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By Ian Hay

A KNIGHT ON WHEELS.

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY. Illustrated by Charles E. Brock.

A SAFETY MATCH. With frontispiece.

A MAN'S MAN. With frontispiece.

THE RIGHT STUFF. With frontispiece.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

A KNIGHT ON WHEELS

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BY

IAN HAY

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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TO
H. M. S.

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A KNIGHT ON WHEELS

CHAPTER I

ENVIRONMENT

Thursday morning was always an interesting time for Philip, for it was on that day that he received letters from ladies.

On Mondays he used to write to them, from the dictation of Uncle Joseph. On Tuesdays he had an easy time of it, for Uncle Joseph was away all day, interviewing East End vicars, and Salvation Army officials, and editors of newspapers which made a speciality of discriminating between genuine and bogus charities. Uncle Joseph was a well-known figure in the philanthropic world,—that part of it which works without limelight and spends every penny it receives upon relieving distress, and knows nothing of Charity Balls and Grand Bazaars, with their incidental expenses and

middlemen's profits,—and it was said that no deserving case was ever brought to his notice in vain. He would serve on no committees, and his name figured on no subscription list; but you could be quite certain that when Uncle Joseph wrote a cheque that cheque relieved a real want; for he had an infallible nose for an impostor and a most uncanny acquaintance with the habits and customs of the great and prosperous brotherhood of professional beggars.

Hard-worked curates and overdriven doctors, who called—and never in vain—at the snug but unpretentious house in Hampstead on behalf of some urgent case, sometimes wondered, as they walked away with a light heart and a heavy pocket, what Uncle Joseph was worth; for it was said by those who were supposed to know that his benefactions ran into four figures annually. As a matter of fact his income from all sources was exactly seven hundred and fifty pounds a year, and none of this was spent on charity. [pg 4]

Uncle Joseph had one peculiarity. He transacted no business with the female sex. If help was required of him, application must be made by a man.

On Wednesdays Philip wrote—or more usually typed—more letters, but none to ladies. On this day he addressed himself to gentlemen, tersely informing such that if they made search in the envelope they would find a cheque enclosed, "in aid of the most excellent object mentioned in your letter," which it would be a kindness to acknowledge in due course. Uncle Joseph used to sign these.

This brings us round to Thursday again; and, as already indicated, this was Philip's field day. On Thursday morning one James Nimmo, the factotum of the establishment, used to arrive shortly after breakfast in a cab, from an excursion into regions unknown, with quite a budget of letters. They were all from ladies, and were replies to Philip's letters of Monday. Most of them contained cheques, chaperoned by lengthy screeds; some enclosed lengthy screeds but no cheques; while a few, written in a masculine hand, stated briefly that "If my wife is pestered in this fashion again," Yours Faithfully proposed to communicate with the police. [pg 5]

Although these letters were all addressed to Philip, Uncle Joseph opened them himself, ticking off the cheques and postal orders and dictating the names and addresses of their senders to Philip, who posted them up in a big book.

On Fridays Philip wrote acknowledging the letters. For a boy of fourteen he was a very fair stenographer, and could take down the sentences almost as quickly as Uncle Joseph could dictate them. His typing, too, was almost first-class, and he possessed the useful, if risky, accomplishment of being able to write two separate and distinct hands.

Saturday was a particularly delightful day, for then Uncle Joseph and Philip put all business cares behind them and held high revel. Sometimes they went up the River; sometimes they went to Lords; and sometimes they took the train into the country and tramped over the Hog's Back or the South Downs.

It was upon these occasions that Uncle Joseph would discourse upon Woman, and wonder, with Philip, why she had been sent into the world.

"There appears to be no parallel to the female mind," Uncle Joseph would say, "in any of the works of nature. It seems almost incredible that God should invent such a wonderful piece of mechanism as Man—invent him for the express purpose of controlling and developing this marvellous world of ours—and then deliberately stultify his own work and handicap his own beautifully designed and perfectly balanced engines by linking them up with others which are conspicuous for nothing but bias and instability. What a world this might have been, Philip, if *all* its inhabitants had been constructed upon a rational plan, instead of only one half! Why is it, I wonder?" [pg 6]

Philip, who could not remember having spoken to a woman for ten years, except once or twice across a counter, would shake his head despondingly.

"Put it another way," continued Uncle Joseph. "What master-mariner, having set up a carefully designed, perfectly balanced compass upon the bridge of his ship, would then proceed to surround that compass—upon the steadiness of which the very life of the ship depends—with a casual collection of bar-magnets or soft iron bolts? What compass could be expected to point to the Magnetic North for one moment in such a field of force? It would not even be a constant field of force; for the magnets would come and go, or at least wax and wane in attractive power, altering the resultant intensity from year to year—from day to day, even. No compass could give a true bearing under such circumstances. And yet the Supreme Architect of the Universe has done that to us! He creates man, and having set him to direct the course of this planet, surrounds him with women! Why, Philip? Why?"

At this Philip would endeavour to look as wise as possible, but once more would find himself unable to contribute to the debate.

Uncle Joseph would nod his head. [pg 7]

"Quite right, Philip," he would say. "We don't know why, and we never shall. All we can do is to bow to God's will, accept the situation, and adopt the best means at our disposal of mitigating our disabilities. There is only one thing to do. What is it, Philip?"

Philip was always quite ready this time.

"Avoid women," he would reply gravely, "at all times and in all places."

After that they would talk about bird-migration, or high-tension magnetos—subjects affording easier and more profitable ground for speculation.

On the particular Thursday morning with which we are dealing, Philip and Uncle Joseph sat in the library prepared for business. Philip was installed at the broad writing-table, with a reporter's notebook and a pencil. Beside him, ready for use, stood the typewriter. Uncle Joseph sprawled for the moment in an easy-chair, industriously perusing a copy of the current issue of the "Searchlight," a weekly organ whose editor possessed an almost indecent acquaintance with the private lives of most of the rogues and quacks who batten upon the British Public. He even went so far as to publish an annual list of their names, aliases, and addresses. Uncle Joseph had figured therein more than once, but not as Uncle Joseph.

There was a knock at the door, and James Nimmo entered, carrying a cowhide bag. This he opened, and poured its contents upon the table—letters of every shape, size, colour, and scent.

"A heavy post this week, James Nimmo," commented Uncle Joseph. [pg 8]

"Mph'm," replied James Nimmo (who was a Scotsman). "Could I get speaking with you, Colonel?" he added. He called Uncle Joseph "Colonel" because he was a colonel.

Uncle Joseph looked up sharply.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

James Nimmo looked at him, and like the Eldest Oyster, shook his heavy head. Uncle Joseph rightly took this to be a sign of assent.

"Where?" he asked.

"At Commercial Road." (As a matter of fact James Nimmo said "Commaircial Rod," but it will be simpler to transcribe as we go.)

"I expected it," said Uncle Joseph. He held up the "Searchlight." "These people say they have been making enquiries. Listen."

> *Do any of my readers happen to know anything of the Reverend Aubrey Buck? He appears to be devoting his undoubted talents to the furtherance of a crusade against what he calls "The Popish Invasion of the English Home"; and to that end he is circularising the country with a passionate appeal for funds. A copy of this appeal has been forwarded to me by a correspondent. The head offices of the Anti-Popery League (from which this document emanates) are situated at 374a Commercial Road. Noting this illuminating fact, and failing to find any reference to the establishment in the Post-Office Directory, I last week despatched a representative to the Commercial Road, to seek out and interrogate the Anti-Popish Buck. As I expected, 374a Commercial Road proved to be a small greengrocer's shop—an "accommodation address" of the most ordinary type—*
> *whose proprietor admitted that he was in the habit of taking in letters on behalf of some* [pg 9]
> *of his customers, but declined any further information. Enthusiastic but credulous Protestants should therefore be on their guard. The Reverend Aubrey is evidently an experienced hand, for his dupes are most judiciously selected, being entirely maiden ladies of independent means and advanced Evangelical views. From his epistolary style I cherish a shrewd suspicion that Aubrey is nearly related to my old friend Howard Glennie ("Searchlight" Rogues' Catalogue, No. 847), who—*

"Man, he's a marvel, yon felly!" observed James Nimmo admiringly. He was referring apparently to the editor of the "Searchlight."

—Who, not long ago, as regular students of the "Searchlight" will recollect, spent a very profitable two years raising the small sum necessary to enable him to make provision for his aged mother before leaving this country for good, in order to devote his life to spiritual work in a leper colony—a colony situated in an island so distant that I was ultimately able to prove, to the profound chagrin of Howard Glennie, that it did not exist at all. The name of Aubrey Buck, I may add, not does appear in "Crockford."

Uncle Joseph laid down the paper.

"And what do you think of that?" he enquired.

"We shall need to be getting another address," replied James Nimmo.

"We shall have to drop Aubrey Buck, too," said Uncle Joseph. "However, we can't complain. We have done pretty well out of him. Let me think. I know! We will turn him into a retired University Don with paralysis in both legs, who has to do typewriting for a living. He shall send an appeal for work to every lady novelist in the country. Their name is legion. In nine cases out of ten they will [pg 10
send money instead of manuscript."

"And if they do send manuscript?" enquired James Nimmo dubiously.

"We will keep it for a week," replied Uncle Joseph readily, "and then return it, accompanied by a manly but resigned letter announcing that the paralysis has spread to the Don's arms as well, and he supposes there is nothing for it now but the workhouse. That ought to bring in a double donation. Tell your brother to move from Commercial Road to Islington. We have never had an address there. Were the other places all right?"

While James Nimmo proceeded with his report Philip sorted the letters on the table. The conversation did not interest him—he was accustomed to it. But the editor of the "Searchlight" would have appreciated it keenly.

Presently James Nimmo departed, and Uncle Joseph and Philip went through their correspondence. The letters were arranged into three heaps. The first addressed itself to *Master T. Smith, care of the Reverend Vitruvius Smith, 172 Laburnum Road, Balham*. The other two were directed to *The Honorary Secretary of the International Brotherhood of Kind Young Hearts, Pontifex Mansions, Shaftesbury Avenue*, and *The Reverend Aubrey Buck, Head Office, The Anti-Popery League, 374a Commercial Road*, respectively.

Most of Master T. Smith's envelopes contained postal orders, some of them accompanied by lengthy epistles which blended heavy-handed patronage and treacly sentiment in equal [pg 11
proportions. Uncle Joseph read one or two aloud.

My dear little Tommy,—I feel that I must send you something in response to your little letter, which has touched me to the depths of my heart.

"Only five shillings," commented Uncle Joseph, referring to the postal order.

I hope your father is better, and will soon be about his parish work again. The expense of his illness must have been very great, and I cannot wonder that you should have overheard your mother crying in the night, when she thought you were all fast asleep. Perhaps it was wrong *of you to write to me for help without consulting your parents; but, as you point out, it would, indeed, be a splendid surprise if you could go to your father's study with a little money in your hand and say:—"That is for household expenses, dear Father, from an anonymous well-wisher." I think it was clever of you to spell "anonymous" correctly.*

"It was infernally silly of you," amended Uncle Joseph, looking up for a moment. "However:—

I feel therefore that I must fall in with your little plot. I am not allowed by law to send actual coin through the post, or you should have had a bright new five-shilling piece. [This woman ought to be put into a Home.] *So I enclose what is called a postal order. If you sign your name on it and take it round to the nearest Post-Office, they will give you five shillings in exchange.*

Do not apologise for your handwriting. I think it is quite good for a boy of ten. Give my love to your baby brother.

Your sincere friend,
Jane Roper.

P.S. I wonder how you heard of me.

"They all want to know that," grunted Uncle Joseph. "None of the silly creatures seem ever to have heard of directories." [pg 12

Master Thomas Smith gravely signed the postal order which Uncle Joseph had pushed over to him, remarking that it was a good thing Miss Roper had not filled up the name of the post-office.

There were fifteen more letters in a very similar strain. They were not all read right through, but the name and address of the sender were always entered in the book and the postal orders were carefully extracted and filed.

Their total value was found to be seven pounds ten—this despite a disappointment caused by the last letter in the heap, which bore a small coronet on the back and promised a cheque at least. It ran:—

> *My dear little boy,—I read your letter with great interest and indignation. It only proves what I have* always *said, that some of our noble clergy are shamefully underpaid. I do not send you any money, for to do so would be to insult a sacred profession, and I am quite sure that your little plan of offering a contribution of your own towards your household expenses, though creditable to your feelings, would meet with your dear father's deepest disapproval. I will do better than that. I have some little influence with the kind Bishop of your diocese, and if you will send me your father's full name and the name of his church and parish,—all I have at present is your home address,—I will make strong representations to His Lordship on your behalf. Indeed, I expect to meet him at dinner next week. I have been unable to verify your father's name in* "Crockford's Clerical Directory," *which I always keep by me. But you see, there are so many Smiths—*

"Quite so," murmured Uncle Joseph, in tones of deep satisfaction. [pg 13

> *—And the task is too difficult. However, if you will send me the details I ask for, I feel sure that the dear Bishop will make a searching enquiry into your father's case.*
>
> *Your affectionate friend,*
> *Sarah Brickshire.*
>
> *P.S. I wonder how such a little boy as you found out my address.*

"Interfering old tabby!" observed Uncle Joseph testily. "If she persists in this preposterous nonsense we shall have to change your *venue*, Philip. Now for the Kind Young Hearts!"

To judge by the contents of the second heap of envelopes, the International Brotherhood of Kind Young Hearts was an institution of variegated aims and comfortable income. A five-pound note dropped out of the first letter opened, the sender, in her covering epistle, expressing her warm admiration for the character of a heroic (but unfortunately fictitious) individual named Dimitri Papodoodlekos,—or something to that effect,—an Armenian gentleman of enlightened views and stiff moral fibre, who, having been converted late in life to the principles of Wesleyan Methodism, had persisted, in the very heart of the Ottoman Empire and in the face of all Islam, in maintaining and practising the tenets of his newly embraced creed until summarily deported from his native Armenia by direction of the Sultan himself. The writer begged to enclose a small contribution towards the sum of fifty pounds which she understood the Brotherhood of Kind Young Hearts was endeavouring to raise in order to set up the expatriated Papodoodlekos in a cigar-divan in Stoke Newington. [pg 14

The next letter contained a postal order for one pound, contributed by a warm-hearted but gullible female in Leicestershire, as a contribution towards the sum required to purchase a dress-suit for Samuel Mings, the Walthamstow garotter, who, having recently completed a term of fifteen years' penal servitude, was now anxious to atone for past misdeeds by plunging into a life of intense respectability. Samuel, it seemed, had decided to follow the calling of a waiter at suburban dinner-parties; and, being a man of agreeable address and imposing appearance, had already booked several conditional engagements in the Golder's Green district. A second-hand dress-suit was now all that was requisite to ensure for him a permanent residence in the paths of virtue.

It may be mentioned here that sufficient cash to equip Samuel with an entire Bond Street *trousseau* was yielded by this post alone.

But the begging-letter writer, charm he never so wisely, draws a blank sometimes. Presently Uncle Joseph picked up a large grey envelope from the heap.

"Man's handwriting," he observed.

From the envelope he extracted a letter and a cheque. A casual glance at the face of the cheque caused him to raise his eyebrows comically and whistle. Then he skimmed through the letter.

"Here's a fellow with a sense of humour," he said. "What a tonic after all these women! [pg 15

Sir,—My wife, who occasionally permits me to take charge of her correspondence (especially when she is asked for money), has handed me your very interesting communication. I learn from it that the International Brotherhood of Kind Young Hearts is in need of funds for fifteen different objects—prettily described by you as "this week's List of Mercy." The list includes:—

(1) Appeal on behalf of an Armenian undesirable, who appears to have evaded the Immigration Laws of this country and so planted himself in our unhappy midst.

(2) Appeal on behalf of a retired garotter, who, before setting up in business as a suburban burglar, evidently desires to study the architecture and internal arrangements of the residences of our wealthy bourgeoisie.

(3) Appeal for a sum sufficient to send one thousand slum children to the seaside.

This appears to be a laudable object, though it is perhaps undesirable to despatch children of that age and condition to the seaside in early December, as you apparently propose to do. It would, moreover, have established greater confidence in the minds of your clients if you had mentioned the name of the slum, the name of the watering-place to which you propose to send the children, and the nature of your arrangements for conveying and maintaining them there. If I may say so, there is a lack of names, places, and figures in your scheme. But perhaps, as in the case of John Wesley, "the world is your parish."

There are twelve other appeals of a similar nature, all equally hard to resist and all equally entertaining. Subscribers, I note, are requested to place a mark opposite to the particular item of your programme to which they wish their contribution to be devoted. I confess I find my sympathy excited less by some of the appeals than by the others. For [pg 16
instance, I fear I cannot support your view of the desirability of providing a one-armed protégé of yours, Albert Edward Skewby, with a hurdy-gurdy. In my opinion there are only two musicians in history—Bach and Tchaikowsky—and neither of these sounds to advantage on a hurdy-gurdy. Besides, Albert probably has another arm inside his waistcoat. You look and see. Neither can I find it in my heart to support your Home of Rest for unwanted Doggies. Sausages are dear enough as it is, and if you are going to corner the market in this well-meaning but misguided fashion, I fear they will soon be out of my reach altogether.

However, some of your other appeals moved me deeply, and I confess I have experienced great difficulty in making my final choice. I was strongly attracted at first by the case of the gentleman who has just terminated a protracted visit to an inebriates' home, and who, I gather, is anxious to raise a sum sufficient to enable him to qualify for readmission at an early date. I nearly succumbed, again, to your appeal on behalf of the lady who has recently been rendered a widow by reason of the hasty and ill-considered action of a band of African cannibals. On second thoughts, however, remembering that the pangs of the good lady over the loss of her husband must be as nothing in comparison with those of the unfortunate savages who are probably still trying to digest him, I held my hand, and passed on to my final choice—the purchase of an annuity for the aged and badly-used butler, Lemuel Bloote—(what fun it must be making up names like that!)

Lemuel, I gather, has severed his connection with his employer—a nobleman to whose family and person the Blootes have been faithfully attached for more than forty years—owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding with regard to a valuable and massive service of Sheffield plate, unaccountably missing from the baronial strong-room. Lemuel naturally left the court without a stain upon his character, but wounded pride forbade [pg 17
him to reènter the service of his aristocratic traducer. Too old to start life afresh, too self-respecting to beg, he has thrown himself, you say, upon the compassion of the International Brotherhood of the Kind Young Hearts. I cannot resist this appeal. I set my mark against the name of Lemuel Bloote, and beg you to be so kind as to accept my cheque on his behalf. I do not know how great a sum is required to purchase an annuity for a Bloote, so I leave the cheque blank. Kindly fill it up at your discretion. I make only one stipulation. I am a collector of Sheffield plate. If Lemuel has not already disposed of his stock, perhaps you will kindly put me into direct communication with him.

Let me close with a word of advice. When you write your next batch of appeals, do not allow your sense of humour to run away with you altogether. I admire and respect a cheerful knave, but let there be moderation in all things.

Yours faithfully,
Julius Mablethorpe.

The cheque was headed *Bank of Expectation*, and bore the somewhat unexpected signature of

the head of the house of Rothschild. It was drawn to the order of *A. S. Windeller, Esq.*, and was dated *April the First, 2013*.

"I should like to meet that fellow," said Uncle Joseph appreciatively.

"So should I," said Philip.

His uncle looked up.

"Hallo!" he said. "Is your sense of humour beginning to sprout, Philip? You are growing up, my boy. How old are you?"

"Nearly fifteen," said Philip.

"Well, you don't look it, but you possess certain attainments which a young man of thirty might envy. In other respects you must be considered backward. But you are an excellent secretary, you can keep accounts, and you are exceptionally well up in English literature and modern science. I have directed you to the best of my ability in the right way of life. At any rate, I have kept you away from wrong influences. You are healthy in body and prompt in mind, and you are thoroughly inoculated against the female virus. Now your sense of humour is developing. You should go far. But we are wasting time. Let us polish off Aubrey Buck's correspondence, and then I will dictate to you one or two new letters which I have drafted. Your attention appears to be wandering. What are you thinking about?" [pg 18]

"Nothing in particular, Uncle Joseph," said Philip. He took up his pen briskly.

But for all that he *had* been thinking about something in particular. Uncle Joseph's reference to the female virus had brought it to his mind. It was a little girl in a blue cotton frock.

CHAPTER II

LE PREMIER PAS

HAVING disposed of the Reverend Aubrey Buck's correspondence,—it was not so bulky as on previous occasions, for evidently the paragraph in the "Searchlight" had dealt its originator a mortal blow,—uncle and nephew sat down to an excellent luncheon, cooked and served by James Nimmo. No woman ever crossed the threshold of the house in Hampstead.

James Nimmo had originally been a ship's steward, and his conversion to misogynistic principles had been effected comparatively late in life. Always a man of thrifty disposition, he had shirked the responsibility and expense of matrimony until he had attained the ripe age of forty. Then he fell a sudden and abject captive to the charms of a damsel of Carnoustie, half his age. The match was struck, but it was stipulated by the girl's parents that the wedding should not take place until after James Nimmo's next voyage.

Before sailing, the prospective bridegroom handed over to his beloved the greater part of his savings, to be expended in the purchase and outfitting of a suitable establishment,—to wit, a *bijou* villa in Broughty Ferry,—in order that the honeymoon might commence without unavoidable delay upon his return.

Eight weeks later James Nimmo sailed into the Tay, to find his turtle-dove flown. Alarmed possibly by the unrest produced in the real property market by recent legislation, the lady had forborne to purchase the *bijou* villa. Having no house, to spend money upon furniture was obviously a work of supererogation. Lastly, inspired possibly by a yearning for a wider field in which to exercise her undoubted talents, the affianced of James Nimmo had decided to emigrate to Canada. This decision she promptly put into execution, departing without due ostentation in the steerage of an Allan liner, and taking with her her parents, James Nimmo's savings, and a young carpenter of steady habits and good wage-earning capacity whom she had married three days previously. [pg 20]

Six months later James Nimmo made the acquaintance of Uncle Joseph on board a P. & O. liner, homeward bound from Bombay. James was deck-steward on that voyage, and Uncle Joseph's attention was first attracted to him by the extreme coldness, not to say *hauteur*, with which he attended to the wants of seasick lady passengers. James Nimmo on his part noted with grim approval the whole-hearted fashion in which Uncle Joseph, who was a presentable bachelor of

thirty-six in those days, boycotted the long row of chairs in the lee of the deckhouses, and confined himself to the smoking-room or the windward side of the ship.

