its own court of justice. It had its guilds, too—of midwives for instance, Maman Vacher, who were bound to obey any reasonable summons—"

"You, there, just listen to that!" put in the baker.

"And of bakers, M. Champollion, who sold bread at a price regulated by law, with a committee of five *prohomes* to see that they sold by just weight."

"Eh? Eh? And I warrant the law allowed no yeast from Germany!"—This from the widow.

"Beyond doubt, my daughter, it would have countenanced no such invention; for the town held its charter from the Viscounts of Beziers and Albi, and might consume only such corn and wine as were grown in the Viscounty."

"*Parbleu!*"—the baker shrugged his shoulders—"in the matter of wine we should fare well nowadays under such a rule!"

"In these times Ambialet grew its own wine, and by the tun. Had you but used your eyes on the way hither they might have counted old vine-stocks by the score; they lie this way and that amid the heather on either side of the calvary. Many of the inhabitants yet alive can remember the phylloxera destroying them."

"Which came, moreover, from the Rouergue!" snapped Maman Vacher.

"Be silent, my daughter. Yes! these were thriving times for Ambialet before ever the heresy infected the Albigeois, and when every year brought the Great Pilgrimage and the Retreat. For three days before the Retreat, while yet the inns were filling, the whole town made merry under a president called the King of Youth—*rex juventutis*—who appointed his own officers, levied his own fines, and was for three days a greater man even than the Viscount of Beziers, from whom he derived his power by charter: '*E volem e auctreiam quo lo Rei del Joven d'Ambilet puesco far sas fastas, tener ses senescals e sos jutges e sos sirvens*...' h'm, h'm." Père Philibert cast about to continue the quotation, but suddenly recollected that to his hearers its old French must be as good as Greek.

"—Well, as I was saying, this King of Youth held his merrymaking once in every year, at the time of the Great Pilgrimage. And on a certain year there came to Ambialet among the pilgrims one Tibbald, a merchant of Cahors, and a man (as you shall see) of unrighteous mind, in that he snatched at privy gain under cover of his soul's benefit. This man, having arrived at Ambialet in the dusk, had no sooner sought out an inn than he inquired, 'Who regulated this feast?' The innkeeper directed him to the place, where he found the King of Youth setting up a maypole by torchlight; whom he plucked by the sleeve and drew aside for a secret talk.

"Now the fines and forfeits exacted by the King of Youth during his festival were always paid in wine—a pail of wine apiece from the newest married couple in the Viscounty, a pail of wine from anyone proved to have cut or plucked so much as a leaf from the great elm-tree in the place, a pail for damaging the Maypole, or stumbling in the dance, or hindering any of the processions. 'We have granted this favour to our youth,' says the charter, 'because, having been witness of their merrymaking, we have taken great pleasure and satisfaction therein.' You may guess, then, that in one way and another the King and his seneschals accumulated good store of wine by the end of the festival, when they shared it among the populace in a great carouse; nor were they held too strictly to account for the justice of particular fines by which the whole commonalty profited.

"This Tibbald, then, having drawn the King aside, began cautiously and anfractuously and *per ambages* to unfold his plan. He had brought with him (said he) on muleback twelve half-hogsheads of right excellent wine which he had picked up as a bargain in the Rhone Valley. The same he had smuggled into Ambialet after dusk, covering his mules' panniers with cloths and skins of Damas and Alexandria, and it now lay stored in the stables at the back of his inn. This excellent wine (which in truth was an infamous *tisane* of the last pressings, and had never been nearer the Rhone than Caylus) he proposed to barter secretly for that collected during the feast, and to pay the King of Youth, moreover, a bribe of one livre in money on every hogshead exchanged. The populace (he promised) would be too well drunken to discover the trick; or, if they detected any difference in the wine would commend it as better and stronger than ordinary.

"The King of Youth, perceiving that he had to deal with a knave, pretended to agree, but stipulated that he must first taste the wine; whereupon the merchant gave him to taste some true Rhone wine which he carried in a leather bottle at his belt. 'If the cask answer to the sample,' said the King, 'Ambialet is well off.' 'By a good bargain,' said Tibbald. 'Nay, by a godsend,' said the King; and, stepping back into the torchlight, he called to his officers to arrest the knave and hold him bound, while the seneschals went off to search the inn stables.

"The seneschals returned by and by, trundling the casks before them; and, a Court of Youth being then and there empanelled, the wretched merchant was condemned to be

whipped three times around the Maypole, to have his goods confiscated, and to be driven out of the town *cum ludibrio*.

"Now, the knave was clever. Though terrified by the sentence, he kept his wits. The talk had been a private one without witnesses, and he began to shout and swear that the King of Youth had either heard amiss or was maliciously giving false evidence. He had proposed no bargain, nor hinted at one; he had come on a pilgrimage for his soul's sake, bringing the wine as a propitiatory offering to Our Lady of the Oder for the use of her people. Here was one man's oath against another's. Moreover, and even if his sentence were legal (which he denied), it could be revised and quashed by the Viscount of Beziers, as feudal lord of Ambialet, and to him he appealed. Nevertheless they whipped him; and the casks they broached, and having tasted the stuff, let it spill about the marketplace.

"But when the whipping was done, the King of Youth stood up and said: 'I have been considering, and I find that this fellow has some right on his side. No one overheard our talk, and he sets his oath against mine. Let him go, therefore, under guard, to the Viscount and lodge his complaint. For my part, I have my hands full just now, and after until the feast, and shall wait until my lord summon me. But I trust his judgment, knowing him to be a very Solomon.' Then, turning to the culprit, 'You know my lord's château, of course? My guards will take you there.' 'The devil a furlong know I of this accursed spot,' answered Tibbald viciously, 'seeing that I arrived here a good hour after dark, and by a road as heathenish as yourselves.'

"'You shall travel by boat, then,' said the King, 'since the road mislikes you. The château lies some two miles hence by water.' This, you see, was no more than the truth, albeit the château stood close at the back of him while he spoke, on the rock just overhead, but Tibbald could not see it for the darkness.

"So—the townsfolk smoking the King's jest—two stout servitors led the merchant down to the landing by the upper ferry, and there, having hoisted him aboard a boat, thrust off into the stream. The current soon swept them past the town; and for a while, as the boat spun downward and the dark woods slipped past him, and he felt the night-wind cold on his brow, Master Tibbald sat in a mortal fright. But by and by, his anger rising on top of his fear, he began to curse and threaten and promise what vengeance would fall on Ambialet when the Viscount had heard his story, to all of which the boatmen answered only that the Viscount was known to be a just lord, and would doubtless repay all as they deserved.

"And so the boat sped downstream past the woods, and was brought to shore at last under a cliff, with dim houses above it, and here and there a light shining. And this, of course, was Ambialet again; but the King of Youth had given orders to clear the streets, close the inns, and extinguish all flambeaux; so that as the guards marched Tibbald on the cliffway to the château, never a suspicion had he that this sleeping town was the same he had left in uproar.

"Now, the Viscount, who meanwhile had been posted in the affair, sat in the great hall of the château, with a cup of wine beside him and, at his elbow, a flagon. He was a great lord, who dearly loved a jest; and, having given Master Tibbald audience, he listened to all his complaint, keeping a grave face.

"'In truth,' said he, 'you have suffered scurvy treatment; yet what affects me is the waste of this wine which you intended for Our Lady of the Oder. As lord of Ambialet I am behoven to protect her offerings.'

"'But the stripes, monseigneur!' urged Tibbald. 'The stripes were given me in her name. Listen, therefore, I pray you, to my suggestion: Let the burg pay me fair compensation for my wine. So she will miss her offering; her people will bleed in their purses; and I, being quits with both, will leave Ambialet the way I came.'

"'You call that being quits, Master Tibbald?' said the Viscount, musing. 'Truly, you are not vindictive!'

"'A merchant, my lord, has a merchant's way of looking at such affairs,' answered Tibbald.

"'So truly I perceive,' said the Viscount, 'and, in faith, it sounds reasonable enough. But touching this compensation—my people are poor in coin. Shall it be wine for wine, then, or do you insist upon money?' And here he poured out a cupful from the flagon at his elbow and offered it to the merchant, who drank and pulled a wry mouth, as well he might, for it had been saved from the spillings of his own *tisane*.

"'The Viscount eyed him curiously. 'What! Master Tibbald? Is our native wine so sour as all that?' He drained his own cup, which held a very different liquor.

"'Oh, monseigneur,' began Tibbald, 'you will pardon my saying it, but such stuff ill becomes the palate of one of your lordship's quality. If, setting our little dispute aside for a moment, your lordship would entrust an honest merchant with the supply of your lordship's cellar—' Here he unslung the bottle at his belt, and took leave to replenish the Viscount's

cup. 'Will your lordship degustate, for example, this drop of the same divine liquor spilt to-night by your lordship's vassals?'

"'Why, this is nectar!' cried the Viscount, having tasted. 'And do you tell me that those ignorant louts poured six hogsheads of it to waste?'

"'The gutters ran with it, monseigneur! Rhone wine, that even at four livres the hogshead could not be sold at a profit.'

"'*Pardieu!*' The Viscount knitted his brow. 'I am an enemy to waste, Master Tibbald, and against such destroyers of God's good gifts my justice does not sleep. Retire you now; my servants will lead you to a chamber where you may take some brief repose; and before daybreak we will set forth together to my Council-house a few miles down the river, where the councillors will be met early, having to answer some demands of the Holy See upon our river-tolls conveyed to us through my lord of Leseure. There I will see your business expedited, the money paid, and receipt made out.'