One hot night in the Red Sea a chance remark of Uncle Joseph's unlocked the heart and loosed the tongue of James Nimmo, and before dawn the whole of the tale of the fickle beauty of Carnoustie had been told, for the first and last time, to mortal man. [pg 21

At Tilbury James Nimmo resigned his post and abandoned the service of the sea, in order to follow Uncle Joseph. Since that day they had never been parted. All this had happened more than ten years ago.

Philip had been added to the household at Hampstead a few days after Uncle Joseph had landed at Tilbury,—in fact, it was on Philip's account that Uncle Joseph had come home,—and from that moment he had lived and breathed in a society exclusively masculine. He still retained recollections of the period when petticoats ruled him, but they were very faint, for his nursery days had ended abruptly at the tender age of four.

Sometimes, though, he had visions. He saw dimly a stout, autocratic, but on the whole good-tempered being whom he called Nanny. He saw more dimly a big silent man, who occasionally took him on his knee and fed him furtively with the tops of eggs, and made laborious conversation. And most dimly of all he saw a lady, very dainty and sweet-smelling, who always appeared to be talking. When she talked to a group of other ladies and gentlemen, she seemed to smile and sparkle like some pretty jewel. But when she was alone with the big silent man she neither smiled nor sparkled, and her voice sounded shrill and hard. Philip had a vague recollection that on these occasions the room always seemed to grow darker.

The pretty lady took little notice of Philip, but Philip took sufficient notice of her to be able to [pg 22
realize, one day, that she was gone. Nothing else about the house seemed changed except that. Philip still played in the nursery, and went out walking with his Nanny: he even received the tops of eggs from the big silent man, who seemed to grow more silent and less big as the days went by. But the pretty lady never came back. Once Philip ventured to enquire of the Man what had become of her, but the question was not answered, and the Man seemed to grow even smaller than before; so Philip, fearing lest he should fade away altogether, refrained from further investigations.

Not long after this Philip was taken to see the Man in bed, and he noted with concern that the Man had shrunk away almost to nothing. Philip was lifted up, and the Man kissed him, which he had never done before, and said something which Philip did not understand, but which made Nanny cry. Philip cried, too, when he was taken back to the nursery, and Nanny endeavoured to comfort him by giving him an egg with his tea. But Philip would only eat the top. The Man would have been pleased if he had known this, and perhaps he did; for during the hour of Philip's tea-time he passed on to a place where people know everything, and—which is far better—the reason of everything.

After that came a period when the windows were darkened and people came and went in great numbers throughout the house. Philip had a new black velvet suit, and rather enjoyed the stir and bustle. But when this *émeute* was over the days grew very dull, for Nanny and Philip and one or [pg 23
two maids seemed to have the house to themselves. Everybody appeared to be waiting for something. Even the glories of the black velvet suit began to pall, and Philip was genuinely relieved when one day a carriage drove up to the door and a gentleman stepped out and rang the bell with an authoritative peal. Most gratifying of all, the gentleman was shown straight up to the nursery, where he shook hands with Philip and directed him to address him as Uncle Joseph. The gentleman strongly resembled the Man, except that his back was stiffer, and he held his head more proudly, and spoke in a staccato and commanding voice.

It was Philip's last day in the nursery, for Uncle Joseph took him away that very afternoon. *Non sine pulvere*, however. For a most unexpected and memorable conflict arose between Uncle Joseph and Nanny. Philip, who sat on the window-seat an interested witness, never forgot that spectacle. He had seen Nanny cross and he had seen Nanny cry; but he had never before seen Nanny cross and crying at the same time. Her voice rose higher and higher, and then broke. Philip heard her say "That lamb!" several times, and Uncle Joseph replied, in a very steady resolute voice: "Never again! Never again to one of your sex!"

After that events moved rapidly, and Philip remembered little more except a hurricane of tearful farewells from Nanny and the maids, and a long journey in the carriage to the house in Hampstead. Here he was introduced to James Nimmo, who provided him with an excellent tea, and then washed him (with surprising skill) and put him to bed. After a few days Philip, with the happy [pg 24
adaptability of extreme youth, grew so accustomed to his new surroundings that it would have embarrassed him extremely to have had his face washed by a lady.

Now, after ten years, the visions of his nursery days came but rarely. The pretty lady he had almost forgotten. Once a whiff of scent, emanating from an *houri* who passed him in the Finchley Road, brought her memory back to him, but only for a moment. Poor, cross, faithful Nanny was a mere shadow. The Man dwelt most strongly in his recollection, but he was becoming inextricably merged with Uncle Joseph.

James Nimmo and Uncle Joseph divided Philip's upbringing between them. Uncle Joseph taught him to read and write, while James Nimmo instructed him in the arts of cookery and needlework. By the time he was ten Philip could make an omelette, repair a rent in his own garments, or "sort"—to use James Nimmo's expression—a faulty electric bell.

Uncle Joseph broke to him the news that the world was round, and initiated him into the mysteries of latitude and longitude and the geography of continents and oceans. James Nimmo's discourses had a more human and personal touch. He spoke of far-reaching steamer-tracks as if they had been London thoroughfares, alluding to mighty liners with no more emphasis than if they had been so many motor omnibuses—as, indeed, they are. He criticised New York, Colombo, or Melbourne in no mere scientific spirit, but from the point of view of a thrifty Scot ashore for a few hours' pleasure. [pg 25

Neither was Philip's literary education neglected. Uncle Joseph cultivated his intellect, while James Nimmo enriched his vocabulary. From Uncle Joseph he learned to enjoy the masterpieces of his native tongue, and to express himself in direct and cogent English; but it was from James Nimmo that he picked up such colloquial *patois* as "ashet" and "gigot" and "besom." He also referred at times to "the morn's morn," and was accustomed to enquire of his uncle, "Are you not for another cup of tea?" or, "Will I open the window?"

It was to James Nimmo, too, that Philip owed his first introduction to poetry. James was in the habit of referring constantly to a friend of his, apparently deceased, whose full name Philip never rightly ascertained, but whose invariable appellation was "Rabbie." "Rabbie," it appeared, was the only real poet who had ever existed. His soul was the soul of Scotland. Rabbie had never penned a line which did not get home to his countrymen: conversely, no Scot could ever be overtaken by a great thought, or conceive a moving sentiment, without finding that thought or sentiment already expressed, in perfection, in some work of Rabbie's.

James Nimmo could quote whole stanzas of him, and kept a store of apposite tags and passages from his works upon the tip of his tongue. He was addicted to the recital of lengthy selections from an intensely respectable poem entitled, "The Cotter's Saturday Night"; and would throw off shorter masterpieces—"The Twa Dogs," "Scots Wha Hae," and "Auld Lang Syne"—in their entirety. [pg 26] Most of these performances Philip secretly considered rather dull, but he made an exception in favour of a curious little poem about a mouse, which James Nimmo used to recite with great tenderness and a certain pathetic effect. Our affections must have an outlet somewhere. Old maids cherish pug-dogs: perhaps it was the same instinct which softened the sere and yellow heart of James Nimmo towards the "wee sleekit, cowerin', timorous beastie," whose schemes had gone agley too, and whose efforts to found a home for itself had met with no better success than his own.

The fact that Rabbie was subject to human weaknesses of any description, or had ever experienced any other passions than those arising from patriotic fervour or political animus, was concealed from Philip for many a year. Once only did James Nimmo lift a corner of the curtain.

"He went tae his grave at seven-and-thirty," he mentioned one day.

"Why?" enquired the ingenuous Philip.

"Because *they* had drained the life oot o' him," replied James Nimmo, his face hardening. "I mind a vairse he yince wrote. It micht ha' been his ain epitaph:—

"*As father Adam firrst was fooled—*
A case that's still too common—
Here lies a man that wumman ruled,
The deevil ruled the wumman!"

—A summary of the life and character of Scotland's national bard which his most ardent admirer will admit errs a little on the side of leniency towards Rabbie and ingratitude towards a sex which, all things considered, had no special cause to bless him. [pg 27]

After luncheon Uncle Joseph disposed himself to slumber for half an hour, while Philip, who in common with his kind always felt particularly energetic when distended with food, practised high-jumping in the garden.

At two the pair went out for a walk. If it happened to be a Thursday—as it was to-day—they repaired to a large bank in Finchley Road, where the notes and gold which had come out of the

morning's envelopes were handed over to a polite cashier. Uncle Joseph was a well-known figure here. When he strode in on Thursday afternoons the cashier always sent a hurried message to the manager; and that financial Janus would emerge smiling from his temple behind the glass screens and come round to the front of the counter and shake hands with Uncle Joseph and engage him in agreeable conversation, while Philip watched the cashier licking his thumb and counting bank-notes with incredible rapidity. After entering the numbers of the notes in a big book the cashier would seize the bag containing the gold and silver—quite a number of Uncle Joseph's subscribers used to send actual coin in registered envelopes: they were of the type which does not understand postal orders and mistrusts cheques—and pour it in a jingling cascade upon the counter. Then, having counted it by playing lightning *arpeggios* upon it with his fingers, he would sweep it up in a brass coal-shovel and fling it contemptuously into a drawer already half-full, hopelessly mixing it with other people's money from the start. To Philip, like most of us, banking was a mystery. [pg 28

The manager and Uncle Joseph then shook hands, and the proceedings terminated with a vote of want of confidence in the weather. After that Uncle Joseph and Philip walked to Swiss Cottage Station, where Uncle Joseph departed alone by the Underground—to another bank, in the Edgeware Road this time. Here he deposited a bundle of cheques and crossed postal orders. The majority of these were drawn to the order of the Treasurer of the International Brotherhood of Kind Young Hearts, though a fair proportion bore the names of Master T. Smith and the Reverend Aubrey Buck.

Out of consideration for the manager of the bank at Hampstead, who, had he been asked to place sums of money intended for such a diversity of people to the credit of a single individual, would undoubtedly have become greatly confused,—and deeply interested,—Uncle Joseph kept a separate account at the Edgeware Road Bank for all contributions to his benefactions which did not arrive in the form of notes or cash. These he invariably endorsed, "Everard James, Secretary." The same name was inscribed upon his pass-book. It was understood in the Edgeware Road Bank that Mr. James was general director of a large philanthropic institution, and the fact that he paid in so many cheques endorsed by other people was doubtless due to the circumstance that these were minor officials of the same organization—as, indeed, they were. [pg 29

Philip usually devoted his solitary walk home from Swiss Cottage Station to a minute inspection of the shop-windows in Finchley Road. On this particular Thursday afternoon, though, he began to run. The soundness of his physical condition may be gauged from the fact that he ran up Netherhall Gardens, a declivity much in favour with prospective purchasers of motor-cars, out on trial trips, and in corresponding unfavour with would-be vendors of the same—to say nothing of the inhabitants of the Gardens.

He ran on past the newly built Tube Station, up Frognal, and presently reached the outskirts of Hampstead Heath. It was half-past three, and the red wintry sun was sinking low.

Suddenly he paused, and then stopped dead. He was conscious, deep down within him, of a recurrence of the sensation which had stirred him on the previous Sunday, as he walked over this part of the Heath with Uncle Joseph. On that occasion he had noticed a little girl sitting on a gate. She had smiled at Philip as he passed—a wide and friendly smile. Philip had not returned it, for Uncle Joseph had noted the smile and improved the occasion at once.

"You see, Philip?" he said. "The hunting instinct already! That child has never seen you before; she will never see you again; she would not care if you went to perdition to-morrow, though she would feel intensely gratified if she could be certain that you had gone there on her account. She is nothing to you, or you to her. But you are a man and she is a woman. So she smiles at you. It is the first and most primitive of the arts of attraction. There is nothing behind the smile—nothing but an undeveloped predatory instinct. And that is what Man has to struggle against all the days of his life, to the detriment of his own and the world's progress." [pg 30

Long before Uncle Joseph had concluded these timely observations the little girl was out of sight. "Predatory" was a new word to Philip. He made a mental note of it, and resolved to question Uncle Joseph as to its meaning on a more suitable occasion. Meanwhile he felt that he had had an escape—an escape and a warning.

Still—here he was, four days later, back on the same dangerous spot. And there, sitting on the same gate, with the setting sun glinting on her long, honey-coloured pigtail, sat the little girl.

"Hallo, boy!" she said, and smiled again.

Philip gave her a severe look.

CHAPTER III

SAMSON AND DELILAH

I

THE little girl continued to sit upon the top rail of the gate, with her heels on the second and her long black legs tucked up beneath her. She had taken off her jacket, and was using it as a cushion to mitigate the hardness of her perch. She was dressed in a blue cotton frock, which was gathered in round her waist with a shiny red leather belt. At least Philip considered it red: the little girl would have explained that it was *cérise*.

She also continued to smile. Her teeth were very small and regular, her eyes were soft and brown, and some of her hair had blown up across the front of her tam-o-shanter, which matched the colour of her belt.

Philip stood stock still, and surveyed her a little less severely.

"Hallo, boy!" said the little girl again.

"Hallo!" said Philip, in guarded tones.

"I saw you on Sunday," the little girl informed him.

"Yes, I know," said Philip coldly, and prepared to pass on. Uncle Joseph's warning had recurred to him with the mention of Sunday.

"Don't go," said the small siren on the gate.

"I think I will," said Philip.

"Why?" [pg 32

Philip hesitated. Uncle Joseph had trained him always to say exactly what he thought, and never to make excuses. But he experienced a curious difficulty in informing this little creature that he was leaving her because she belonged to a dangerous and unscrupulous class of the community. It was the first stirring of chivalry within him. So he did not reply, but began to move away, rather sheepishly.

The little girl promptly unlimbered her stern-chasers, and the scornful accusation rang out:—

"You're shy!"

Into an ordinary boy such an insult would have burned like acid. But Philip merely said to himself thoughtfully, as he walked away:—

"I wonder if I *am* shy?"

Then presently he decided:—

"No, I'm not: I can't be, because I wanted to stay and talk to her!"

He walked on a few yards, and then paused again. Boy nature, long dormant, was struggling vigorously to the surface.

"I *won't* be called shy!" he said to himself hotly.

He turned and walked quickly back.

The little girl was still sitting on the gate, studiously admiring the sunset. Once more Philip stood before her.

"I say," he said nervously, "I'm not shy."

The little girl looked down languidly.

"Have you come back again?" she enquired.

"Yes," said Philip, scarlet.

"Why?" [pg 33

"I wanted to tell you," pursued Philip doggedly, "that I wasn't shy just now."

The little girl nodded her head.

"I see," she said coldly. "You were not shy—only rude. Is that it?"

The greater part of Philip's short life had been spent, as the reader knows, in imbibing the principle that a man not only may, but, if he values his soul, must, be rude to women upon all occasions. It is therefore regrettable to have to record that at this point—at the very first encounter with the enemy—Philip threw his principles overboard.

"Oh, no," he said in genuine distress. "I didn't mean to be rude to you. It—it was a different reason."

The little girl made no reply for a moment, but stood up on her heels and unrolled her cushion to double its former width.

"Come up here and tell me about it," she said maternally, patting the seat she had prepared.

Philip began to climb the gate. Then he deliberately stepped down again.

"Aren't you coming?" asked the little girl, with the least shade of anxiety in her voice.

"Yes," said Philip. "But I'll come up on the other side of you. Then I shall be able to keep the wind off you a bit. It's rather cold."

And he did so. Poor Uncle Joseph!

Now they were on the gate together, side by side, actually touching. Philip, feeling slightly dazed, chiefly noted the little girl's hands, which were clasped round her knees. His own hands [pg 34
were broad, and inclined to be horny; hers were slim, with long fingers.

The little girl turned to him with a quick, confiding smile.

"Now tell me why," she commanded.

"Why what?" asked Philip reluctantly.

"Why you went away just now."

Philip took a deep breath, and embarked upon the task of relegating this small but dangerous animal to her proper place in the Universe.

"It was—it was what Uncle Joseph said," he explained lamely.

"Who is Uncle Joseph?"

"He—I live with him."

"Haven't you got a father or a mother?" A pair of very kind eyes were turned full upon him.

"No."

"Poor boy!"

To Philip's acute distress a small arm was slipped within his own.

"I have a father and a mother," said the little girl. "You may come and see them if you like."

Philip, who intended to cut the whole connection as soon as he could decently escape from the gate, thanked her politely.

"Only don't come without telling me," continued his admonitress, "because Father isn't always in a good temper."

Philip thought he might safely promise this.

"Now tell me what Uncle Joseph said," resumed the little girl. "What is your name?" she added, before the narrative could proceed.

"Philip." [pg 35

"Philip what?"

"Philip Meldrum."

"Shall I call you Phil?" enquired the lady, with a friendly smile.

"Yes, please," replied Philip, feeling greatly surprised at himself.

There was a pause. Philip became dimly conscious that something was expected of him—something that had nothing to do with Uncle Joseph. He turned to his companion for enlightenment. Her face was slightly flushed, and her eyes met his shyly.

"What is *your* name?" he enquired cautiously.

"Marguerite Evelyn Leslie Falconer," replied the little girl, in tones of intense relief.

"Oh," said Philip. "Do they call you all that?"

"No. I am usually called Peggy. Sometimes Pegs."

"Why?"

Miss Falconer sighed indulgently.

"Peggy is the short for Marguerite," she explained. "Didn't you know?"

"No," said Philip.

He was about to proceed to a further confession, when the little girl said graciously:—

"You may call me Peggy if you like."

Here Philip, whose moral stamina seemed to be crumbling altogether, took his second downward step.

"I shall call you Pegs," he said boldly.

"All right," replied the lady so designated. "Now tell me what Uncle Joseph said."

"Uncle Joseph," began Philip once more, "was with me on Sunday, when you were sitting here." [pg 36

"Was I?" enquired Peggy with a touch of *hauteur*. Then she continued inconsequently: "I remember him quite well. Go on."

"He saw you," continued the hapless Philip, "when you smiled at me."

Miss Falconer's slim body stiffened.

"O—o—o—oh!" she gasped. "How can you say such a thing? I *never* did!"

Poor Philip—who had yet to learn the lesson that feminine indiscretions must always be accepted without comment and never again referred to without direct invitation—merely reiterated his tactless statement.

"But you did," he said. "Or perhaps," he added desperately, for Peggy's eyes were almost tearful, "you were only smiling to yourself about something."

To his profound astonishment this lame suggestion was accepted. Miss Falconer nodded. Her self-respect was saved.

"Yes," she said; "that was it. Go on."

"—And when Uncle Joseph saw you smiling—to yourself—he said that women always did that. He said they couldn't help it. It was a—a prebby—a prebby-something instinct. I can't remember the word."

"Presbyterian?" suggested Miss Falconer helpfully. "Our cook is one."

"Something like that. Yes, I believe it *was* that," said Philip. He was quite sure it was not, but he was anxious not to offend again. "He said it was due to a—a Presbyterian instinct. He thinks [pg 37] women ought to be avoided."

"Why?" asked Peggy, deeply intrigued.

"He doesn't like them," explained Philip. He spoke quite apologetically. Half an hour ago he could have set forth the doctrines of Uncle Joseph as matters of fact, not of opinion.

But Miss Falconer did not appear to be offended. She seemed rather pleased with Uncle Joseph.

"I don't like them much myself," she announced. "Except Mother, of course. I like little girls best—and then little boys." She squeezed Philip's arm in an ingratiating manner. "But why doesn't Uncle Joseph like women? They can't do anything to *him*! They can't stop *him* doing nice things! They can't send *him* to bed!" concluded Miss Falconer bitterly. Evidently the memory of some despotic nurse was rankling. "Did he ever tell you why?"

"Oh, yes—often."

"What does he say?"

"He says," replied Philip, getting rapidly into his stride over long-familiar ground, "that women are the disturbing and distracting force in Nature. They stray deliberately out of their own appointed sphere in order to interfere with and weaken the driving-force of the world—Man. They are a parry—parry—parry-sitic growth, sapping the life out of the strongest tree. They are subject to no standard laws, and therefore upset the natural balance of Creation. They act from reason and not instinct—no, I think it is the other way round—they act from instinct and not from reason. They have no breadth of view or sense of proportion. They argue from the particular to the general; and [pg 38] in all argument they habitually beg the question and shift their ground if worsted. They cannot organise or direct; they only scheme and plot. Their own overpowering instinct is the Prebby—Presbyterian instinct—the instinct of plunder—to obtain from Man the wherewithal to deck their own persons with extravagant and insanitary finery. This they do, not to gratify man, but to mortify one another. A man who would perform his life's work untravelled—no, untrammelled—must avoid women at all costs. At least," concluded Philip traitorously, "that is what Uncle Joseph says."

Miss Falconer puckered her small brow. Evidently she declined to go all the way with Uncle Joseph in his views.

"I don't understand it all," she said frankly, "but some of it sounds pretty silly. Is your Uncle Joseph a nice man? Do you like him?"

"Yes," said Philip stoutly. "He is very kind to me."

"He sounds a funny man," mused Peggy. "I shall talk to Mother about him. I must go now. It is getting dark."

She slipped off the gate, and Philip perceived, for the first time, that for all her youthfulness she was half a head taller than himself.

"Where do you live?" enquired Philip, forgetting his previous intentions.

"Over there, where the lamp-posts are. Goodnight, Phil!"

"Good night, Pegs!" [pg 39]

The children shook hands gravely. Both desired most ardently to ask the same question; but Philip was restrained by his principles (now returning hurriedly to duty), and Miss Peggy by maidenly reserve. But each secretly made the same resolution at the same moment.