"Tibbald thanked the Viscount and repaired to his room, whence, an hour or two later, the chamberlain summoned him with news that my lord was ready and desired his company. The night was dark yet, and down through Ambialet he was led to the self-same ferry-stage from which he had first put forth, my lord taking heed to approach it by another stairway. At the foot lay moored the Viscount's state barge, into which they stepped and cast off downstream.

"So once more Master Tibbald voyaged around the great loop of the river, and, arriving yet once again at Ambialet—which he deemed by this time to be some leagues behind him—was met at the lower stage by a company of halberdiers, who escorted him, with his protector, to the great lighted Hall, wherein sat a dozen grave men around a great oaken table, all deep in business.

"They rose together and made obeisance as the Viscount walked to his throne at the head of the table; and said he, seating himself—

"'Messieurs, I regret to break in upon your consultations, but an outrage has been committed in my town of Ambialet, demanding full and instant punishment. This merchant came with six hogsheads of excellent Rhone wine, which the citizens, after afflicting him with stripes, spilt at large upon the market-place. What fine shall we decree?'

"Then said the eldest *prud'homme*:—'The answer, saving your lordship's grace, is simple. By our laws the payment must equal the market price of the wine. As for the stripes—'

"'We need not consider them,' the Viscount interposed. 'Master Tibbald here will be satisfied with the fine, and engages—that being paid—to leave Ambialet by the way he came. Now, the wine, you say'—here he turned to Tibbald—'was worth four livres the hogshead?'

"But here our merchant, perceiving his case to go so fairly, allowed the devil of avarice to tempt him.

"'I said four livres to *you*, monseigneur, but the honest market price I could not set at less than five and a half.'

"'Six times five and a half makes thirty-three. Very good, then, Master Tibbald: if you will pay the Council that sum, its secretary shall make you out a note of quittance.'

"'But, my lord,' stammered poor Tibbald; 'my lord, I do not understand!'

"'It is very simple,' said the Viscount. 'Our law requires that any man bringing alien wine into the Viscounty shall suffer its confiscation, and pay a fine equal to its market price.'

"The merchant flung himself upon his knees.

"'My lord, my lord!' he pleaded, 'I am a poor man. I have not the money. I brought nothing save this wine to Ambialet.'

"'The day is breaking,' said the Viscount. 'Take him to the window.'

"So to the window they led him.—And I leave you, my children, to guess if he rubbed his eyes as they looked out upon the market-place of Ambialet, and upon his own mules standing ready-caparisoned before the door of the Council-house, and, beyond them, upon the tall Maypole, and the King of Youth, with his officers, fitting their ribbons upon it in the morning sunlight.

"'But here is witchcraft!' cried he, spreading out both hands and groping with them, like a man in a fit. 'Two good leagues at the least have I travelled downstream from Ambialet—'

"His speech failed.

"'And still art face to face with thy wickedness,' the Viscount concluded for him. 'Pay us

speedily, Master Tibbald, lest Our Lady work more miracles upon thee.'

"'My lord, I have not the money!' wept Master Tibbald.

"'Thou hast good silks and merchandise, and six good mules. We will commute thy fine for these, and even give one mule into the bargain, but upon conditions.'

"'Nothing I gainsay, so that Our Lady lift this spell from me.'

"'The agreement was to quit Ambialet in the way thou camest. Now, 'tis apparent thy coming here has been by two ways—by road and by water. Take thy choice of return—shall it be by water?'

"'What! From a town that lieth three leagues downstream from itself! Nay, monseigneur, let it be by road, that at least I may keep my few wits remaining!'

"'By road, then, it shall be, and on muleback. But the way thou camest was with a greedy face set towards Ambialet, and so will we send thee back.'

"As the Viscount promised so they did, my children; strapping Master Tibbald with his face to the mule's rump, and with a merry crowd speeding him from the frontier."

Brother Marc Antoine lay back against his apple-tree, laughing. Maman Vacher and the baker, seeing that the tale was done, continued to regard Père Philibert each with a foolish grin.

Père Philibert took snuff slowly.

"My children," said he, tapping his box, "in this tale (which, by the way, is historical) there surely lurks a lesson for you both. You, Pierre Champollion, may read in it that he who, with an eye to his private profit, only runs counter to ancient custom in such a town as our Ambialet, may chance to knock his head upon stones. And you, Maman Vacher—What was the price of that chanticleer of yours?"

"Indeed, reverend father, I could not have asked less than six francs. A prize-winner, if you remember."

"You valued it at twelve in your threats and outcries, and that after you had stewed his carcass down for a soup!... Tut, tut, my children! You have your lesson—take it and go in amity."

Transcriber's note:

In "A Jest of Ambialet" "either side the calvary" was changed to "either side **of** the calvary."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MERRY-GARDEN AND OTHER STORIES ***

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