II

Philip found his uncle smoking a pipe in a big armchair before the study fire. He was jotting down calculations on a blotting-pad.

"The opposite sex has its uses, Philip," he said. "To-day, thanks to the sentimental credulity of a number of estimable but credulous females, we have raked in forty-seven pounds ten. With that sum we shall be able to do some real good."

"How are you going to spend it this week, Uncle Joseph?" asked Philip.

"Considering the season of the year, I think the best thing I can do is to devote practically all of it to Christmas benevolences—chiefly of the coal-and-blanket order. I have no quarrel with the very young, and I don't like to think of any child, male or female, going hungry or cold on Christmas Day. You can do a lot with forty-seven pounds ten, Philip. For about fourpence you can distend a small stomach to its utmost capacity, and you can wrap it up and keep it warm for very little more. What a blessed thing it is that these misguided females have some one to divert their foolish offerings into wise channels. This very week, but for us, forty-seven pounds ten would have dropped into the banking-account of some professional beggar, or gone to bolster up some [pg 40
perfectly impossible enterprise, such as the overthrow of the Church of Rome or the conversion of the Jews."

Uncle Joseph laughed whimsically.

"There is a touch of humour about it all," he said. "It would appeal to the editor of the 'Searchlight.' I must tell him all about it some day—when I go out of business! Yes, we'll stick to coal-and-blanket charities at present, Philip. After Christmas I want to tackle the question of emigration again. Now get your writing-pad. I want to dictate rough copies of the letters for next Monday."

Uncle Joseph filled a fresh pipe, and began to stimulate his epistolary faculties by walking about the room. Philip silently took his seat at the table.

"Aubrey Buck must go," was Uncle Joseph's first announcement. "Let us make a start upon his successor. His name shall be Arthur Brown, M.A., late Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Trinity is so big that it is very hard to trace all its late Fellows, especially if their name is Brown. John's is good, too, but we did very well with a Johnian missionary to Central Patagonia a couple of years ago, and we must divide our favours impartially. Now, take this down:—

"*Dear Madam,—Not long ago I was like yourself—a personality in the world of letters. Not of letters such as this, which (between you and I) it is with the utmost repugnance that I have brought myself to sit down and address to a fellow-scribe—*

"That's a purposely turgid and ungrammatical sentence, but she won't know. It does me good [pg 41
to dictate it—

"*—but of the great world of Literature, where the rarest spirits assemble and meet together—*

"That's out of the Prayer Book, and fits in rather well there—

"*—spirits that live as gods, and take sweet counsel together.*

"That last bit is King David, but she will probably think it is Ella Wheeler Wilcox—

"*The busy life that you lead, as one of the protagonists of modern thought—*

"She won't know what a protagonist is, but it will please her to be called one—

"*—deprives me of the hope that you can possibly have found time to glance through my poor works. Yet, believe me, even I have had my little circle. I, too, have walked in the groves of the Academy with my cluster of disciples, striving to contribute my mite to the sum-total of our knowledge.*

"Now we might come to the point, I think—

"*But my course is run; my torch extinguished. Two years ago I was attacked by paralysis of the lower limbs—*

"Always say 'lower limbs' when talking to a lady, Philip—

"*—lower limbs, followed by general prostration of the entire system. I am now sufficiently recovered to don my armour once more; but alas! my occupation is gone. My Fellowship expired six months ago, and has not been renewed. My pupils are dispersed to the corners of the earth. Entirely without private means, I have migrated to London,* [pg 42

where I am endeavouring to eke out an existence in a populous but inexpensive quarter of the town—the existence of a retired scholar and gentleman, save the mark!—

"That's a good touch, Philip!

"*—by clerical work.*

"No, don't put that. She will think clerical means something to do with the Church. Say 'secretarial' instead—

"*Have you any typing you could give me to do? I hate asking, and I know that you know I hate asking; but there is a subconscious, subliminal bond, subjective and objective,—*

"I don't know what that means, but it sounds splendid—

"*—that links together all brothers of the pen; and I venture to hope that in appealing to you, of all our great brotherhood, I shall not appeal in vain.*

"We had better wind up with a classical quotation of some kind," concluded Uncle Joseph. "She will expect it from a Don with paralytic legs, I fancy. Reach me down that Juvenal, Philip. I have a notion. Yes, here we are:—

"*Possibly you may ask, and ask with justice, why the University has done nothing for me. I did make an appeal to the authorities; but—well, a man hates to have to appeal twice for a thing that should by rights be granted without appeal at all; and I desisted. The University is rich and respectable; I am worn-out and shabby. What could I do?*

Plurima sunt quæ
Non homines audent pertusa dicere læna.

"Get that down right, Philip. She may take it to some educated person to get it translated." [pg 43

"What does it mean, Uncle Joseph?" asked Philip, carefully copying out the tag.

"It means, roughly, that a man with patches on his trousers cannot afford to ask for much. Now to wind up:—

"*So I pray you—not of your charity, but of your good-comradeship—to send me a little work to do. The remuneration I leave to you. I am too destitute—and perhaps too proud—to drive a bargain.*

Yours fraternally,
Arthur Brown.

"Put 'Late Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.' You can add the Islington address when James Nimmo has fixed it up. Then type it out. Do about seventy copies. I have been going through the lady members of the Authors' Society, and have picked out most of its female geniuses. Now for next week's list for the Kind Young Hearts! Three or four of the old items can stand—particularly Papodoodlekos: he is a very lucrative old gentleman—but the others must come out. I shall not send the revised list, though, to your friend—what was that humourist's name?"

"Mr. Julius Mablethorpe," said Philip.

"That's the man. Now I think of it, I have read some novels by him. I shall not send him the revised list, but I am grateful to him, all the same, for one or two useful hints. That scheme for sending children to the seaside ought not to have gone in at this time of year. The foolishness of the average female philanthropist is so stupendous that one grows careless. Instead, we will [pg 44
substitute a League of Playground Helpers—a band of interfering young women whose primary act of officiousness shall be to invade the East End and instruct slum-children in the art of playing games scientifically and educatively. There's a great rage for that sort of thing just now, though how one can make a mud-pie, or play hop-scotch, or throw kittens into a canal scientifically and educatively beats me. Still, the idea is good for a few postal orders."

The list was completed, to a running accompaniment of this sort, and Philip began to put away his writing materials.

Uncle Joseph glanced at the clock.

"There is just time for one more letter before dinner," he said. "I am going to ring the changes

on Tommy Smith a trifle. Next week, I think, instead of writing to grown-ups, he must send an ill-spelt but touching appeal to some little girls. About a dozen will do—the children of wealthy or titled widows. The difficulty will be to get hold of the brats' Christian names. However, we will work it somehow. We might say 'Little Miss So-and-So,' or, 'The Little Girl who lives with Mrs. So-and-So.' Either will look childish and pretty. Just take this down, and we'll see how it sounds:—

"Dear Little Girl,—I am only a little boy about your age, and my Daddy does not know I am writing to you.

"Put in spelling mistakes as usual."

"My Daddy is a curate. We are very poor, and he has been ill for months. I often hear my mother crying in the night, when she thinks we are all in bed asleep. I have no sister of my own—only a little baby brother. How I wish you were my sister. Then you might help me to earn some money for my father. Shall we pretend to be brother and sister, and then— [pg 45

"Hallo, Philip, old man. Getting tired?"

Philip had stopped writing. He was gazing dully, fixedly, and rebelliously at the paper before him. His pencil dropped from his fingers.

For nearly three years he had been a faithful secretary and a willing amanuensis. He had performed his duties mechanically, without even considering the morality of his conduct or the feelings of his correspondents. Now, suddenly, he hated Uncle Joseph and all his works.

"Why?" he wondered.

CHAPTER IV

HEREDITY

I

On Tuesday morning Uncle Joseph went away to the City as usual, and Philip was left to his own devices. Monday had been a heavy day, for all the new appeals had been copied out and sent off. All, that is, except three. Master T. Smith's elaborately ill-spelt epistles required time for their composition, and each, of course, had to be copied out by hand, for it was not to be supposed that the Smiths possessed a typewriter. So when after breakfast Uncle Joseph discovered on the bureau three stamped and addressed envelopes still awaiting enclosures, he directed Philip to indite three further copies of Master T. Smith's celebrated appeal for a little sister, and post them with the others.

When Uncle Joseph had gone, Philip set about his task, but with no great zest. As a rule he took a professional pride in his duties, and moreover extracted a certain relish from his uncle's literary audacities. The reader will possibly have noted that at this period of his career Philip's sense of humour was much more highly developed than his sense of right and wrong. But during the past few days something very big had been stirring within him. Some people would have called it the voice of conscience—that bugbear of our otherwise happy childhood. Others would have said with more truth that it was Heredity struggling with Environment. As a matter of fact it was the instinct of Chivalry, which, despite the frantic assurances of a certain section of our sisters that they stand in no need of it, still lingers shyly in the hearts of men—a survival from the days when a woman admitted frankly that her weakness was her strength, and it was a knight's glory and privilege to devote such strength as he possessed to the protection of that weakness. [pg 47

Philip no longer found himself in sympathy with Uncle Joseph's enterprises. It was not the enterprises themselves to which he objected, for he realized that no one was a penny the worse for them, while many were considerably the better. But all the newly awakened heart of this small knight of ours rebelled against the idea of imposing upon a woman. Philip felt that Uncle Joseph must be wrong about women. They could not be what he thought them—at least, not all of them. And even if Uncle Joseph were right in his opinion, Philip felt positive of one thing, and that was that no woman, however undeserving, should ever be hardly treated or made to suffer for her own shortcomings. And to this view he held tenaciously for the whole of his life.

At the present moment it caused him acute unhappiness to be compelled to sit down and pen

sloppy effusions to little girls with whom he was not acquainted, asking them to be so good as to consent to become his sisters, or as an alternative send a postal order by return. But he was loyal to the hand that fed him and to the man who had been his father and his mother for the greater part of his little life. He wrote on, steadily and conscientiously, until the three letters were copied out and ready for the post. [pg 48

But it is impossible to do two things at once. You cannot, for instance, write begging letters and think of blue cotton frocks simultaneously. In copying out the last letter, Philip, owing to the fact that his wits were wandering on Hampstead Heath instead of directing his pen, was guilty of a clerical error.

The residence of Master Thomas Smith, it may be remembered, was situated at 172 Laburnum Road, Balham, though overzealous philanthropists, bent upon a personal investigation into the sad circumstances of the Smith family, might have experienced some difficulty in piercing its disguise as a small tobacconist's shop. Now Philip, instead of writing out this address at the head of the sheet of dingy Silurian notepaper upon which T. Smith was accustomed to conduct his correspondence, absent-mindedly wrote "Holly Lodge, Hampstead, N.W."—a *lapsus calami* which was destined to alter the whole course of his life, together with that of Uncle Joseph, besides bringing about the dissolution of an admirably conducted little business in the begging-letter line.

After this he folded the letter and fastened it up in the last envelope (which, by the way, was addressed to

The Little Girl
Who lives with
Lady Broadhurst
Plumbley Royal
Hants), [pg 49

—and sat down to luncheon. It was a cold and clammy meal, for it was washing-day, and the only hot thing in the house was James Nimmo, who, in the depths below, entangled in a maze of moist and clinging draperies, was groping blasphemously in the copper for the bluebag. Washing-day was James Nimmo's day of humiliation. Uncle Joseph had offered more than once to have the work sent out to a laundry, but James Nimmo persisted in doing it himself, though the lamentable behaviour of the maids next door, what time he hung the crumpled result of his labours out upon the drying-green, galled him to the roots of his being.

After luncheon Philip, calling downstairs through a cloud of steam that he was going out to the post, took up the letters and his cap and ran out of the house, down the short gravel-sweep, and up the road.

Twenty minutes later he might have been observed diligently scouring Hampstead Heath in search of a blue cotton frock and a *cérise* leather belt.

II

"Hallo, Phil!" remarked Miss Falconer, hastily crumpling up her handkerchief into a moist ball and stuffing it into her pocket. Her back had been turned, and she had not noticed his approach.

Philip climbed up on the gate beside her. [pg 50

"Tell me what you have been doing since I saw you last," commanded Peggy briskly.

"I have been helping Uncle Joseph," said Philip, rather reluctantly. He was not anxious to be drawn into details upon this topic.

"Uncle Joseph?" The little girl nodded her head with an air of great wisdom. "I have been talking to Mother about him."

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her what you told me, about his not liking women; and I asked her why she thought it was."

"What did she say?" enquired Philip, much interested. Of late he had been giving this point a good deal of consideration himself.

"She said," replied Peggy, evidently quoting *verbatim* and with great care, "that there was probably only one woman in the world who could give an answer to that question—and she never would!"

"What does that mean?" enquired the obtuse Philip.

"It means," explained Peggy, adopting the superior attitude inevitable in the female, however youthful, who sets out to unfold the mysteries of the heart to a member of the unintelligent sex, "that Uncle Joseph was once fond of a lady, and she threw him over."

"But I don't think that can be true," said Philip deferentially. "Uncle Joseph isn't fond of any ladies at all. You have only to hear him talk about them to know that. He thinks they are an incu—incu—something. Anyhow, it means a heavy burden. They are Parry-sites, too. He says the only [pg 51
way to do one's work in life is to keep away from women. How could he be fond of one?"

"I expect he didn't always think all those things about them," replied Peggy shrewdly. "Men change with disappointment," she added, with an air of profound wisdom.

"How do you know that?" enquired Philip respectfully. Such matters were too high for him.

"I have often heard Mother say so," explained Peggy, "after Father has been in one of his tempers."

Philip pondered. Here was a fresh puzzle.

"How can your father have been disappointed?" he asked. "He is married."

"It wasn't about being married that he was disappointed," said Peggy. "You can be disappointed about other things, you know," she explained indulgently.

"Oh," said Philip.

"Yes. Haven't you ever been disappointed yourself? Wanting to go to a party, and not being allowed to at the last minute, and all that?"

"Oh, yes," agreed Philip. "Not parties, but other things. But I didn't know grown-up people could be disappointed about anything. I thought they could do anything they liked."

Hitherto Philip, simple soul, had regarded disappointment and hope deferred as part of the necessary hardships of youth, bound to melt away in due course, in company with toothache, measles, tears, treats, early bedtimes, and compulsory education, beneath the splendid summer [pg 52
sun of incipient manhood. Most of us cherish the same illusion; and the day upon which we first realise that quarrels and reconciliations, wild romps and reactionary dumps, big generous impulses and little acts of petty selfishness, secret ambitions and passionate longings, are not mere characteristics of childhood, to be abandoned at some still distant milestone, but will go on with us right through life, is the day upon which we become grown up.

To some of us that day comes early, and whenever it comes it throws us out of our stride—sometimes quite seriously. But in time, if we are of the right metal, we accept the facts of the situation, shake ourselves together, and hobble on cheerfully enough. In time this cheerfulness is increased by the acquisition of two priceless pieces of knowledge; one, that things are just as difficult for our neighbour as ourself; the other, that by far the greatest troubles in life are those which never arrive, but expect to be met halfway.

It is the people who grow up early who do most good in the world, for they find their feet soonest. To others the day comes late,—usually in company with some great grief or loss,—and these are most to be pitied, for we all know that the older we get the harder it becomes to adapt ourselves to new conditions. Many a woman, for instance, passes from twenty years of happy childhood straight into twenty years of happy womanhood and motherhood without speculating very deeply as to whether she is happy or not. Then, perhaps, the Reaper comes, and takes her husband, or a child, and she realises that she is grown up. Her life will be a hard fight now. But, [pg 53
aided by the sweetness and strength of Memory, accumulated throughout the sunny years that lie behind, she too will win through.

There are others, again, to whom the day of growing-up never comes at all. They are the feeble folk, perpetually asking Why, and never finding out. Still, they always have to-morrow to look forward to, in which they are more fortunate than some.

Meanwhile Miss Marguerite Falconer was explaining to the untutored Philip that it is possible for grown-up people to suffer disappointment in two departments of life,—the only two, she might have added, that really matter at all,—Love and Work.

"How was your father disappointed, exactly?" asked Philip.

"He painted a big picture," said Peggy. "He was at it for years and years, though he was doing

a lot of other ones at the same time. He called the other ones 'wolf-scarers,' because he said there was a wolf outside on the Heath that wanted to get in and eat us, and these pictures would frighten *any* wolf away. I used to be afraid of meeting the wolf on the Heath myself—"

"You were quite small, then, of course," put in Philip quickly.

Miss Falconer nodded, in acknowledgment of his tact, and continued:—

"—but Nurse and Mother said there wasn't any wolf really. It was a joke of Father's. He often [pg 54
makes jokes I don't understand. He is a funny man. And he didn't use the pictures to frighten the wolves with *really*: he sold them. But he never sold the big picture. He went on working at it and working at it for years and years. He began before I was born, and he only finished it a few years ago, so that just shows you how long he was. Whenever he had sold a wolf-scarer he used to get back to the big picture."

"What sort of picture was it?" enquired Philip, deeply interested.

"It was a very big picture," replied Peggy.

"How big?"

Peggy considered.

"Bigger than this gate we are sitting on," she said at last. "It was called 'The Many-Headed.' Father sometimes called it 'Deemouse,' too,—or something like that."

"What was it like?"

Peggy's eyes grew quite round with impressiveness.

"It was the *strangest* thing," she said. "It was a great enormous giant, with heads, and heads, and heads! You never saw such a lot of heads."

"I expect that was why it was called 'The Many-Headed,'" observed Philip sapiently. "What sort of heads were they?"

"They were most of them very ugly," continued Peggy. "They were twisting about everywhere, and each one had its mouth wide open, shouting. Dad kept on putting new ones in. There always seemed to be room for one more. Like sticking roses in a bowl, you know, only these heads weren't like roses. After a Bank Holiday he nearly always had two or three fresh ones." [pg 55

"Why?"

"He used to go out then on the Heath—to study the Canal, he said, and get fresh sketches."

Philip, who was inclined to be a little superior on the subject of London geography, announced firmly that there was no canal on Hampstead Heath.

"Only in Regent's Park," he said. "Besides, why should he sketch a canal?"

It was Peggy's turn to be superior.

"Canal," she explained, "is a French word, and means people—people with concertinas and bananas, who sing and wear each other's hats, and leave paper about. Dad would sketch them when they weren't looking, and then put them into the picture. Oh, I forgot to tell you that the giant had great huge hands, and he was clutching everything he could lay his hands on—castles, and mountains, and live people. He had a real king, with a crown on, between his finger and thumb."

"What about the disappointment?" asked Philip.

"The disappointment? Oh, yes; I forgot. Well, at last the picture was finished and sent away—in a lovely frame. But it came back. One afternoon I went into the studio, and there was Father. He was sitting very quiet and still on a little stool in front of the picture. He never moved, or looked round, or said 'Go away!' when I came in. I was so surprised. For a long time he had been having a lot of bad tempers, so when I saw him sitting so still and quiet I was quite frightened.

"I went and stood beside him, and looked at the picture, too. Then he saw me, and said: 'It has [pg 56
come back, you see, Peggy!' He said it two or three times, I think. 'There are eight years of a man's life in that picture—eight years of a man's body and blood and bones! And it has been sent back—

sent back, by a parcel of promoted housepainters who daren't let such a piece of work hang on their walls because they know it would *kill* every filthy daub of their own within reach!'

"Then he asked me what we should do with it. I said—of course I was *quite* small then—that I thought if he took it and showed it to the wolf it would frighten him away altogether. That made him laugh. He laughed in a funny way, too, and went on so long that I thought he would never leave off. At last he stopped, and made a queer noise in his throat, and said: 'No, we won't do that. I will show you a more excellent way.' He said that two or three times over, like he did before. Then he got up, and went and pulled a big sword and dagger out of a rack of armour and stuff in the corner, and said: 'Now for some real fun, Peggy!' and we cut up the picture into little bits. Father slashed and slashed at it with the sword, and I poked holes in it with the dagger."

"What fun!" said Philip, the chord of destruction thrilling within him.

"Yes, wasn't it? I remember I cut the king with the crown on right out of the picture, with the giant's finger and thumb still round him. I kept it for a long time, but I lost it at last. When we had slashed the picture all to bits, Dad tore it out of its frame and rolled it up into a bundle and threw it into a corner. Then he went out for a long walk, without his hat. When Mother came home she cried. It was the only time I ever saw her cry. I didn't know till then that grown-up people did. I cried, too. I was little then." [pg 57

"Has your father painted any more pictures?" asked Philip, diverting the conversation.

"No—never. He only paints wolf-scarers now. I tell him what to paint."

Philip's eyebrows rose, despite themselves.

"Yes, I do!" maintained Miss Falconer stoutly. "The other day he said to me: 'Here, Peggy, you understand the taste of the Hoypolloy'—that's another French word for people—'so give me an idea for a pot-boiler.' (He calls wolf-scarers 'pot-boilers' sometimes: I don't know why.) And I said: 'Well, I think it would be nice to have a picture of a little girl in a lovely frock with a new doll, showing it round the doll's house and introducing it to all the other dolls.' He laughed, and said: 'That's capital. I bet a sovereign they put that one on the line.' When I asked what line, he said, 'the clothes line.' He is a funny man," concluded Peggy once more.

They sat on for some time, discussing adult peculiarities. Finally Philip announced that he must go, for Uncle Joseph would return at four o'clock and expect him to tea. As they parted, Philip enquired awkwardly:—

"I say, Pegs,—will you tell me? I couldn't help wondering about something just now."

"What was it?" enquired Peggy graciously.

Philip asked his question too bluntly. [pg 58

Miss Peggy's small frame stiffened indignantly.

"I wasn't ever doing any such thing," she announced in outraged tones.

Philip, whose knowledge of the sex was improving, had the sense to withdraw the imputation and apologise at once. Then he waited.

"Perhaps I was, just a little bit," admitted Peggy presently.

"What was the matter?" asked Philip gently.

"It was Father. He boxed my ears after lunch, for making a noise. I was only singing, but he is in one of his bad tempers just now. He will be all right in a day or two."

Philip, much to his surprise, found himself trembling with indignation.

"Does he do it often?" he asked between his clenched teeth.

"No, not often. Besides, he can't help it. Men are just like children, Mother says. You have to make allowances for them. I always try to remember that. The daily work of half the women in the world is to make allowances for some man or other, Mother says. Good-night, Phil!"

"Good-night, Pegs!"

The little girl ran off through the gathering gloom, turning to wave her hand before she

disappeared.

Philip walked slowly home, pondering in his heart yet another (and quite unsuspected) aspect of the relations between men and women.

There were two sides to every question, it appeared.

His education was proceeding apace.

CHAPTER V

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

UNCLE JOSEPH had an adventure in town which amused him immensely.

The International Brotherhood of Kind Young Hearts, it may be remembered, radiated its appeals from within the precincts of Pontifex Mansions, Shaftesbury Avenue. It was quite a good address, but, like many of the good things of this world, looked best on paper.

The Kind Young Hearts rented a small office-flat at the top of a block of rather out-of-date buildings in the neighbourhood of Dean Street. The flat was uninhabited, and contained not a particle of furniture of any description except a capacious letter-box; but these deficiencies, which might have roused unworthy suspicions in the breasts of some of the more worldly of Uncle Joseph's supporters, were covered by the fact that the door was double-locked, and no subscriber had ever entered the premises. On the door itself the name of the Society was painted in neat black letters. Underneath was pinned a typewritten notice,—of an apparently temporary character, but in reality as enduring as Uncle Joseph's tenancy,—to the effect that the Secretary had been called away to the country on an urgent case, but hoped to return shortly.

It was Uncle Joseph's custom to make a periodical inspection of this establishment, though he left to James Nimmo the task of making the weekly collection of letters. On this occasion all seemed in order. No restive subscriber waited on the landing; no emissary of the law, masquerading as a stargazer, lounged in the street outside. No one had tampered with the Chubb lock on the door. No one had scribbled opprobrious comments across the Secretary's notice. All was peace. [pg 60

Uncle Joseph entered the flat. The box contained half a dozen letters, which he opened and read in the dusty sunlight of the office.

Meanwhile Mr. Charles Turner, junior member of the editorial staff of the "Searchlight," was mounting the staircase with all the headlong eagerness of a young and inexperienced fox-terrier in pursuit of his first rat. He took himself seriously, did Turner, which was a pity; for a touch of humour is indispensable to a man whose profession it is to expose humbugs. Dill, his chief, possessed this quality in perfection, with a strong dash of cynicism thrown in. He knew that righteous wrath was wasted upon the tribe of quacks and sharpers. He never invoked the assistance of the law against such gentry. He preferred the infinitely more amusing plan of exposing their methods in cold print and leaving it to them to invoke the assistance of the law against *him*. Consequently his name was a hissing and an abomination among all the fraternity, while the British Public, though strongly suspicious of Dill's sense of humour, took in, read, and profited by the "Searchlight" in general and its Rogues' Catalogue in particular. [pg 61

The "Searchlight" was unique. There were other organs which made a speciality of exposing quackery, but these could seldom resist the temptation of endeavouring—usually successfully—to blackmail the quack as an alternative to exposing him. But the "Searchlight" was above suspicion. It had never attempted to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, for the excellent reason that such a proceeding would have bored its proprietor. Dill harried the unjust, not from any special feeling of tenderness towards the just, but in order to gratify his own rather impish sense of humour. He had no special regard for the feelings or pocket of the British Public, but he loved to clap an impostor in the pillory and watch him squirm.

This was the seventh visit of the zealous Turner to the headquarters of the Kind Young Hearts. He had missed James Nimmo on the previous Thursday, for that astute emissary always made his call for the letters about eight o'clock in the morning: so Turner was still without evidence as to whether the flat was in use at all. His gratification, then, on beholding the door standing open was extreme.

He peeped inside. Standing by the window of the bare and dusty room he beheld a middle-aged, military-looking gentleman perusing letters. The enemy was delivered into his hands. He tapped at the door and walked in.

Uncle Joseph looked up from the last letter, and gave Mr. Turner a polite good-morning. The [pg 62
sleuth-hound replied in suitable terms, and embarked upon a tactful yet deadly cross-examination, long laid up in readiness for such an opportunity as this.

But he was faced with a difficulty at the outset. Anxious not to alarm his quarry, he had decided to open the attack with a few pleasant observations upon the convenient situation of the office and the tasteful character of its furniture and appointments. So, hastily reining back his opening sentence, which began: "This is a snug little establishment of yours, sir. I expect you get through a lot of solid business here,"—which sprang automatically to his lips,—Mr. Turner remarked:—

"I have called in reference to a circular which you sent me a few days ago."

"Did I?" replied Uncle Joseph blandly.

"Yes. It was an appeal for funds for the International Brotherhood of Kind Young Hearts."

"This is most interesting," said Uncle Joseph, putting his letters back into their envelopes. "But tell me, how do you know that it was I who sent you a circular; and why have you tracked me to an empty flat in Soho to talk to me about it?"

"Aren't these the offices of the Brotherhood of Kind Young Hearts?" asked Turner, a little abashed.

Uncle Joseph smiled indulgently, and looked round him.

"They don't *look* very like the offices of a charitable organization," he said—"do they? Charity
begins in a *home*, you know. That being the case, I rather fancy your Kind-Hearted friends would [pg 63
at least have furnished themselves with something to sit down on."

But Turner, although he was young and inexperienced, was no fool. Otherwise he would not have been upon the staff of the "Searchlight."

"Charitable organizations sometimes employ accommodation addresses," he said, regarding Uncle Joseph keenly; "especially when they are not quite—you see?"

Uncle Joseph nodded comprehendingly.

"Yes," he answered, "I see. Well, Mr.—I don't think I caught your name."

"Turner."

"Thank you. Well, Mr. Turner, accommodation address or not, I am afraid your birds are flown. You will have to seek them in some other eyrie. You see, I have been in possession of this flat for some few days now. In fact, several letters have already been addressed to me here."

He held out the little bundle of envelopes, in such a way that Mr. Turner found it quite impossible to read the addresses, and then put them back into his pocket.

"I must have the name on that door painted out," continued Uncle Joseph briskly, "or I may have more investigators descending upon me. Not that I am anything but delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr.—"

"Are you quite sure," said Turner steadily, "that you are not the Secretary of the organization whose name is painted on that door?"

Uncle Joseph laughed easily.

"Under this impressive cross-examination," he said, "I know I shall presently feel quite certain [pg 64
that I am! Mr. Turner, you fill me with guilty apprehensions. It is a great gift of yours. May I ask if you are a representative of the law? Or are you the emissary of some newspaper? Or are you merely taking up detection as a hobby?"

Turner flushed. He felt certain that he was being bluffed, but Uncle Joseph would give him no opening.

"I represent the 'Searchlight,'" he said.

"In that case," said Uncle Joseph cheerfully, "I shall be delighted to offer you a lift back to the office. I am going to call on Mr. Dill at twelve o'clock. Come downstairs, and let us see if we can get a cab anywhere."

He locked the door of the flat, and proceeded cheerfully down the staircase, followed by the dazed and defeated Mr. Turner.

Ten minutes later Uncle Joseph was shaking hands with Dill.

"I have just had a narrow escape of being haled to justice by one of your bright young men," he said; and recounted his adventure.

Dill, lying back in his chair and smoking a cigarette,—it was said that he got through a box a day,—heard the story and chuckled.

"An unlucky coincidence for Turner," he said. "Still, he is all right. He is young, and wants a bit more savvy, but he is a glutton for work and as plucky as they make them. I always send him where I think there is a likelihood of any chucking-out being attempted. I am quite at sea about this Kind Heart business. It is evidently a biggish affair, with a big man behind it. I can't make out whether he is an old friend, or a new candidate for the Rogues' Catalogue altogether. But I'll nab him yet. Have another cigarette?" [pg 65

"How are your Christmas charities going?" enquired Uncle Joseph, helping himself.

"Not too well," said Dill. "In the old days things were simple enough. I asked for the money and I got it. Now the public are bled white either by knaves like this fellow who runs the Kind Hearts, or a parcel of incompetent sentimental old women who waste one half of what they get on expenses and the other half on pauperisation. I have had a deficit each year for three years now."

Uncle Joseph took out a pocket-book, and counted out twenty five-pound notes.

"I can run to a little more this year," he said. "Here you are—fifty for the free dinners and fifty for the toy-distribution. Anonymous, of course, as usual."

Dill gathered up the money.

"Meldrum," he said,—and his voice sounded less like a raven's than usual,—"you are a white man. I say no more."

"Good-morning," said Uncle Joseph.

CHAPTER VI

RENOVARE DOLOREM

THE leaven was working.

One evening after tea Philip took a big breath and addressed his uncle.

"Uncle Joseph," he said, "I was talking to a little girl on Hampstead Heath to-day."

"More fool you," was the genial response. "What were you talking about?"

"You," said Philip, a little unexpectedly.

Uncle Joseph looked up.

"Oh," he said. "Why was I so honoured?"

Philip explained, in his deliberate fashion.

"She was that little girl we passed on Sunday," he said, "sitting on a gate. She smiled at me, and you told me it was only an instinct. A prebby—a prebby—"

Uncle Joseph assisted him.

"—predatory instinct. Well, I met her again one day, and I told her what you said. I explained that you knew all women were dangerous, and were the great stumbling-block to a man's work in life. Also parasites."

Uncle Joseph smiled grimly.

"Well, and what did she say to that?" he enquired.

"She said she would ask her mother about it."

Uncle Joseph nodded.

"They always do," he commented. "And what did Mother say?" [pg 67

"Her mother said—" Philip hesitated.

"Go on," said Uncle Joseph quietly.

"She said that—that the reason why you thought that all women should be avoided was known only to one woman, and she wouldn't tell."

Colonel Meldrum rose to his feet, and laid his pipe upon the mantelpiece with a slight clatter. Philip eyed him curiously. There was a change in his appearance. He seemed to have grown older during the last ten seconds. The lines of his face were sharper, and his stiff shoulders drooped a little.

Then came a long and deathlike stillness. Uncle Joseph had turned his back, and was gazing into the glowing fire, with his head resting on his arms. Philip, feeling a little frightened, waited.

At last Uncle Joseph spoke.

"How old are you, boy?" he asked.

"Fourteen," said Philip.

There was another silence. Then Uncle Joseph spoke again.

"You should be old enough to understand now. Your friend's mother was right, Phil. Would you like to hear the story?"

"Yes, please," said Philip.

Uncle Joseph turned round.

"Why?" he asked curiously.

Philip replied with characteristic frankness.

"Because," he said, "it might make it easier for me to keep away from all women, like what you told me to do, if I knew the reason why I ought to."

"You are beginning to find it difficult, then?" [pg 68

Philip, thinking of a blue cotton frock and a pair of brown eyes, nodded.

"Then I will try and make it easier for you," said Uncle Joseph. "It is my plain duty to do so, for if once you get into your head the notion that woman is man's better half and guiding angel, or any sentimental, insidious nonsense of that kind, you are doomed. Your father allowed himself to cherish such beliefs, and he died of a broken heart before he was thirty. You are your father's son."

"Who broke his heart?" asked Philip, looking up quickly. It was the first time that Uncle Joseph had ever mentioned his father to him.

"Your mother," said Uncle Joseph bluntly. "She broke another man's heart later on, but that is another story. Perhaps the other man deserved it, but your father, above all men, did not. Have we read Tennyson together?"

"Yes," said Philip. "'The Idylls of the King.'"

"You remember King Arthur?"

Philip nodded, beginning dimly to comprehend.

"Well, your mother was Guinevere."

Philip was silent for a while. Then he asked:—

"Is that why you say we must avoid all women?"

"Partly. There was my own case as well. When I was well over thirty, Philip, I fell in love. I had never loved any woman before, because my whole life and soul were bound up in the regiment. I fell in love with the regiment when I joined it as a little subaltern, and I worshipped it for sixteen years. In course of time they made me adjutant, which cures most men of such predilections, but it only made me feel as proud as a hen with eight hundred chickens. Then, just as I got my final step [pg 69
and became commanding officer, I met a girl and fell in love with her. It was in Calcutta. She was the spoiled beauty of that season, and I was the youngest colonel in the Indian Army, so everybody thought it a very suitable match.

"We did not get engaged for quite a long time, though. Oh, no! First of all, I had to learn to dance attendance. As I say, I had never been in love before, or even had any great experience of women. All my time had been lavished on the regiment. So I laboured under the delusion that if a man loved a woman, his proper course was to tell her so straight, and prove his words by devoting himself to her service. I have learned wisdom since then, but that was what I thought at the time."

"What ought you to have done, Uncle Joseph?" asked Philip curiously.

"I ought either to have bullied her, or gone and made love to another girl. Those are the only two arguments which a woman appreciates. But I made myself too cheap. This girl, as soon as she found that she was quite sure of me, began to play with me. She ordered me about in public, and I loved her so much that I obeyed her, and did not regard her behaviour as the least underbred or vulgar. She gave me rather degrading odd jobs to do, and I did them, proud to think that I was her squire. As for presents, if I gave her something that she did not chance to want or possessed already, it was declined with every manifestation of offended propriety, but if she did happen to require anything, she told me to get it for her, and I did so gladly, for I felt that all these little [pg 70
trifles were gradually binding us together. I had not quite grasped a woman's idea of playing the game in those days, you see. I thought all this aloofness of hers was due to a young girl's reserve of character, and that, being too shy and timid to tell me in so many words that she cared for me, she was accepting all my devotion and my little offerings purposely and deliberately, in order to show me that, although she could not bring herself to say the word at present, she meant to do the square thing in the end. I loved her for *that*, and tried to be patient. But once, when I, presuming on this theory of mine, suggested to her that she must care for me rather more than she gave me to understand, she flashed out at me and told me that I ought to be proud to serve her free gratis and for nothing, and that a *true* knight never hoped for any reward from his lady otherwise than an occasional smile and word of thanks. On the whole, I think that was the most outrageous statement I have ever heard fall from the lips of a human being; but as uttered by her it actually sounded rather splendid! It made me feel quite ashamed of myself, Philip. I said I was a mercenary brute, and asked her to forgive me. This, after I had made an abject exhibition of myself, she ultimately did.

"For the next few months I had a pretty bad time of it. I loved her too much to keep away from her, but my self-respect was at zero. I had to put my pride in my pocket and undergo some humiliation nearly every day. To stand about for hours, waiting for a dance, perhaps to have it cut [pg 71
in the end; to dash off parade and change out of uniform and gallop away to a riding appointment, perhaps to find that she had forgotten all about it; to be compelled to laugh and look amused when she said uncharitable things about my best friends—that was my daily round, Philip. Yes, they were stiff days, and I saw they would get worse. When you find yourself gradually ceasing to respect a woman without ceasing to love her, then you are in for a demoralizing time, my son.

"But I endured it all. I summoned up fresh stocks of patience and philosophy. I told myself that she was only a child, and a spoiled child at that; and that she would shake down presently. When she was a little older and wiser, she would realise what humiliation she had often heaped upon me, and she would come and say she was sorry, in her pretty way, and ask me to forgive her; and I would do so, and we would live happily ever afterwards. Meanwhile I must be enormously patient.

"Then suddenly, without any sort of warning, just as I was reaching the limit of physical

endurance,—there is a physical side to these things, Philip, as you may find some day,—she capitulated, and we became engaged. For a fortnight I lived in the clouds. I gave her all the presents I could think of, and then sat down and unfolded to her all my dreams and visions for the future. I told her how proud the regiment would be of her, and what a splendid regiment we would make of it between us. I confessed to her, just like a penitent child, that I had been neglecting the regiment of late, all on her account. Now that the suspense and worry was over I meant to work [pg 72] double tides and make the old regiment twice as efficient as it had ever been. I told her I felt like a giant refreshed. With her beside me, there was no limit to things we might do with that regiment.

"Then Vivien—that was her name—interrupted me. She said, in her pretty imperious way:—

"'Joe dear, your regiment bores me. You never talk of anything else. In future I forbid you to mention it in my presence.' Then she kissed me, and took me off to a tea-fight."

Uncle Joseph, who had been striding about the room during this narration, suddenly halted and faced his nephew.

"Looking back now," he said, "it is plain to me that this was the point at which I ought to have made a stand. I should have taken Vivi firmly, and said to her: 'My dearest child,'—Uncle Joseph's voice dropped to a gentle, caressing murmur, but he recovered himself with a jerk,—'understand this. A man's work is his life. It is his father and his mother, and his meat and his drink, and the air he breathes; and the woman who marries him must be prepared to stand by his side and see him through it, and not to hang round his neck and get between him and what he has to do. She must sympathise with him when things go wrong, and share his satisfaction when they come right again. If she grows jealous of his work and tries to detach him from it, there will be a disaster. Therefore you must take me and my work together or forswear us both, for they cannot be divided.' That is [pg 73] what I should have said, Philip, for I knew it was true, even as she kissed me. But I didn't. I thought I should be able to educate her up to appreciation of my beloved regiment, and that her prejudice and selfishness would weaken in time.

"But I was wrong. It was I who weakened. I began by turning out less frequently at parade. I began to cut mess. I began to lose touch with the rank and file. Formerly it had been my pride to know the name of every man in my regiment, and something about him. Soon I found myself saluted by men on the parade-ground whose faces I did not recognise. Then I began to listen to Vivien's criticisms of my officers. She sneered at my subalterns, because some of them were hard up and could not keep polo ponies. She called them 'a fusty lot,'—half of them had seen active service before they were twenty-one,—and compared them unfavourably with the Viceroy's Staff. She appeared to regard my affection for them as a sort of slight to herself. She looked down on my splendid little Gurkhas, and said it was a pity I could not get command of a white regiment. And I, instead of telling her straight that she must never speak in that way of my men again, began by making a few lame excuses for them and ended by acquiescing in her opinions. I found myself patronising my own officers—some of the finest soldiers in the Service—and drifting into an attitude of superciliousness towards soldiering in general. And all this, Philip, arose from that ennobling passion, Love!

"Then, when the hot weather came, she went away to Simla. I was to follow her in a month. [pg 74] During that month I came to myself again. I realised, once and for all, that a man's duty comes first in this world, and straightway I saw life clearly and as a whole once more. The cloud that had settled over the regiment lifted again, and by the time I went on leave we were as happy a band as ever.

"I travelled up to the hills full of tremendous emotions, Philip. In the first place, I had not seen Vivien for over a month, and I was mad with the desire of setting eyes on her again. In the second place, I was determined to make it plain that she must not attempt to come between me and the regiment again. It was a delicate problem to tackle, I knew; but I still hugged the delusion that she was only a child and could be educated up to a wife's duties. But I saw a big fight ahead of me—a big fight!"

Uncle Joseph's voice dropped, and the light of battle died out of his eyes.

"What was the end of the fight?" asked Philip, apprehensively. He saw tragedy on the horizon.

Uncle Joseph laughed. It was not a pleasant sound.

"I need not have worried," he said. "There was no fight. When I got to Simla I discovered that she had been engaged to another man for nearly a fortnight."

Philip shrank back into his chair, stunned.

"She had not even written to tell me," continued Uncle Joseph. "She had allowed me to travel [pg 75] half across India to see her, and then—!... People told me he wasn't a bad fellow. A bit of a boor, but a good sort on the whole. He was heir to a title of some kind, I think. I never saw him—or her,

after the one interview.... They were married about a month later.

"I went back to the regiment. I had that consolation, I told myself. Nothing stood between me and my work now. But I was wrong again. Nothing seemed worth while any more. Regimental routine wearied me to death, and presently I understood what had happened. In the old days I had loved the regiment because it was *my* regiment: latterly I had loved it because it was *her* regiment, and I wanted to make it a credit to her. Now that she was gone—*cui bono*? But I fought on—I would not give in. I was mechanical, but pretty thorough. I fulfilled every duty rigidly. The only difference was that, whereas the regiment had formerly been commanded by a Damascus blade, it was now commanded by a broomstick, and it went about its work correspondingly.

"Then, three months later, came a letter from your father. He was dying, Phil,—dying of a broken heart, if ever a man did. His story was the same as mine, only more shameful. He asked me to take charge of you. Then I saw light: my duty lay plain ahead of me. I would go home and devote the rest of my life to protecting my nephew from the monstrous danger of Woman. I sent in my papers, came home, and took charge of you; and here we are! I have spoken."

Uncle Joseph dropped unconcernedly back into his armchair, and relit the ashes of his pipe. [pg 76
But his fingers were shaking.

Philip sat still and silent for a long time. Then he asked:—

"Was she very pretty, Uncle Joseph?"

"She was the most beautiful creature I have ever seen," said Uncle Joseph simply.

Philip ventured on one more question.

"Is she alive now?"

Uncle Joseph shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," he said. "I have dropped so thoroughly out of the world that the social history of the past ten years is a blank to me. I never have heard of her since I left India. I do not even know her husband's title."

Uncle Joseph turned to his nephew. A grim smile played about the ends of his mustache.

"And now, laddie," he enquired, "have I made things any easier for you?"

Philip flushed.

"What do you mean?" he muttered. But he knew only too well.

"I mean this," said Uncle Joseph. "Has my story made it any easier for you to relinquish your acquaintance with the small siren of Hampstead Heath?"

It was the first critical moment in Philip's life. Reason and Instinct—the truculent logic of his uncle and the gentle, chivalrous spirit of his father—fought for mastery within him. Instinct won, and he replied doggedly:—

"No. I'm sorry."

"So am I," said Uncle Joseph, rising to his feet again. "However, you must be protected from [pg 77
yourself. Listen! You will drop your acquaintance with this little girl, and refrain from making any other friendships of a similar nature so long as you remain in my charge. It is an order. You understand?"

Philip bowed his head in silence. He had been brought up in a soldier's house, and when Uncle Joseph spoke in his orderly-room voice there was nothing more to be said on the matter.

That night, for the first time in his life, Philip cried himself to sleep. He had pledged his knightly word to keep tryst with a lady on Hampstead Heath the following afternoon, and now he would have to break it.

CHAPTER VII

THE INCONSISTENCY OF UNCLE JOSEPH

BUT no. Nothing of the kind.

It was a most amazing day altogether.

It was a Thursday. They paid the usual visit to the bank, after which Philip and his uncle parted company at Swiss Cottage Station, and Philip walked resolutely home. The Elysian Fields were closed to him. He wondered how long Peggy would wait, and what she would think when he did not come. He hoped that in her quaint, old-fashioned way she would take a leaf from her mother's book and "make allowances" for him.

Holly Lodge was deserted, for James Nimmo had washed up and gone round the corner, in accordance with his invariable custom of an afternoon, in order to recuperate exhausted nature by partaking of what he termed "a wee hauf." (Philip often wondered what he did with the other half.) Philip let himself in at the side door with his latchkey, and, sitting down before the library fire, endeavoured to divert his thoughts by reading "The Idylls of the King." He turned up "Merlin and Vivien," which he had not previously studied, and set to work upon it. He had a personal interest in the name of Vivien now.

Meanwhile, two people were converging upon Holly Lodge.

The first was Uncle Joseph, returning from the City an hour and a half before his time. His business had been cut short by the sudden illness of one of his almoners, and he found himself free to return home at half-past three. He sat in a comparatively empty District Railway carriage—the human tide was not due to ebb for nearly two hours yet—perusing the current number of the "Searchlight." It contained two interesting paragraphs. [pg 79]

The first said:—

> *For some time past readers of the* "Searchlight" *have been forwarding to me copies of a weekly appeal for cash issued by an enterprising organisation calling itself "The International Brotherhood of Kind Young Hearts." The modus operandi of the ingenious gentleman who conducts this precious enterprise is not without its merits. Evidently with the idea of appealing to every possible shade of sentimentality, the circular is furnished with a list of no less than fifteen charitable objects, and the dupes of the Brotherhood are requested to select the case, or cases, which excite their compassion most, and mark these upon the list when forwarding their donations. The objects for which contributions are invited are most artistically varied, ranging as they do from the maintenance of "A Home for Unwanted Doggies" to the rehabilitation of a repentant but slightly indefinite burglar; but I can assure prospective contributors, with the utmost confidence, that, however meticulously they may earmark their pet cases, their money will all find its way into one capacious pocket. The administration of this exceptionally ingenious scheme of flat-catching is evidently in capable and experienced hands. Last week, anxious to make the acquaintance of the master-mind, I despatched one of my trustiest representatives to the headquarters of the Brotherhood, hoping that Big Brother—or whatever the arch flat-catcher calls himself—might be found at home. The offices are situated in Pontifex Mansions, Shaftesbury Avenue, and consist of an undistinguished suite of apartments with the name of the Brotherhood painted upon the outer door, accompanied by a typewritten notice to the effect that the Secretary has gone to the country—a piece of information which is not altogether surprising. Here the scent abruptly ended, for enquiries elicited the news that the tenancy of the Brotherhood had terminated. Indeed, a new tenant was actually in possession when my representative called. We may, therefore, confidently expect Big Brother to break out shortly in a fresh place, probably with the name of his organisation slightly altered. As an alternative to "Kind Young Hearts," may I respectfully suggest "Fine Old Sharks"?* [pg 80]

In another part of the paper Dill delivered his weekly comments upon the progress of his Christmas funds.

> *Subscriptions for the Christmas Dinner and Toy Funds are coming in steadily, and I am beginning to entertain high hopes of closing this year's account without a deficit. I have again to thank numerous old friends, whose names will be found in the list below, for the faithfulness and regularity with which they come to my assistance. This week's list is headed by an anonymous contribution of a hundred pounds. The giver is a gentleman whom, though his name is known to few, I regard as one of the most generous, and perhaps the most practical, philanthropist of my acquaintance. I have never known him to subscribe to an undeserving cause, and I have never known him refuse a worthy appeal. His gifts are made upon the sole condition that his name is not published. I am not prone to gush, and I will therefore refrain from commenting upon*

this rather unusual persistence in doing good by stealth. But I believe that deeds of this kind do not go unrewarded, and I can assure my anonymous friend that if he sets any store by the blessings of tired mothers and hungry children, they are his in abundance. [pg 81

Uncle Joseph smiled a wry smile, and turned to the financial article.

The second was a lady. She rang the bell at Holly Lodge just as Philip reached the last page of "Merlin and Vivien."

James Nimmo was still moistening earth's clay at the establishment round the corner, and Philip answered the door.

Before him, standing on the doorstep, he beheld a tall, beautiful, and gracious lady. She was dressed in deep black, and looked old—quite thirty-five; possibly forty. She had a rather sad face, Philip thought, but it lit up wonderfully when she smiled, which she did as soon as she beheld the stolid, sturdy little figure in the doorway.

"Is this Holly Lodge, little boy?" she asked.

"Ye—es," stammered Philip. Evidently his visitor purposed crossing the threshold, and rules upon that subject were inflexible.

The Beautiful Lady smiled again.

"I think I know who you are," she said. "You are called Tommy."

"Yes," admitted Philip apprehensively. "Only sometimes," he hastened to add.

"I expect you have a grander name for state occasions," said the Beautiful Lady.

Philip might have mentioned that he possessed several, but he had the good sense merely to nod his head. [pg 82

"Are your parents at home?" continued the visitor.

"I am afraid there is nobody at home but me," replied Philip, nerving himself to shut the door.

"That is capital," said the Beautiful Lady. "It is you whom I want to talk to particularly. So I am going to ask you to entertain me until your father and mother come home. Will you?"

Unconscious of the length of the visit to which she had committed herself, the lady walked into the hall.

Philip swiftly reviewed the essential features of the situation. The most obvious and pressing was the fact that a female had gained admittance to Holly Lodge. The second followed as a corollary—she must be ejected before Uncle Joseph returned. That would not be for a couple of hours at least. Surely he could get rid of her by that time. He led the intruder into the library—there was no drawing-room at Holly Lodge—and begged her to be seated. Then he installed himself upon the edge of a chair on the other side of the fireplace and took feverish counsel within himself.

"You must be wondering who I am," said the Beautiful Lady pleasantly. "I ought to have introduced myself sooner. My name is Lady Broadhurst, and I live in Hampshire."

Philip remembered addressing the envelope now. He nodded politely.

"I know," he said. "Plumbley Royal."

"That is right," said Lady Broadhurst. "I have been puzzling as to why you should have thought of writing to *me*. Where did you come across my address, I wonder." [pg 83

"It was in an old Red Book," said Philip.

"I see. Still, it is strange that you should have selected me," continued the Beautiful Lady

musingly. She seemed perplexed, yet gratified, evidently suspecting the hand of Providence. Philip might have explained that the wonder would have lain less in his visitor's selection than in her omission,—he had sent a copy of Tommy Smith's letter to every widow in the book whose name began with B,—but his mind was working frantically behind a solemn countenance, and he did not answer. He was trying to put himself in Uncle Joseph's place. How would he have treated this intrusion? How would he have parried questions about Tommy Smith? How would he have substantiated the starving curate and his fireless home, in the face of the solid comfort of Holly Lodge and the absolute invisibility of the curate and his emaciated progeny? Would he have dressed up James Nimmo as a curate? Would he have sent out to Finchley Road for a lady to represent the curate's tearful consort? Would he have explained that the curate had just received preferment and gone to live at Berwick-on-Tweed? Possibly; but such feats of imposture were beyond the powers of a slow-witted, inherently honest philogynist of fourteen.

Lady Broadhurst was speaking again, in a low, musical voice, holding out her hands to the blazing fire. Philip noticed that these hands were long and thin, like Peggy's and unlike the hands of the women whom he sometimes encountered sitting in omnibuses or serving in shops. Her feet were tiny, too. In the glow of the fire her eyelashes looked long and wet. [pg 84

"I was very much touched," she was saying, "by your letter. Your wanting a little girl for a sister came very near home to me; for I have just lost a little girl of my own. She was all I had, Tommy. She was taken from me three months ago.... I suppose we should take our losses as they come, without wincing or questioning the wisdom of God. But I was weak—and selfish. For a long time I refused to bow to his will. I cried out, and would not be comforted...."

The Beautiful Lady's eyes were really glistening now. Presently a tear splashed on to the long white hand. Philip felt strangely uncomfortable. He had been warned by his uncle more than once to beware, above all, of a woman's tears. "Her tears are the biggest gun in her battery," Uncle Joseph had said. But Philip forgot to feel suspicious. He was only intensely sorry for the lady.

Presently she began to speak again, not altogether to Philip.

"But I came to myself," she said. "I suddenly learned that all things work together for good—that there is no sorrow which does not bring its own consolation with it. One day I saw myself as I was—a querulous, self-centered, self-conscious, self-made martyr. I had forgotten that other people had their troubles too—troubles which I might do something to smooth away." She looked up. "Do you know who taught me that lesson, Tommy?" [pg 85

Philip shook his head apologetically.

"I'm afraid I don't," he said.

"It was you!"

"Me?" said Philip, a little dazed.

"Yes—you! It was your letter. When I read it I learned, all of a sudden, where the cure for sorrow lies. It lies in trying to help others. So I have come to see you and your parents, in the hope that I may be allowed to be of some small service to you all. I cannot give you a little sister to play with—"

The lady's voice broke suddenly, and Philip tactfully arose and put coal upon the fire.

"—but I may be able to help you in other ways. I am fairly well off, and I ask to be permitted to see that your father gets back to health and strength again. Do you think he would consent? He might like to go abroad for a little."

Philip began to feel horribly uncomfortable. He had already allowed his visitor to assume that she was in the dwelling of an indigent Clerk in Holy Orders, and that she was addressing Master Thomas Smith. Moreover, he had sat mute while she laid bare to him the tenderest secrets of a woman's heart, and the thought of what the end of the conversation must be made him feel a pitiful little cad. On the other hand, it was plainly advisable to establish some sort of working explanation, however lame, of the non-appearance of the Smith family. Once more, what would Uncle Joseph have done? He would probably have explained to this gracious being quite courteously but extremely firmly, that she was an incubus and a parasite, actuated by predatory instincts, and would have cast her from the house. But Philip felt utterly incapable of and entirely disinclined to such a drastic course of action. But plainly, something must be done. His head began to swim. [pg 86

"Perhaps your father and mother would like to go away together for a few weeks," suggested the Beautiful Lady. A glow of cheerful kindness was creeping into her cheeks. "To the seaside, perhaps, or even to the south of France. They could take the baby with them, and you might come to me, Tommy. Could you accept me as your mother for a week or two, do you think?" There was a

world of wistfulness in her voice. "Could you?"

Apparently not, for straightway the solemn-faced little boy before her flushed scarlet.

"I—I'm afraid you have been making a mistake," began Philip desperately. "I'm not Tommy Smith at all."

Lady Broadhurst looked puzzled.

"Not Tommy Smith? But you wrote me that letter, surely?"

"Yes, I wrote it," admitted Philip in a low voice.

"Then where is the mistake? You are not the baby, are you?"

"No, I'm not the baby either," said Philip miserably.

"But your father—"

"I haven't got any father—or mother, I'm afraid," said Philip, feeling more guilty than ever.

The lady paused, and contemplated him with quickened interest.

"You poor little lad!" she said, very softly. [pg 87

"But whose house is this?"

"My uncle's."

Lady Broadhurst's face cleared.

"I see," she said. "You have no parents of your own, but live with your uncle and aunt. Naturally you would regard them as your father and mother, and speak of them as such. I understand now. But that shall make no difference. In fact I like the scrupulous way you tell me everything. If your uncle is ill—"

"He isn't ill," said Philip regretfully.

"Then he is better?" said Lady Broadhurst with a cheerful smile. "In that case he will be able to travel at once."

Philip gripped the arm of his chair. The bad time had come.

"My uncle isn't a—" he began.

He was going to say "curate," but at that moment, to his profound surprise and unspeakable relief, there fell upon his ears the music of a latchkey in a lock, followed by the banging of the front door. Uncle Joseph had returned, an hour and a half before his time.

Well, whatever happened now, the responsibility had slipped from Philip's shoulders. And in the midst of all the present turmoil of his senses one emotion overtopped all the others—a feeling of intense curiosity to behold the arch-expert in misogyny handling the situation.

It would be a sensational scene, Philip thought. And he was not disappointed.

"Hallo, there, Philip!" Uncle Joseph's voice rang out from the hall. "Are you in?" The library door stood ajar, and his words could be heard distinctly. [pg 88

"Yes, Uncle Joseph!" called Philip.

"That is my uncle," he explained, turning politely to the Beautiful Lady. "He—"

But the words died on his lips. Lady Broadhurst was on her feet, deadly white, and shaking. One hand was at her heart, the other fumbled at the mantelpiece for support.

Uncle Joseph's voice rang out again, this time from the neighbourhood of the hatstand.

"I'm back sooner than I expected. Skip about and get me some tea, you young beggar!"

The Beautiful Lady's white lips parted, and she uttered a faint cry. But she did not move.

Philip went out into the hall. His uncle was hanging up his greatcoat.

"Well, young man?" he observed cheerfully.

"There is some one wanting to see you in the library, Uncle Joseph," said Philip falteringly.

"Oh! Who?"

"A—a lady."

Uncle Joseph's brow darkened instantly.

"*A lady?*" he said icily. "Who let her in?"

"I did. At least, she came in."

"Well, we can appraise responsibility later. Meanwhile—"

Uncle Joseph, very stiff and erect, strode across the hall and into the library.

There was a moment of dead silence, and then a great cry; then a rush of feet; then silence again—silence that could be felt.

What had happened? Philip wondered. [pg 89

Then, at last, came voices.

"Vivien! Vivien! Vivien! My little Vivien, after all these years! Thank God for his infinite goodness and mercy! My Vivien! My little girl!"

"Joe! Joe! Dear, dear Joe! At last, at last! Hold me closer, dear! I can't believe it yet! I'm frightened—hold me closer! Oh, my dear, my dear!"

Then the voices blended into an indeterminate, cooing, soothing murmur.

Philip looked into the library.

Upon the hearthrug, with his back to the door, stood Uncle Joseph, misogynist. In his arms he held the Beautiful Lady, and he was passionately kissing her eyes, her hair, her lips.

Philip retired in good order and closed the door softly, leaving them together.

Once in the hall, he snatched up his cap and coat and slipped out of the front door. The afternoon light was fading.

There was still a chance, he thought.

He broke into a run.

CHAPTER VIII

He was right, but it was touch and go. Peggy was climbing down from her gate as Philip cantered up.

"Hallo, Pegs!" he said breathlessly.

Miss Falconer greeted him coldly.

"Hallo!" she replied. "Going for a walk?"

"What walk?" asked the bewildered Philip. "Didn't you expect to meet me?"

"Certainly not. Why should I? I wasn't thinking about you at all," replied Eve's daughter.

"But you promised to meet me here at half-past three," cried Philip in dismay.

"And now it's a quarter to five!" blazed Peggy, abandoning her strategical position, woman-like, in order to score a tactical point.

Sure enough, the sound of a church chime fell musically on their ears through the still evening air.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Philip.

"It doesn't matter at all," replied Peggy, still inflexible. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Philip quietly. He was constitutionally incapable of forcing his society where it was not wanted. He turned to go. "It's a pity I'm late," he added regretfully. "The most exciting things have been happening, and I wanted to tell you about them."

The small damsel's *hauteur* melted in an instant. She deliberately resumed her perch upon the gate. [pg 91

"You can come and sit up here if you like," she intimated, holding out her hand.

Philip accepted the invitation with alacrity, but the touch of Peggy's froggy paw brought a look of concern into his face.

"I say," he said, "you are cold! Put on my greatcoat."

Peggy declined.

"You'll want it yourself," she said.

But Philip was insistent.

"You simply must," he urged. "You are shivering all over. You can give me a corner of it to sit on if you like."

The argument came to an end, and presently they were installed side by side upon the gate, like two sociable sparrows. Peggy, whose teeth were chattering, snuggled gratefully into the warmth of the big coat, while Philip balanced himself on the rail beside her, sitting on a very liberal allowance of corner.

"Are you comfortable now?" he asked.

"Yes," said Peggy gratefully. "I'm glad you came," she added with characteristic honesty.

"Why?" enquired Philip. He did not know that one must never ask a lady for her reasons.

But the little girl answered quite frankly:—

"I was getting frightened."

And she slipped her arm round Philip's neck.

If Philip had been to a boys' school he would have received this familiarity with open alarm or

resentment. Being what he was, nothing but a very gallant little gentleman, he responded by putting his own arm in a protective fashion round his companion's slim shoulders. [pg 92

"Now we are all right," he said comfortably.

"Tell me your news," commanded Peggy.

Philip related the whole amazing story. Peggy listened breathlessly, her eyes and lips forming three round O's. When the recital was finished, she remarked:—

"She must have been the lady Mother meant when she said that was the question only one woman could give the answer to only she never would."

"Yes," said Philip, catching the general sense of this unusual passage of syntax. "It was the same name—a funny name—Vivien."

"How do you know?" asked Peggy curiously.

"Uncle Joseph told me all about her," said Philip. "I forgot, you haven't heard that bit."

And at the pressing invitation of Miss Falconer, he recited the tale of Colonel Meldrum's love-affair.

Peggy's verdict came hot and emphatic.

"She was a beast to treat him like that."

"Well, she has come back to him in the end," said broader-minded Philip.

"Will they get married, do you think?" asked Peggy, all in a feminine flutter.

Philip pondered.

"I suppose so," he said at last. "But they are pretty old."

"If they do," continued Peggy, "what will happen to you?"

Philip pondered again. Life had suddenly turned a corner, and new vistas were opening before him. [pg 93

"I don't know," he said slowly. "I don't want to go back home at all. For one thing, I don't see how I can. I have broken an order. I told Uncle Joseph about meeting you, and he forbade me to speak to you again so long as I lived under his roof. I shouldn't have come this afternoon—"

"Oh!" said Peggy reproachfully.

"You can't disobey an order," explained Philip gently. "But when I saw Uncle Joseph and the lady—like"—he coughed modestly—"like the way they were, I thought I might."

"He had broken his own orders," observed Miss Falconer jesuitically.

"Besides," continued Philip, "I am not going to live under his roof any longer. I hate it all so."

"Hate what?"

Philip recollected himself.

"The work I have to do," he said. "I used to like it once; but now—now I don't think it is very good work. Anyhow, I hate it. I can't go back to it. I only went on because—well, because of Uncle Joseph. He was very good to me, and I was some use to him."

"My dear, he won't want you now," said Peggy shrewdly.

Philip was conscious of a sudden thrill.

"Won't he?" he said. "I never thought of that. Then I *needn't* go back?"

"You'll have to go somewhere, though," observed his sage counsellor. "Where are you going

to?"

"I should like to go about a bit. I have never even been to school. I don't know any other boys. I want to grow up and be a man, and travel about all over the world," said Philip, his eager spirit dashing off into futurity at once. [pg 94

"I see," said Peggy, suddenly cold again.

"Yes," continued Philip. He was fairly soaring now. "Have you read 'The Idylls of the King'?"

Peggy shook her head blankly.

"No," she said. "Is it a story?"

"Yes. It's all about a Round Table, and some knights who met there. They used to ride out and do the most splendid things."

"What sort?" asked Peggy absently.

The sudden revelation of the eternal masculine in Philip, exemplified by his desire to roam, was jangling the chords of the eternal feminine in herself.

"Dangerous things," explained Philip enthusiastically.

"What for?"

"Well, they very often did them just out of bravery; but the very best things a knight did were always in honour of his Lady."

"Oh! Then you would require a Lady?" said Peggy, growing distinctly more attentive.

"Rather!" said Philip. "To serve, you know. Whenever a knight performed any great deed he wouldn't care anything about himself. He would just feel he had done it for his Lady, and she would reward him."

"How?"

Philip's brow wrinkled. He had not considered the point before. With him, service always came far above reward.

"Well," he said at last, "she would praise him, and go on being his Lady, and nobody else's." [pg 95

At this point in the conversation Philip was conscious of a sudden constriction round his neck. Peggy appeared to be about to make some remark; but she relaxed her arm again, and enquired calmly:—

"When are you going to begin?"

"I shall have to grow up a bit first, I suppose," said the prospective Galahad regretfully. "But I don't want to go back to Uncle Joseph till then."

"Why should you?" urged the small temptress at his side. "He won't require you now that his Lady has come back to him. You are free to be anything you like."

"The difficult part," remarked the practical Philip, "will be to make a start at being anything. To begin with, I don't know where to go."

"Come to us," said Miss Falconer promptly.

Swiftly she sketched out her plans to her mesmerised companion.

"I will take you up to the house now," she said. "I will put you into the studio: Dad is never there after dark. You can stay all night—"

She paused, and turned to Philip enquiringly.

"You won't be frightened?" she enquired, half-apologetically.

"Knights are never frightened," replied Philip axiomatically.

"You can sleep on the model-throne," continued Peggy, taking all obstacles in her stride. "I will bring you in some supper, and no one will know. Then, when Mother comes to see me in bed, I shall tell her about you, and we will settle what to do next. But you mustn't—not on *any* account— [pg 96
let Dad see you, or he would have one of his tempers. Come on!"

It was almost dark by this time, and Peggy's voice had sunk to an excited and ghostly whisper. She dropped off the gate, dislodging her companion—who it will be remembered had been accommodated with a seat upon a portion of her apparel—with some suddenness.

"We are rather late," she said. "I am not allowed to stay out after dark. Let's run! Give me your hand."

They trotted through the gloaming, and presently came to a house standing by itself, well back from the road. Breathing heavily, the two small conspirators stole round to the north side of the house, and presently came to a halt close under the wall. Above their heads, eight feet up, Philip could see a small window. It stood open.

"Take me on your back," said Peggy. "Stoop down."

Philip obeyed.

"Keep *quite* steady!"

By dint of much struggling, the agile Miss Falconer succeeded in working her small but sharp knees on to Philip's shoulders.

"Now!" she whispered at length. "Stand up slowly, with your face to the wall!"

Philip straightened his back laboriously, his fair burden maintaining her balance by clinging to his hair with both hands.

"This is a splendid adventure!" she whispered.

"Rather!" gasped Philip, with tears in his eyes. [pg 97

"Now I am going to stand on your shoulders," explained Peggy. "Bend forward a little, with your hands against the wall. Keep your head well down, or I may tread on it."

Two minutes after, the soles of the young lady's shoes removed themselves from Philip's shoulder-blades with a convulsive spring, and followed their owner in a harlequin dive through the open window. There was a dull thud on the floor inside, followed by a brief silence. Then there was the sound of some one moving in the dark, and presently a French window further along the wall swung open with a click, and Peggy, touzled but triumphant, dragged her guest into the house.

The window closed, and a flood of electric light swept away the darkness. Philip looked round curiously. He had never been in a studio before. The side of the room at which they had entered was built out in the form of a penthouse, and was roofed with glass. In the middle of the floor stood a small platform, covered with a rug. On the platform stood a sofa, and on the sofa reclined an eerie figure, like a gigantic Dutch doll. Half-finished canvasses—prospective wolf-scarers, no doubt —leaned against the walls. In a corner lay an untidy heap of robes and draperies.

Upon an easel close by the throne stood an almost completed picture. It represented an infant of improbably angelic aspect asleep in a cot, in company with two golliwogs, a mechanical monkey, and a teddy bear.

"That," remarked Peggy professionally, "is a wolf-scarer. It's called 'Strange Bedfellows.' It's [pg 98
very pretty. It's nearly finished. This thing here is a model-throne. You can sleep on it to-night. Nobody will disturb you. Dad never comes here until after ten in the morning, and none of the maids are allowed in the studio at all. You will be quite warm. I'll get you some of these robes and things out of the corner. Ooh!"

Philip, fascinated by his surroundings, had not yet had time to notice his hostess. Now he turned quickly. Miss Falconer was in a somewhat dishevelled condition. Her red tam-o'-shanter was white with plaster. Her frock was stained all down the front, and one of her stockings had been cut open right across the knee, displaying a crimson bruise which threatened to deepen into purple.

"You have hurt yourself!" cried Philip in great concern.

"I got a bit of a bump dropping through that window," admitted Peggy, indicating the aperture through which she had gained admission to her home. "But it doesn't hurt much, except when you bend your knee suddenly. Now I must go and have tea in the schoolroom. When I see Mother I shall tell her about you, and she will know what to do. If you hear anybody coming, turn out the light and creep under the model-throne. It is hollow underneath. I have often been there, playing at robbers with myself."

Philip turned up the overhanging drapery, and dubiously surveyed the grimy recesses of his last refuge.

"Supposing I get underneath," he enquired, "and it turns out to be only you?" [pg 99

Peggy considered. Then her face dimpled. The game of conspirators was, indeed, exhilarating.

"I shall knock seven times on the floor with a stick," she announced, "before I come down the passage. Then you will know."

"That will be splendid," agreed Philip. "You are awfully clever," he added admiringly, as the directress of his fortunes turned to go.

Peggy swung round again, with her fingers on the doorhandle. A sudden rush of colour swept across her face and neck, and for a moment her wide brown eyes met Philip's. Then the lashes dropped again.

"I say, Phil," she said shyly, "I'll be your Lady if you like."

Next moment she was gone, and our knight, feeling that he had been somewhat remiss in not having made the suggestion himself, was left listening to the sound of his Lady's feet limping down the passage.

CHAPTER IX

GENUS IRRITABILE

Montagu Falconer had had a busy day. At breakfast he had sent for, and sworn at, the cook. The cook, who was a lady of spirit and accustomed to being sent for, had reserved her defence until the storm had spent itself, and then pointed out with admirable composure and undeniable truth that an omelette which is uneatable at a quarter to ten may have been—and in fact was—in perfect condition when placed upon the table at nine. She then withdrew in good order, parrying the intimation that she might take a month's notice, which hurtled through the door after her, with the rejoinder that she recognised no orders save those of her mistress.

When she had gone, Mrs. Falconer said calmly:—

"I wouldn't give cook notice quite so often, old man, if I were you. Some day she will take it, you know, and then where will you be? Don't forget her marrow-bones: they are the best in London."

In reply Montagu Falconer picked up the omelette between his finger and thumb and threw it into the fire, where it created an unpleasant smell.

After this promising beginning, he proceeded to his day's work. As he entered the studio he noticed a middle-aged woman pass the window, supporting one end of a basket, at the other end of which staggered a tumble-haired little girl. It was the laundress, with her daughter. [pg 10

The daughter was not too well dressed. She wore a short and rather ragged frock, and had holes in her stockings. But she was a picturesque little figure, with a pretty face and wild coppery hair.

Mr. Falconer had intended to devote a sulphurous morning to the completion of "Strange Bedfellows." This prospect possibly accounted for the omelette incident, for Peggy's papa possessed what is indulgently called a temperament, which, being interpreted, means a dislike (from which many of us less highly-strung people also suffer) of performing uncongenial duties. But at the sight of the little girl, his professional instincts despatched him hot-foot through the French window into the garden. Here, with much shouting and redundancy of words, he secured

from the dazed but gratified parent, in return for an unnecessarily generous fee, the services of her daughter as model for a head-study.

"I'll run 'er home and wash 'er face, sir," she announced, "and you shall 'ave 'er back in 'alf an hour."

She was better than her word. The little girl returned in twenty-five minutes. Not only was her face washed, but she wore her Sunday frock, together with a pair of sixteen-button boots of patent leather,—the patent upon which had palpably expired,—once evidently the property of a lady of fashion, and a tragic travesty of a toque. Under her arm she bore her mother's umbrella; and her [pg 10
wild mane was screwed into two tight pigtails, fastened at the tips with bows of magenta ribbon.

Montagu Falconer, blaring like a bull, cast her forth, weeping, to be intercepted and comforted with clandestine cake by Mrs. Falconer at the back door.

After this followed a savage onslaught, some two hours in duration, on "Strange Bedfellows," which infuriated its creator so much that at luncheon his wife was afforded a more than usually numerous series of opportunities for "making allowances."

In the afternoon there was a slight lull, for Montagu betook himself and his temperament for an airing on the Heath. He returned sheer drunk with the glories of an autumn sunset, to make a heavy and unwholesome tea. But in an evil moment he asked for his daughter, and it was discovered that she was not in the house. A hurricane sprang up in a moment, increasing to a typhoon when Miss Peggy arrived with a stained frock and a bruised knee.

She was despatched incontinently to bed, where cook and the housemaid and (later) her mother combined to tend her wounds and supply her with abundant, if surreptitious, refreshment.

After dinner Montagu Falconer found himself in possession of a fresh grievance. His wife had deserted him. As a rule she sat placidly upon the other side of the fire and listened while her husband derided the British Philistine and consigned the Members of the Royal Academy, *seriatim*, *to* perdition. But to-night even these simple pleasures were denied him. His wife's chair stood [pg 10
empty. Probably she was upstairs, coddling that insubordinate brat, Peggy. Her own husband, of course, might shift for himself; he had no claim upon her consideration. He was at liberty to slave day and night to keep a roof over their heads; but when, shattered by the magnitude of his exertions, he returned to his own fireside for a few words of wifely recognition and encouragement, what did he find? An empty chair!

He laughed bitterly.

"I wonder," he said, "how high I might not have climbed if I had been properly understood!"

He was so engrossed with this gratifying speculation that he failed to hear seven portentous thumps upon the floor of the passage leading to the studio.

After another half-hour his sense of grievance took a still more pathetic turn. He was now the willing, patient, overdriven breadwinner, struggling to keep an impoverished household together. His part was to work, work, work, with none to say him nay. Happy thought! He would go and work now. Possibly if his wife found him, half-blind with fatigue, toiling at his easel at midnight, she might feel sorry. Anyhow, he would try it.

Feeling comparatively cheerful, and ignoring the fact that one does not usually paint by artificial light, the downtrodden breadwinner proceeded to the studio. He stepped softly, for he did not want his wife to hear him at present. She was to discover him later, when his stage effects had been properly worked up.

To his surprise he noted a light under the studio door. Who could it be? The servants were [pg 10
strictly forbidden to enter the sacred apartment at all. It seemed too much to hope that it might be cook. His eyes gleamed, and he turned the handle softly.

Philip was sitting upon the sofa on the model-throne, partaking of chicken-and-ham and cocoa with an air of romantic enjoyment. He had now been an inmate of the studio for four hours, but Peggy had not returned to him. Instead, a kindly, cheerful lady, with steady eyes and a humorous mouth, bearing sustenance upon a tray, had paid him a lengthy visit. To her Philip had recounted the full tale of Uncle Joseph, not omitting the Beautiful Lady, but suppressing the nature of Uncle Joseph's profession and his own part therein. This was unfortunate, for had he not done so Mrs. Falconer would have pointed out to him what he had so far failed to realise—namely, that as the Beautiful Lady had walked in at the door, Uncle Joseph's old life had flown out of the window, and that Aubrey Buck, Tommy Smith, *et hoc genus omne*, were no more.

"I will think things over in the night watches," said Mrs. Falconer, "and in the morning I will come and tell you what to do. Now, you queer little mortal, eat up your supper and go to sleep. As

you have no mother, do you think I might give you one kiss?"

That was half an hour ago.

Philip was conscious of a slight draught upon the back of his neck, which was turned towards the door. Hardly had he realised this when he was aware of an inarticulate roar; and into his field of vision there bounded a gentleman with a golden beard and a fiery eye, wearing a black velvet dinner-jacket. This was doubtless Pegs's father, and from external evidence he was suffering from one of his "tempers." [pg 10

"What the Blazing Henry are you doing here?" bawled the gentleman.

Philip replied politely that he was having supper.

"Supper?" yelled Montagu Falconer. "How dare you have supper in my studio? How dare you bring your filthy food in here? Tell me that!" His eye fell upon the tray, suggesting a fresh outrage. "Where did that supper come from?" he demanded. "Where from, you mooncalf?"

"It came along that passage," replied the mooncalf, taking a drink of cocoa.

Peggy's papa waved his arms and raved.

"Curse you!" he shouted. "Don't drink cocoa in my presence! It is a beastly habit and a beastly beverage. It's my cocoa, too!"

"It was getting cold," explained Philip, in extenuation.

"And don't answer back!" bellowed the master of the house. "Don't answer back, or I'll brain you—like—like this!"

He snatched a mediæval mace from off the wall, and, to Philip's intense gratification, proceeded to pound an Etruscan vase into smithereens.

"Who are you?" he continued. "Who are you, to go filibustering all over my house? Who are you, to insinuate your disgusting presence into my kitchen and forage among my household stores?"

Philip, still keeping a hopeful eye on the mediæval mace, considered. [pg 10

"I'm a boy," he said cautiously.

This eminently reasonable explanation only exasperated Mr. Falconer still further.

"No, you are *not*!" he bawled. "You are a criminal! Do you know I have a wife and daughter—let alone a staff of young and innocent servants? Supposing one of them had seen you? You might have frightened them all out of their wits—you toad!"

Mr. Falconer stamped up and down the room, plainly meditating further acts of violence. Philip, realising that his host had not yet been taken into the confidence of his wife and daughter regarding the present situation, decided to be cautious.

Presently the fermenting Montagu came to a standstill.

"Why did you come here at all?" he demanded.

"I wanted somewhere to sleep," replied Philip.

Montagu uplifted clenched hands to heaven.

"Unutterable dolt!" he roared. "Do you imagine you are in a common lodging-house?"

"Oh, no, sir," Philip assured him. "I like your pictures awfully," he added, with a friendly smile.

This time Montagu Falconer first gaped at him, and then enquired:—

"Are you a *crétin*?"

Philip, who did not know what a *crétin* was, shook his head dubiously, and said he was not sure. Mr. Falconer, after assuring him that there was no doubt on the matter whatever, continued

his cross-examination.

"Where the devil have you come from? I suppose you know *that*!" [pg 10

"I came from Hampstead," replied Philip.

"Do you live in that beastly spot?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"You have to live somewhere," the *crétin* pointed out gently.

"Then why not go on living there, you unspeakable Yahoo? Why leave your antimacassars, and china dogs, and wool mats, and wax fruit, and—and harmoniums, and come bursting into a civilised household—eh?"

"I have run away from home," said Philip simply.

Mr. Falconer uttered a yell of triumph.

"A-a-ah! *Now* we are getting at the facts. What is your address?"

Philip told him.

Mr. Falconer assumed an air of ferocious satisfaction.

"Admirable!" he cried; "most inexpressibly satisfactory! You are outwitted! I have over-reached you—criminal! To-night, since you desire it, you shall enjoy my hospitality; but to-morrow morning, on the stroke of nine, an officer of the law—a policeman—shall wait upon you and conduct you back to the slum from which you came. Meanwhile, wretched offal, sleep! Sleep all over the studio if you like, and be damned to you! To-morrow—*ad leones*! Good-night!"

And without another word this excellent but ill-balanced householder shot out of the studio into the passage, locking the door behind him.

Philip finished the last piece of ham and the last mouthful of cocoa, turned out the electric light, rolled himself up in a Greek robe of saffron serge, and lay down upon the sofa. He was concerned in his mind about several things. In the first place, he had been discovered, and that might mean trouble both for Peggy and her mother. In the second the door was locked, which meant that he was a prisoner. In the third, he was to be sent back to Uncle Joseph at nine o'clock next morning, which would be an ignominious ending to his first great adventure. He pondered. [pg 10

In due course, just before he fell asleep, his obvious and proper course of action occurred to him. It was the only way, he decided, and moreover promised further adventure. He would have liked to be able to say good-bye to Peggy, but....

His eyes closed, and he slipped into the dreamless, motionless sleep of tired childhood, the lay figure and the other Strange Bedfellows keeping watch and ward by his pillow.

CHAPTER X

THE ECCENTRIC GENTLEMAN

It was a lovely morning. Philip, tramping vigorously along a Hertfordshire highway, felt that if all his adventures were to be conducted under such a kindly sun as this he would have little to complain of. But at present his most pressing desire was to get as far away from the residence of Mr. Montagu Falconer as possible.

He had quitted that restful establishment some three hours previously, escaping from durance by the simple expedient of opening the French window and walking out on to the lawn. He had caught an early morning train into the country; and having travelled as far as one-and-ninepence

would carry him, had also covered a considerable distance upon two sturdy legs. But he was uneasily conscious of the avenging power of the Law, which, goaded into activity by his late host,—Heaven only knew on what charges,—might be interesting itself on his behalf over all the countryside.

Still, he felt that he had no alternative. If he had accepted Mr. Falconer's pressing invitation to remain and be arrested at nine o'clock that morning, a still more involved situation would have arisen. For one thing Pegs and Mrs. Falconer would have been dragged into the fray, which would have been a most unnecessary complication; for apparently their choleric but obtuse protector had [pg 11
not scented their presence in the plot at all. They would certainly have confessed complicity and taken Philip's side; and this would have led to a domestic upheaval of a most monumental character. So Philip had cut the Gordian knot by running away.

It was eleven o'clock. He had breakfasted off the very inconsiderable remains of his supper, and was now acutely conscious of the existence of an excellent digestion clamouring for employment. He tramped resolutely along the wide country road, fingering the sum of elevenpence which remained in his right-hand trouser pocket, and wishing he could come to a shop.

He also speculated as to his future. He was a clear-headed little boy, and though he had led a secluded life, he had spent it almost entirely with grown-up people, and was accustomed to marshalling facts and weighing probabilities. He ran over the list of his accomplishments and limitations.

He had no Latin or Greek, but was a good stenographer and typewriter. He could keep accounts and file correspondence with method and neatness. He was a promising mathematician, with a useful but unsystematic acquaintance with mechanics and physics. He had read and re-read some twenty of Shakespeare's plays. He knew long passages of Milton and Tennyson by heart, and was well up in the history of ancient chivalry. His favourite book was Sir Thomas Malory's "Morte d'Arthur"; next in order ranked a string of well-thumbed science manuals. It may be added that he [pg 11
had never read a novel in his life. The foundation-stone of nine novels out of ten is a woman, and the coping-stone thereof is love made perfect; so naturally such works had found no place upon Uncle Joseph's shelves.

He was fairly expert with singlestick and rapier, and could play piquet and double-dummy bridge with more than average skill. But he knew nothing of cricket and football; and the ordinary joys of the schoolboy's holidays—pantomimes, parties, and the like—were a sealed book to him.

His labours on behalf of the Kind Young Hearts and Thomas Smith had introduced him to a large and varied, if unusual, circle of acquaintance, and he possessed a knowledge of human nature and the world in general that a seasoned man about town might have envied.

For some time back his thoughts had been occupied with the contemplation of a suitable career. The profession of Knight Errantry having apparently fallen into desuetude, he had been compelled to resign himself to the prospect of a more humdrum occupation. With the true instinct for the surviving possibilities of romance, he had decided to become an engineer. Like all boys of the present age he was consumed with the desire to understand, direct, and control machinery—especially the machinery of the automobile. The numerous cars which whizzed up and down the Finchley Road were an abiding joy to him. He could tell the make of any of them—just as a woman can tell the make of another woman—by the cut of its bonnet. Number plates attracted him [pg 11
especially, for they stimulated his imagination. When a mud-splashed car displaying the letters "S.B." stole silently past him in the gathering darkness, he realised with a thrill the bigness of the world; for this weary giant, now slipping into the roaring heart of London, had come all the way from the fastnesses of Argyllshire. He paid a penny a week for a small but highly technical journal which dealt with the latest mode in such things as sleeve-valves and detachable rims. He even executed designs of his own, inventing tyres which never punctured and carburettors that never choked. So now, with the choice of a career suddenly thrust upon him, he had no difficulty in making up his mind. It had been made up for some time. At this very moment he was on his way to Coventry, whence he knew that vast numbers of motor-cars emanated. What he was going to do when he got there he had not definitely settled. He felt that he already possessed certain saleable merchandise in the form of clerical skill: this he proposed to barter for technical instruction. He would arrange details when he reached Coventry. Philip was essentially one of those people who decline to think of the Vistula until they have crossed the Rhine.

Presently he came to an old, lofty, and warmly tinted brick wall, skirting the road for nearly a quarter of a mile on his right, and evidently sheltering some venerable house and garden. As he approached, Philip observed a large notice-board, jutting out for all to see.

[pg 11

MOTORISTS

Please drive slowly along
this wall. It contains
two hidden gates.

A quarter of a mile farther on, where the wall ended, came another board, which said, simply:—

THANK YOU!

Philip's comment on this pretty device was characteristic.

"What a beast you would feel," he said to himself, "if you *didn't* drive slowly and then found that 'Thank You!' sticking out at the end!"

He made a mental note that if ever he possessed a car of his own and came to this wall, he would comply punctiliously with the request upon the first board and so earn the right to read the second. He added a rider to the effect that if ever he possessed a house of his own like that he would put out a similar board.

He had scarcely passed the second of the concealed gates—the first was a mere kitchen door—when there was a grinding of bolts, and the gates were dragged open, slowly but resolutely, first one and then the other, by a small but intensely fat girl of seven or eight. This proceeding exposed to view the front of an ancient and ivy-clad house. Exactly opposite to the front door stood a motorcar of antique design and dilapidated appearance. From beneath the car projected a pair of human feet, attached to a pair of lengthy legs. The owner of the legs was apparently doing something painful to the underbody of the car, from beneath which came a stream of objurations of a bloodthirsty but innocuous type, punctuated by the clink of a spanner. [pg 11

The small girl, breathing heavily, stooped down to inspect these operations. Presently, adopting a more comfortable but somewhat reptilian attitude, she crawled bodily under the car. Here she encountered the head of the mechanic, who was lying on his back, engaged apparently in the task of removing mud-stalactites from the bottom of the car with a spanner. As fast as the stalactites were dislodged they fell into the excavator's eyes or mouth.

"What are you doin' of, Daddy?" enquired a husky but interested voice in his ear.

"Eating mud," replied the mechanic. "Splendid thing for the digestion, Dumps. Have some?"

"No, thank you," was the dignified reply. "I shall be havin' a glass of milk soon. But I will watch you," added Miss Dumps indulgently.

She rolled over with some difficulty on to her back, and lay staring solemnly at the mud-encrusted vault above her, while her harassed parent resumed his task of digging with the spanner for a buried nut. [pg 11

"I've opened the gates, Daddy," announced the small lady presently, in tones which were intended not so much to convey information as to remind her companion that he was forgetting his duties as a conversationalist.

"Thank you, madam," replied Mr. Mablethorpe. "Is the road clear?"

"I seen a little boy."

"Trust you for that! Well, we must contrive not to run over him. Just look in my left ear and see if you can find a nut, there's a good girl. I rather fancy I heard it drop in just now. No, don't bother. Here it is in my eye. Now we are really getting on!"

He adjusted the nut to the now exhumed bolt, and began to screw it tight with the spanner. The recumbent Dumps turned her head and regarded him admiringly.

"You are clever, Daddy!" she said.

"You are right," admitted her parent modestly. "I am a wonder. People simply come miles to—Dash and confound the rotten thing! Run your finger round the inside of my collar, Daniel Lambert. I think I can feel it lying somewhere round at the back."

Once more the fugitive nut was recaptured and replaced—this time permanently. Mr. Julius Mablethorpe wriggled painfully from under the car on the gravel drive, and then, rising to his legs, politely dragged his daughter out by the heels, and having first stood her upon her head (in order, as he explained, to give her feet a rest) restored her to an upright position, and surveyed her doubtfully. [pg 11

"We shall get into trouble with Mother, Dumpling," was his first remark.

He was right. At that moment the front door opened, and Mrs. Mablethorpe appeared.

"I can only say, Julius," she began at once,—as a matter of fact, no one had invited her to say anything.—"that I am not in the least surprised at anything you may do; but I *think*"—her voice quavered tearfully—"that you might have had the sense to prevent that child from crawling about in the mud too. Baby, go into the house and ask nurse to give you a bath at once. Your hands and face are black!"

"But I am quite white, Mummy," replied Miss Dumpling soothingly (one soon picked up the habit of speaking soothingly to Mrs. Mablethorpe), "all over the rest of myself. Look, I'll show you!"

Before any one could stop her, the infant detached a stocking from its moorings and rolled it down to her ankle.

"There!" she said triumphantly.

Mrs. Mablethorpe, fearing further enterprise, hurriedly reiterated her ultimatum on the subject of a bath.

"A good hot one," she added.

"The kiddie would do much better to wash her hands and face in cold water," said Mr. Mablethorpe. "What she is covered with is chiefly oil, and hot water will only open her little pores and drive it in."

Mrs. Mablethorpe put her hand to her head, dizzily. [pg 11

"You know I cannot bear argument, Julius," she said, with a little moan.

"Sorry!" said Mr. Mablethorpe humbly. "We must do as we are told, Dumps. We will go upstairs and wash in hot water. Then we shall have black hands and faces for months and months, and Mother won't be able to take us to Church. Hurrah!"

And this undutiful parent and callous husband caught up his daughter on his shoulder and carried her, shrieking joyfully, to the nursery. Five minutes later he descended, clean and smiling, and after caressing his hypochondriacal spouse, set to work to start up his engine. After three back-fires this feat was accomplished, and the car, with much burring of gear-wheels and slipping of the clutch, started off upon its deafening career. The vehicle in question was an old friend, and like most old friends felt privileged to speak its mind on all occasions, which it did with no uncertain voice.

Mr. Mablethorpe, having safely negociated the gateway,—no light feat, considering the amount of play on his steering-wheel,—turned sharp to the right and proceeded northward. Presently he came to four cross-roads. At the foot of the signpost sat a small, sturdy, and well-dressed boy, with short, curly, red hair and hazel-green eyes.

As the car slowed down in case of cross traffic the boy rose to his feet, and ranging up alongside asked a polite question.

Mr. Mablethorpe leaned over as far as he could.

"Is it *very* important?" he yelled above the din. "If I stop this engine to listen to you I may never be able to start it again." [pg 11

Philip replied with the full pressure of his lungs, but the only distinguishable word was "Coventry." The amiable Mr. Mablethorpe accordingly switched off the current, and the engine clanked itself into a state of coma.

"Now let us hear all about it," he said.

"Can you please tell me the way to Coventry?" enquired Philip.

"Coventry—eh? Have you been sent there?" Mr. Mablethorpe's eye twinkled.

"No. I'm going of my own accord," said Philip innocently.

"First time I have heard of a man sending himself to Coventry," mused Mr. Mablethorpe. He surveyed Philip's bewildered face with interest. "Perhaps you don't catch the allusion, though.

Don't you ever send any one to Coventry at school?"

"I have never been to school, sir," replied Philip.

"That's a pity," said Mr. Mablethorpe. "But to resume. Coventry must be a good eighty miles from here. Do you propose to walk?"

"Yes."

Mr. Mablethorpe eyed the pedestrian curiously. "Running away?" he asked.

"Sort of," admitted Philip.

"Well, I have only one motto in life," said Mr. Mablethorpe, "and that is, 'Mind your own business!' So I will refrain from comment. I don't know where Coventry is, but I should think you would not go far wrong if you kept along this road, and asked again later. Now, with your permission, I must be getting on." [pg 11

Mr. Mablethorpe had not proceeded far on his way—to his surprise and gratification the engine had come to life almost immediately—when his conscience smote him.

"I might have offered the little beggar a lift," he said to himself. "Silly not to have thought of it. He has a longish journey before him—that is, if Papa doesn't lay him by the heels. I might stop and let him overtake me. I wonder where he is."

He leaned over the side of the car and surveyed the road behind him.

The car, which had been waiting for some such opportunity as this all morning, promptly mounted the footpath and charged a hedge. Fortunately it was climbing a hill on its first speed at the time, so the results of the impact were not serious.

Mr. Mablethorpe, who was quite accustomed to mishaps of this kind, stopped his engine, and descended to earth to review the situation.

The first object which met his eye was Philip—a little blown and obviously taken by surprise—standing in the road with one hand still upon the Cape-cart hood.

"Hallo!" remarked Mr. Mablethorpe genially. "Still here?"

"Yes," replied Philip. "I thought I would run behind."

"Better come and sit in front," advised Mr. Mablethorpe. "But first of all we must get Boanerges out of the hedge." [pg 12

"Who?"

"Boanerges. Let me introduce you. I present Boanerges—my superb, four-seated, two-cylinder, one dog-power reaping machine—to—to—Mr.—"

"Philip Meldrum."

"—To Mr. Philip Meldrum. Now you know one another. (At least, Boanerges knows you: you don't know Boanerges.) Come and help to shove his ugly face in!"

Philip assisted his new and eccentric friend to disentangle Boanerges from the hedge and push him back into the roadway, and then obediently took his seat. He was trembling with pure ecstasy. He was in a motor-car! At last he had stepped from textbooks into the realms of reality.

He surveyed the various appliances on the dingy dashboard. There were two switches of the electric light variety, one marked "M" and the other "A," which Philip knew stood for Magneto and Accumulator respectively. There was an oil-reservoir, with a piston-rod protruding from the top, and a glass gauge at one side to show the level of the oil. Last of all, suspended from its tail by a drawing pin, came a clockwork mouse, which had originally been the property of the Dumpling and was now spending its declining years as a motor-mascot. Meanwhile Mr. Mablethorpe, with the assistance of the starting-handle, had been playing a monotonous and unmelodious tune upon his hurdy-gurdy-like engine. Presently he paused for breath.

"Boanerges takes a lot of starting-up," he explained. "I'll have one more go, and if that fails we will run him backwards down the hill and let the reverse in. That ought to do it." [pg 12

"Are you running on magneto or accumulator, sir?" enquired Philip.

Mr. Mablethorpe left the starting-handle and came thoughtfully round to the side of the car.

"I don't seem to be running on either," he remarked. "My mistake! Let us try this little fellow."

He turned down the switch marked "A," and returned to his labours. The immediate result was a stunning explosion immediately under Philip's feet.

"That is the first gun," explained Mr. Mablethorpe. "He always gives us three before we start. The first is a protest; the second means '*Drop it, or there will be trouble!*' and the third usually ushers in a conflagration. After that I blow the flames out, and off we go!"

But this was too sanguine an estimate. After five resounding back-fires the engine still failed to exhibit any signs of abiding vitality, although the accumulator had been reinforced by the magneto. Mr. Mablethorpe accordingly took his seat at the wheel and, releasing the brakes, allowed the car to slide rapidly backward down the hill. At the same time he performed some complicated evolutions with his feet.

Instantly the engine sprang into life, and Boanerges, with a playful swerve, shot stern foremost into a bank at the other side of the highway, with a bump which nearly sent Philip back-somersaulting into the seat behind. The engine immediately stopped again. [pg 12

That resourceful but unconventional mechanic, the owner of the car, abandoned his pedal-work, descended once more into the road, and after dispassionately kicking Boanerges three times in the pit of his stomach—the radiator—seized the starting-handle and gave it another resolute twirl.

This time his efforts were successful beyond all expectation. Boanerges promptly charged forward, nearly pinning his tormentor beneath his off-front wheel, and proceeded smartly up the hill once more, Mr. Mablethorpe running frantically alongside and endeavouring to climb into the driver's seat over the spare wheel.

"Another little mistake of mine," he panted, as he finally hopped on board and took the wobbly steering-wheel over from Philip. "I left the gears in the first speed instead of the neutral. But it is all right now. We are off like an Arab steed. Let me oil him up."

He leaned forward and began to agitate the piston in the oil-reservoir, with the result that Boanerges, emitting dense fumes of black smoke from his exhaust, was soon breasting the slope with quite remarkable vigour.

"So you know something about motors?" said Mr. Mablethorpe, as they reached the top of the hill and began to slide comfortably down the other side.

"Only out of books," said Philip. "I have never been in a car before, but I think I understand the way the engine works, and the ignition."

Mr. Mablethorpe surveyed him admiringly. [pg 12

"Wonderful!" he said—"wonderful! Fancy any human creature being able to understand textbooks! They simply prostrate *me*. I dare say," he added enviously, "that you know what poppet-valves are! And worm-drives, and differential sprockets! Prodigious!"

"Only by what I have read about them in a book," explained Philip modestly.

"Well," continued Mr. Mablethorpe. "I know of one thing you never read about in a book, and that was a car like this. Boanerges was built before the printing-press was invented—in the dark ages—in the days of the Black Art. Look at those two switches, marked 'M' and 'A.' They stand for 'Mephistopheles and Apollyon'—the name of the firm who supplied the engine. Oh, it's an eerie vehicle, this. Observe this pedal. You wouldn't think a pedal could do more than just go up and down, would you?"

"It might take out the clutch, or put on the brake, sir," hazarded Philip respectfully.

Mr. Mablethorpe waved his hand contemptuously.

"That's nothing," he said. "Steady, old man!" (This to Boanerges, who, feeling his owner's grip of the wheel relax, had swerved quite thirty degrees out of his course.) "This car was designed by a man without hands or arms—only feet and teeth. At least, I think so. His idea was to steer with his teeth and do everything else with his feet. So he started by abolishing gear-handles and side-

[pg 12

brakes, and applied all his ingenuity to the pedals. Look at this one,—the left. If I push it half-down the car stops. If I push it two thirds down, the car starts again—in the opposite direction—and the engine plays *I wish I was an Angel*, instead of *Hitchy Koo*! We have a lot of fun in close traffic that way. If I push it seven eighths down, the radiator boils over, and I can have a shave or a cup of tea; and if I put it right down, the car turns inside out and becomes a portable camp bedstead. I won't do that at present, because I am not sleepy."

All this surprising information was communicated with an air of solemn and confidential conviction; and Philip, who had never previously encountered any one endowed with Mr. Mablethorpe's peculiar brand of humour, merely gaped dumbly.

"Yes, Boanerges is a car of mystery," continued this excellent but frivolous man presently. "There is a little handle-arrangement down here, in the corner of the dashboard. I don't know who put it there: I just noticed it one day, after I had owned the car for some time. I have only turned it three times. The first time the whole of the back axle dropped off into the road. The second time Boanerges turned right round and ran over a duck which was asleep on a cottage doorstep behind us. The third time a policeman with a notebook shot straight up out of the roadway in front of the car, and took my name and address for obstructing a funeral which had been trying to pass me for two hours. That was about seventeen years ago, just after I bought the car. At least, I didn't buy it: it was left to me by my great-grandmother. I have never meddled with that handle since." [pg 12

Philip, who had lived in serious company hitherto, and had no idea that grown-up people ever descended to imbecility of this description, began to like this strange gentleman. But he made no attempt to maintain a conversation with him. After the dictatorial austerity of Uncle Joseph he felt pleasantly intoxicated by his present companion's frothy effervescence, and was well content to lean back in his seat and listen.

"Of course," resumed Mr. Mablethorpe presently, "I may be wrong about the designer of this car having had no arms. He may have required them—one of them, at any rate—for other purposes. For instance, he may have been engaged to be married. Are you engaged to be married, by any chance?"

"No," said Philip.

"Ah!"

Mr. Mablethorpe appeared to fall into a fresh train of thought, and after a little while enquired:—

"What is your opinion of the female sex as a whole?"

Not long ago Philip could have given his opinion on this subject clearly and concisely. Now he was content to quote the words of another.

"I don't quite know," he said, "but Uncle Joseph thinks—"

He hesitated. Mr. Mablethorpe might not be interested in Uncle Joseph.

But this astonishing gentleman appeared to be interested in everybody.

"Tell me all that Uncle Joseph thinks," he commanded. [pg 12

"Uncle Joseph," began Philip, "used to wonder why women were ever created."

Mr. Mablethorpe turned and regarded his small companion sharply.

"Aha! Uncle Joseph used to wonder that, did he? Why?"

"He said," continued Philip, warming to his subject as the familiar phrases came back to him, "that there is no parallel to the female mind in any other branch of Nature."

"That is true," remarked Mr. Mablethorpe approvingly. "I should like to meet Uncle Joseph. Go on."

"It seems incredible," pursued Philip, with a curiously incongruous expression of intense wisdom upon his honest and ingenuous features, "that Providence should handicap its own beautifully designed human engines by placing them in daily contact with such a piece of uncontrolled and ill-balanced mechanism as Woman."

"Oho!" said Mr. Mablethorpe, manipulating the oil-pump, to the noisome satisfaction of

Boanerges; "Uncle Joseph said that, did he?"

"Yes; and he said putting women near a man was like putting a lot of bar-magnets round a compass. And he said they were parasites, too, actuated by predatory instincts. They—"

But Mr. Mablethorpe interrupted him.

"Uncle Joseph, I take it," he said, "is a married man."

"Oh, no," replied Philip, "he is a bachelor. He never allows a woman into his house, even to wash,—at least, he never did until the other day, when the Beautiful Lady came. And then—well, I didn't know what to think, sir," he concluded helplessly. [pg 12

"This," commented Mr. Mablethorpe, "is elliptical but interesting. Proceed, my infant misogynist. Who was the Beautiful Lady, and why did she call?"

"Well, sir," said Philip, knitting his brows, "it was like this. No woman is ever—was ever—allowed into our house, because—because of what Uncle Joseph thinks—thought—about them. Yesterday a lady called when he was out, and got in."

"Who let her in?" enquired the accusing voice of Mr. Mablethorpe.

"I'm afraid I did, sir," replied Philip apologetically.

"I am not in the least surprised to hear it," said Mr. Mablethorpe. "What was she like?"

"She was all in black, and she sat and talked to me for a long time, and told me she had lost her little girl. Then Uncle Joseph came in, and—and—and they seemed to know each other quite well, sir."

Mr. Mablethorpe deliberately switched off his engine and slowed down to a stop at the roadside.

"Now we can talk without shouting," he said. "I scent copy. This is a real live Romance. Continue. How well did Uncle Joseph and the Beautiful Lady appear to know one another?"

"Pretty well," faltered Philip, with boylike reserve.

Mr. Mablethorpe, who had once been a boy himself,—there were some who said that he had never grown up,—nodded understandingly. [pg 12

"And what happened after that?" he asked.

"I ran away," said Philip.

"Why?"

"They did not seem to need me any more," said Philip simply.

Mr. Mablethorpe produced a pipe, and filled it with great care. He appeared to be thinking deeply about something. Presently, after lighting the pipe, he turned to Philip, and said:—

"Are you in a pressing hurry to get to Coventry?"

Philip thought not, and said so.

"Then why not come and stay with me for a bit?" suggested this amazing man.

CHAPTER XI

RED GABLES

An hour later, shopping commissions having been executed, they clanked majestically homeward. The journey was completed without further mishap, though a frisky calf, encountered by the way, almost wrecked its own prospects of ever becoming veal by an untimely indulgence in the game of "Come to Mother, or Last Across the Road,"—that was how Mr. Mablethorpe described it,—gambolling unexpectedly under the very bows of Boanerges in response to the ill-judged appeal of an anxious parent on the opposite side of the highway.

Presently the long red wall, with its polite notice to motorists, came into view on their left, and the car slowed down. Philip realised with pleasure that this was his destination.

"Did you put up that notice, sir?" he enquired.

"I put it up," replied Mr. Mablethorpe, "but my daughter composed it. She makes rather a special feature of the common courtesies of life. Mind your elbow against that gatepost."

Two minutes later Philip found himself being presented to a languid but still pretty lady, who assured him, in a speech which appeared in some curious way to be addressed to Mr. Mablethorpe rather than himself, that she was charmed to meet him, in spite of a headache, and that she had no [pg 13
doubt that fresh servants would ultimately be forthcoming to take the places of those whose resignations the introduction of an unexpected boy into a hitherto tranquil household would naturally precipitate. Adding a mournful postscript to the effect that Philip would doubtless have made an admirable secretary for her husband, but for the fact that his uncle would inevitably insist upon his speedy return to Holly Lodge, Mrs. Mablethorpe, with a look of patient endurance upon her delicate features, faded away upstairs, to bedew herself with eau-de-Cologne and partake of luncheon in bed.

"Friends," observed Mr. Mablethorpe solemnly as his wife disappeared, "are requested to accept this (the only) intimation and invitation. Now, Philip, come and be introduced to my daughter."

The three spent a perfectly happy afternoon together. Miss Dumpling treated "the new inmate," as Mr. Mablethorpe called Philip, with marked favour, introducing him *seriatim* to three cows, named respectively Boo, Moo, and Coo; a family of lop-eared rabbits; and an aged gramophone suffering from bronchial weakness.

Towards tea-time Mr. Mablethorpe, who knew his wife almost as well as he loved her, penetrated to the invalid's bedroom, and there apologised in the most handsome manner for several crimes which he had not committed. Mrs. Mablethorpe, having delivered herself of a brief homily upon the whole duty of a husband entrusted with the care of a delicate wife, now felt sufficiently recovered to come downstairs and partake of a tea of encouraging dimensions. [pg 13

Philip surveyed her curiously. His feminine horizon was enlarging itself.

"Julius, dear," observed Mrs. Mablethorpe presently, "I know, of course, that it is perfectly useless to say anything to you about Baby's upbringing,—the child is ruined for life by this time,—but I must protest, however feebly, against your feeding her with that sweet and sticky cake. We shall have her running in and out of the dentist's every five minutes in a year or two."

"You hear that, Daniel Lambert?" asked Mr. Mablethorpe of his ruined child. "Mother says we aren't to have any more cake. I think it is most tyrannical of her: she knows how we love running in and out of the dentist's. But we must obey orders. About turn, and let us get back to the bread-and-butter! Come on—I'll race you!"

Mr. Mablethorpe began to munch bread-and-butter with enormous enthusiasm, and poor Dumps, reluctantly laying down a generous slice of plum-cake, followed his example. But when the trio finally obtained permission to retire to the library and play at "wolves"—a pastime to which it appeared that Mr. Mablethorpe was much addicted—and tumbled upstairs together, Philip overheard the unregenerate father whisper to his daughter:—

"If you wish a wish and then feel in my pocket, old lady, you may find something."

In the library the Dumpling offered Philip a share in a large slice of plum-cake.

Philip went to bed that evening in the room which had been prepared for his reception [pg 13
(fortunately without causing any break-up in the staff of the establishment), but did not sleep for a long while. He had much to think of. It seemed almost incredible that he had left Holly Lodge only yesterday, and that it was only last night that he had slept with the wolf-scarers in Montagu Falconer's studio; yet it was a fact. The remembrance of the studio brought back visions of Peggy. He wondered when, if ever, he should see her again. He compared her with Dumps, but quickly realised that comparisons were impossible. Dumps was a decent little kid, though fat, but she was not Pegs.

Then he thought of Dumps's parents, and he began to understand that it takes all sorts to make a world. He was beginning to realise the importance, in every department of life, of "making allowances." This duty was not confined to one sex, as he had previously imagined. Mrs. Falconer, it was true, spent her life in making allowances for Mr. Falconer. But here was Mr. Mablethorpe doing precisely the same thing for Mrs. Mablethorpe.

Finally, he thought of Uncle Joseph and the Beautiful Lady. Perhaps, he reflected, if these two had made allowances for one another earlier in life their coming together would not have been delayed for ten years.

Incidentally he made a note that, dragons having become obsolete, a knight might do worse than set out to persuade people to make allowances for one another.

CHAPTER XII

THE OFFICIAL DEMISE OF TOMMY SMITH

NEXT morning Mr. Mablethorpe, after a quite unexpectedly serious conversation with Philip, departed upon Boanerges to seek out Uncle Joseph.

Having achieved a comparatively unadventurous journey (if we except a collision with a milk-cart in the Finchley Road), he drew up at Holly Lodge, which looked very much the same as when Philip had left it two days before, save that a large board, newly painted and announcing that "This House" was to be "Let or Sold," projected over the laurel hedge which separated the gravel sweep from the roadway.

Uncle Joseph was at home, and received his visitor in the library.

The owner of Boanerges came to the point at once.

"My name," he said, "is Mablethorpe. I do not suppose that the information will interest you in the least, but it is customary to give it. What is more to the point is the fact that I have found a stray nephew. Have you lost one?"

Uncle Joseph admitted that this was so.

"He appears to have left home," continued Mr. Mablethorpe, "two days ago, owing to a sudden and rather unexpected change in your domestic routine."

"He told you the story, then?" [pg 13

"Yes."

"I cannot quite understand," said Uncle Joseph, "why the event to which you refer should have made it necessary for him to leave my house. In fact, I should have thought it would have been an inducement to him to remain. Have a cigar?"

Mr. Mablethorpe helped himself, and replied thoughtfully:—

"I gather that the—the event to which we have referred absolved him, in his rather immature judgment, from further allegiance to your person and service."

Uncle Joseph eyed his visitor keenly.

"Service—eh? Did he explain to you the nature of his services?"

"Yes, he told me all about it. The Kind Young Hearts, the Unwanted Doggies, Tommy Smith—everything. I made him tell me every shred of the story. I would not have missed a word of it. It was priceless—immense—the most brilliant thing I ever heard of! As a brother-artist, in a smaller and less remunerative way, I beg to offer you my felicitations and thanks. But our young friend Philip appears to have found his share of the work uncongenial. Apparently his conscience—"

"Not his conscience," interposed Uncle Joseph: "his disposition. The boy is a born sentimentalist, like his father before him. I had noticed the paternal characteristics developing for

some time, and I expected an upheaval sooner or later. The—the event to which reference has been made precipitated matters, that is all."

"Quite so," agreed Mr. Mablethorpe. "But whatever his underlying forces may be, your nephew appears to be a youth of some directness of character. When I intercepted him yesterday he was on his way to Coventry, with the intention of studying the mechanics of automobilism. He is now in my house, and on my representations has agreed to place his future unreservedly in your hands. But I don't think you will persuade him to go back to the Little Tommy Smith business, you know." [pg 13

"There is no need," said Uncle Joseph. "Little Tommy Smith is dead, and his works have perished with him."

"So I had gathered," said Mr. Mablethorpe.

"How?" asked Uncle Joseph, a little startled.

Mr. Mablethorpe waved his hand in the direction of the window.

"Partly from the presence of that board outside," he said, "and partly because, in the light of—of recent events, any other *dénouement* would have been an inartistic anticlimax, contrary to the canons of the best fiction."

Uncle Joseph surveyed his rather unusual visitor with interest.

"You appear to know something of men and women," he said.

"I have to," explained Mr. Mablethorpe. "I make a living by studying the weaknesses of mankind and publishing the results of my observations at four-and-sixpence net."

"A novelist, I gather."

"Yes, but of the obsolete school. I hate your morbid, soul-dissecting, self-centred pessimist like poison. I go in for happy endings and the eternal good in human nature. In this respect I rejoice to observe that you are not going to disappoint me." [pg 13

Uncle Joseph's cold blue eyes glowed suddenly.

"No, thank God!" he said; "I am not."

After that he told Mr. Mablethorpe the rest of the story.

"Her husband died five years ago. I rather gather it was drink, but I did not press the point. I am quite content to accept the official virtues of the deceased as enumerated on his tombstone and let his hobbies drop into oblivion. She had one little girl, who died, too; and since then she has been living alone—quite alone. Poor soul, she has paid—paid in full. Perhaps I have, too. Pride, pride! Have you ever noticed, in your observations of human life, how very heavily—disproportionately, one might say—God punishes pride? Sins which arise from weakness seem to get off, on the whole, rather more lightly than they deserve; but the sins of the strong—pride, obduracy, even reticence—never! I suppose it is God's way of rubbing in the fact that Strength Belongeth to the Lord Alone."

"I don't think that the strong get punished more heavily than the weak," said Mr. Mablethorpe, "but they feel their punishment much more keenly. It is impossible to punish the weak. They run howling to their betters the moment they feel the first whack, and unload their woes on to them. But the strong, especially the proud, endure their punishment and say nothing. That's why it hurts so." [pg 13

"Perhaps you are right," said Uncle Joseph. "But we appear to be digressing into philosophy. I am to be married next month, and we are going to live in the country. She has been left very poorly off, as the money has passed on with the title. But I think we shall be tolerably comfortable—and busy. We have some small arrears of happiness to make up."

"And your benevolent exercises," said Mr. Mablethorpe, after a long silence, "are now a thing of the past?"

"Yes. Frankly, I am sorry; for the people who paid the money extracted a large amount of innocent pleasure from giving it, and it was a perfect godsend to the people who ultimately received it. But, of course, pedantically speaking, the whole thing was illegal, and Vivien has all a woman's respect for the letter of the law. So I intend to close down. My charities will suffer, I fear; but possibly I shall be able to make good by personal service some of the deficiencies caused by my

failure as a source of revenue. Still, I shall miss it all. I enjoyed composing the appeals, particularly."

"I rather fancy I once received one from you," said Mr. Mablethorpe. "I read it with great appreciation. In fact, I answered it. But now, as to Master Philip. What are your views?"

"Supposing I hear yours first?" said Uncle Joseph.

"Very well. I am a comparatively prosperous man. I have no son. The boy interests me, and I [pg 13
scent copy in him. I also want an occasional secretary and amanuensis. I suggest that he should make his headquarters with me, and I will be responsible for his education. He shall visit you whenever and for as long as you want him. The only stipulation I make is that we have no formal agreement or business arrangement about him. I am not a man of business, and I hate legal contracts and attempts to harness the future more than anything in this world. Will you let me have the boy for as long as he is willing to stay with me?"

"Certainly," said Uncle Joseph.

And with that word Philip's career as a misogynist and recluse came to an official conclusion.

BOOK TWO
LABOR OMNIA VINCIT

CHAPTER XIII

THE GOLDEN AGE

I

PHILIP'S life during the next ten years resembled All Gaul. It was spent partly at a little house in Cheltenham, whither Uncle Joseph, with all his old austerity and cynicism thawed out of him, had conducted the Beautiful Lady two months after their marriage; partly at Red Gables; and partly at a series of educational establishments, ranging from a private school in the neighborhood of St. Albans, where he was initiated into the mysteries of Latin Prose and cricket, to the great engineering shops of the Britannia Motor Company at Coventry.

Life at Red Gables was a very pleasant business. Philip's duties as secretary were of an elastic nature. Sometimes he wrote out cheques for tradesmen and coaxed Mr. Mablethorpe into signing them. Sometimes he battled with publishers about copyrights and royalties. Sometimes he acknowledged the receipt of the letters—chiefly from seminaries for young ladies—of those who wrote to express their admiration of Mr. Mablethorpe's works.

"I suppose, Philip," said Mr. Mablethorpe one morning, ruefully surveying a highly scented missive in a mauve envelope, forwarded by his publishers, "that my books *are* read by other people besides schoolgirls; but why in Heaven's name should no one else ever write to me about them? [pg 14
Not that I want any one to write at all,—the penny post is the curse of modern civilization,—but I could do with a touch of variety now and then. I have only once in my life received a letter, as an author, from a man, and that was from a pork-butcher in the north of England, who wrote to point out, most helpfully and sensibly, that I was guilty of a technical error in making my hero purchase both kidneys and bacon at the same shop. I should like to get a lot of letters like that: they are extremely valuable. But what *do* I get? Letters by the score from schoolgirls—sometimes from a syndicate of schoolgirls—all asking for my autograph and endeavouring to find out, by more or less transparent devices, how old I am and whether I am married or not! You can't choke them off. If you don't answer they write again, enclosing a stamped envelope, which hangs round your neck like a millstone for weeks. If you do, they tell all the other girls, and before you know where you are you find you have tapped Niagara. Let us see what Zenana has found me out now."

He opened the mauve envelope, and read the letter with savage grunts.

"This, Philip," he said, "is from Gwendoline Briggs and Clara Waddell. You will be interested to

hear that they sit up reading my innocuous works in the dead of night, after the other girls have gone to sleep. Well, I hope the Head Mistress catches them at it, that's all!... Here you are: what did I tell you?

... We often wonder what you are like. One of us thinks you are about forty, with rather tired grey eyes— [pg 14

"Impudent minx!

—but the other thinks you are much younger than that; clean-shaven, with a very firm mouth.

"This sort of thing makes me quite sick.... Yes, I thought as much; they want my autograph.

Will you please send two, please, as we are not sisters—only great chums.

"Where do these brats hail from?" Mr. Mablethorpe turned back the page and consulted the heading of the letter.

"*Bilchester Abbey School, Bilchester, Hants.* That's a new name to me. Throw over that directory, Philip: on the third shelf, to your right. Let me see: *Founded, 1897. Governing Body: the Lord Bishop of*——quite so: *Head Mistress, Miss*——yes, yes: *Assistant Mistresses*—never mind them: *Gravel soil; Gymnasium; Altitude, four hundred*—Ah, here we are:—*Number of Pupils, two hundred and seventy-three!* Great Heavens! This must be stopped. Get the typewriter quickly, Philip, and take down something!

Mr. Julius Mablethorpe regrets deeply that he is unable to accede to the request of Mesdames Briggs and Waddell for his autograph. Mr. Mablethorpe had the misfortune some years ago to be deprived of the use of his hands (owing to an explosive fountain-pen), and now finds himself compelled to dictate all his work into a gramophone. Mr. Mablethorpe is seventy-eight years of age, and is still in possession of a fair proportion of his faculties. His eyes used to be grey, as Miss Briggs (or was it Miss Waddell?) surmises; [pg 14 *but he now possesses only one, having lost the other while on a visit to a Dorcas Society, together with a portion of his scalp. He has been married four times, and possesses sixty-nine grandchildren, reckoning thirteen to the dozen. For further details see "Who's Who."*

"That ought to choke them off," observed Mr. Mablethorpe with childish satisfaction, as he finished dictating this outrageous document. "Now, what about this grubby epistle here? It does not smell so vilely as the first, but I bet it is from another of the tribe."

He began to read:—

Dear Mr. Mablethorpe

All your books are in our House Library—

He broke off.

"I tell you what it is, Philip," he said. "I shall have to write a really shocking novel—something unspeakably awful. Then I shall be banned from girls' schools for ever. My circulation will probably go down by ninety per cent, but it will be well worth it.

My name is Elsie Hope, and I love them all. I have no father or mother, and I have just read a story of yours about a little girl who had no father or mother either. It made me cry.

"Snivelling brat!" commented the unfeeling author.

I have not been here very long, and I do not know many of the girls yet, so your books make splendid company. I thought I would like to tell you. Good-bye.

"Gracious!" said Mr. Mablethorpe incredulously. "She hasn't asked for my autograph! Hello, [pg 14] what's this?"

He turned over the page. The letter continued, in a different handwriting—prim, correct, and formal:—

Elsie has gone to bed. I found her writing this letter, and she showed it to me quite frankly. As the child seemed really eager to write to you, I have undertaken to finish her letter and explain the circumstances. I feel sure you will understand, and pardon the

liberty. Do not trouble to reply.

Yours faithfully
Ellen Wardale.

Mr. Mablethorpe laid down the letter.

"Ellen Wardale is a good sort," he said. "As for Elsie Hope, she has not asked me to write to her, so I shall do so. Now, Philip, get out "The Lost Legacy," and we will have a go at Chapter Fourteen. It is going to be a difficult bit. The hero, who is the greatest nincompoop that I have yet created, finds himself suspected by the heroine of having transferred his affections to another lady. (Between ourselves, it would have been a very sensible thing if he had done so, but, of course, he is incapable of such wisdom.) As the story is not half over, we can't afford to get him out of the mess just yet; so this morning I want him to make an even greater ass of himself than before, and so prolong the agony to eighty thousand words. Here goes!"

After this they would work steadily until lunchtime.

II

[pg 14

Philip had other duties to perform. He attended to the wants of Boanerges, and in time reduced that unreliable vehicle to quite a surprising degree of docility.

He became gradually infected with the Romance of our mechanical age. He saw himself, a twentieth-century Galahad, roaming through the land in a hundred-horse-power armoured car, seeking adventure, repelling his country's invaders, carrying despatches under cover of night, and conveying beauteous ladies to places of safety. He spent much of his spare time seated upon the garden wall, watching for the motors that whizzed north and south along the straight white road. (It is regrettable to have to record that many of these disregarded Dumps's notice-board.) He saw poetry in the curve of a radiator, and heard music in the whirring of a clutch.

One day, in an expansive moment, he confided these emotions to Mr. Mablethorpe. That many-sided man did not laugh, as Philip had half-feared he would, but said:—

"*Romance brought up the nine-fifteen*—eh? I must introduce you to a kindred spirit."

And he led Philip to a shelf filled with a row of books. Some were bound in dark blue, and consisted mainly of short stories; the others, smaller and slimmer, were dark red, and contained poetry.

"There," said Mr. Mablethorpe, "are the works of the man whom I regard as the head of our profession. Wire in!"

Philip spent the next three days learning "MacAndrew's Hymn" by heart.

[pg 14

There were many other books in the library, upon which Philip browsed voraciously. Uncle Joseph's selection of literature had been a little severe, but here was far richer fare. Philip discovered a writer called Robert Louis Stevenson, but though he followed his narratives breathlessly found him lacking in feminine interest. The works of Jules Verne filled him with rapture; for their peculiar blend of high adventure and applied science was exactly suited to his temperament. He had other more isolated favourites—"The Wreck of the Grosvenor"; "Lorna Doone"; "The Prisoner of Zenda"; and "To Have and to Hold," which latter he read straight through twice. But he came back again and again to the shelf containing the red and blue volumes, and the magician who dwelt therein never failed him. There were two fascinating stories called "The Ship that Found Herself," and ".007." After reading these Philip ceased to regard Boanerges as a piece of machinery; he endowed him with a soul and a sense of humour. There was a moving tale of love and work called "William the Conqueror"; there was a palpitating drama of the sea called "Bread upon the Waters"; and there was one story which he read over and over again—it took his thoughts back in some hazy fashion to Peggy Falconer and Hampstead Heath—called "The Brushwood Boy."

Only one book upon this shelf failed to please him. It was a complete novel, and dealt with a love affair that went wrong and never came right. The hero, a cantankerous fellow, became blind, and the unfeminine independent heroine never knew, so went her own way and left him to die. This tragic tale haunted Philip's dreams. It shocked his innate but unconscious belief in the general tendency of things to work together for good. He considered that the author should have compelled these two wrong-headed people to "make allowances for one another," and so come together at the last. He even took the opinion of Mr. Mablethorpe on the subject. Mr. Mablethorpe said:—

[pg 14

"His best book, Philip. But—I read it less than any of the others."

Then he introduced Philip to "Brugglesmith," and the vapours were blown away by gusts of laughter.

III

Philip's orthodox education was not neglected. After a year's attendance as a day-boy at the establishment near St. Albans he was sent to Studley, a great public school in the south of England.

Here many things surprised him.

Having spent most of his life in the company of grown men, he anticipated some difficulty in rubbing along with boys of his own age. Master Philip at this period of his career was surprisingly grownup: in fact he was within a dangerously short distance of becoming a prig. But he went to school in time. In three weeks the latent instincts of boyhood had fully developed, and Philip played Rugby football, indulged in unwholesome and clandestine cookery, rioted noisily when he should have been quiescent, and generally tumbled in and out of scrapes as happily and fortuitously as if he had been born into a vigorous family of ten. [pg 14

He achieved a respectable position for himself among his fellows, but upon a qualification which would have surprised an older generation. The modern schoolboy is essentially a product of the age he lives in, and the gods he worships are constantly adding to their number. Of what does his Pantheon consist? Foremost, of course, comes the athlete. He is a genuine and permanent deity. His worshippers behold him every day, excelling at football and cricket, lifting incredible weights in the dormitory before going to bed, or running a mile in under five minutes. His qualifications are written on his brow, and up he goes to the pinnacle of Olympus, where he endures from age to age. Second comes the boy whose qualifications are equally good, but have to be accepted to a certain extent upon hearsay—the sportsman. A reputed good shot or straight rider to hounds is admitted to Olympus *ex officio*, and is greatly in request, in the rôle of Sir Oracle, during those interminable discussions—corresponding to the symposia in which those of riper years indulge in clubs and mess-rooms—which invariably arise when the rank and file of the House are assembled round a common-room fire, in the interval, say, between tea and preparation.

There are other and lesser lights. The wag, for instance. The scholar, as such, has no seat in the sun. His turn comes later in life, when the athletes are licking stamps and running errands. [pg 15

But the Iron Age in which we live has been responsible for a further addition to the scholastic aristocracy—the motor expert. A boy who can claim to have driven a Rolls-Royce at fifty miles an hour is accorded a place above the salt by popular acclamation. No one with any claim to social distinction can afford to admit ignorance upon such matters as high-tension magnetos and rotary valves. The humblest fag can tell at a glance whether a passing vehicle is a Wolseley or a Delaunay Belleville. Science masters, for years a despised—or at the best a tolerated—race, now achieve a degree of popularity and respect hitherto only attainable by Old Blues, because they understand induced currents and the mysteries of internal combustion. Most curious portent of all, a boy in the Lower School, who cannot be trusted to work out a sum in simple arithmetic without perpetrating several gross errors, and to whom physics and chemistry, as such, are a sealed book entitled "Stinks," will solve in his head, readily and correctly, such problems as relate to petrol-mileage or the ratio of gear-wheels, and remedy quite readily and skilfully the ticklish troubles that arise from faulty timing-wheels and short circuits.

It was upon these qualifications that Philip originally obtained admission to the parliament which perennially fugged and argued around the fire on winter evenings. It was true that he had never been fined for exceeding the speed limit in Hyde Park, like Ashley major, nor been run into in the Ripley Road, like Master Crump; but his technical knowledge was very complete for a boy of his age; and being an admirable draughtsman, he could elucidate with paper and pencil mysteries which both he and his audience realised could not be explained by the English language. [pg 15

In time, too, he became a fair athlete. Cricket he hated, but he developed into a sturdy though clumsy forward at football; and his boxing showed promise. His speciality was the strength of his wrist and forearm. On gala nights, when the prefects had been entertaining a guest at tea,—an old boy or a junior master,—Philip, then a lusty fag rising sixteen, was frequently summoned before the quality, to give his celebrated exhibition of poker-bending.

Having discovered that the boys at Studley were much more grown-up than he had expected, Philip was not altogether surprised to find that some of the masters were incredibly young—not to say childish. There was Mr. Brett, his Housemaster. Mr. Brett was a typical product of a great system—run to seed. British public schools are very rightly the glory of those who understand them, but they are the despair of those who do not. Generally speaking, they produce a type of man with no special propensities and consequently no special fads. He has been educated on stereotyped and uncommercial lines. He is not a specialist in any branch of knowledge. His critics say that he is unfitted for any profession; that he cannot write a business letter; that he is frequently incapable of expressing himself in decent English. But—public-school tradition has taught him to run straight and speak the truth. The fagging system has taught him to obey an [pg 15

order promptly. The prefectorial system has taught him to frame an order and see that it is carried out. Games have taught him to play for his side and not for himself. The management of games has instilled into him the first principles of organisation and responsibility. Taking him all round, he is the very man we want to run a half-educated empire.

Possibly these truths had been known to Mr. Brett in his early days. But, as already stated, his principles had run to seed. In the vegetable world,—of which schoolmasters are dangerously prone to become distinguished members,—whenever judicious watering and pruning are lacking, time operates in one of two ways. A plant either withers and wilts, or it shoots up into a monstrous and unsightly growth. In Mr. Brett's intellectual arboretum every shrub had wilted save two—Classics and cricket. These twain, admirable in moderation, had grown up like mustard trees, and now overshadowed the whole of Mr. Brett's mental outlook. In his House he devoted his ripe scholarship and untiring care exclusively to boys who were likely to do well in the Sixth: his mathematicians and scientists were left to look after themselves. French and German he openly described as "a sop to the parental Cerberus." His Modern-Side boys forgave the slight freely—in fact, they preferred it; and their heavily supervised classical brethren envied them their freedom. But cricket was a different matter. Mr. Brett had probably begun by regarding Classics as the [pg 15
greatest intellectual, and cricket as the greatest moral, stimulus in the schoolboy world—a common, and, on the whole, perfectly tenable, attitude of mind. But by the time that Philip came under his charge it is greatly to be feared that he regarded both as nothing more than a means to an end—Classics as an avenue to Scholarships and House advertisement, cricket as an admirable instrument wherewith to lacerate the feelings of other Housemasters.

Cricket was rather overdone at Studley in those days. There were cricket leagues and cricket cups innumerable. Play was organised exactly like work: the control of their pastimes was taken from the hands of the boys themselves and put into the hands of blindly enthusiastic masters. Masters flocked on to the field every afternoon and bowled remorselessly at every net. Healthy young barbarians who did not happen to possess any aptitude for cricket, and whose only enjoyment of the game lay in the long handle and blind swiping, were compelled to spend their allotted ten minutes standing in an attitude which made it impossible for them to slog the ball, listening giddily the while to impassioned harangues upon the subject of playing forward and keeping a straight bat. Cricket, thus highly officialized, soon began to be accepted by the boys as a mere extension of school routine; and being turned from play to work was treated by them as they treated Cæsar and Euclid—that is to say, they did just as much as they were compelled to do and no more. But their enthusiastic preceptors took no account of this. They glowed internally to think [pg 15
how unselfishly they were devoting their spare time to improving the standard of school cricket,—as, indeed, they were,—and cementing the *entente cordiale* between master and boy,—as most assuredly they were not. It did not occur to them that it is possible to have too much of a good thing. Nine boys out of ten would have been grateful enough for half an hour's coaching a week; but to be compelled to spend every afternoon repressing one's natural instincts, debarred, by that unwritten law which decrees that no boy may address his fellows with any degree of familiarity in the presence of a master, from exchanging the joyous but primitive repartees and impromptus of the young, struck the most docile Studleian as "a bit too thick."

Worse still, these excellent men quarrelled among themselves as to the respective merits of their pupils. Many a humble fag, contentedly supping off sweet biscuits and contraband sardines in the privacy of his study, would have been amazed (and greatly embarrassed) if he had known that his merits as a leg-break bowler were being maintained or denied with the utmost vehemence over Common Room port by two overheated graduates of Oxford University. Housemasters plotted and schemed to have the dates of matches put forward or set back, in order that some star performer of their own, at present in the sick-house or away at a funeral, might be enabled to return in time to take part in the fray. Elderly gentlemen who ought to have known better rose straight from their knees after evening prayers and besought their pupils to make runs for the honour of the House. [pg 15

Into this strange vortex the unsuspecting Philip found himself whirled. His first term was comparatively normal. He went to Studley in January, and being, as already recorded, a healthy young animal, soon found his place among his fellows. Of Mr. Brett he could make little or nothing. He was by reason of his training in many ways a grown-up boy. There were times when the cackle of the House Common Room bored him, at which he would have enjoyed a few minutes' conversation with an older man—say upon the morning's news, or some book recently disinterred from the top shelf of the House library. But intercourse with his Housemaster was not for him. Mr. Brett, finding that Philip knew little Latin and no Greek, had dismissed him abruptly to the Modern Side, as one of that noxious but necessary band of pariahs whose tainted but necessary contributions make it possible for the elect to continue the pursuit of Classics. As for Philip's football promise, it was nothing to Mr. Brett. This most consistent of men considered the worship of football "a fetish."

All hope of further intimacy between this antagonistic pair ended during the following summer term, when to Philip's unutterable amazement, Mr. Brett declined to speak to him for the space of three days, because Philip, by inadvertently running out the most promising batsman on his side in the course of a Junior House League match, had deprived Mr. Brett of a possible two points out of the total necessary to secure the Junior House Cricket Cup. The incident did not disturb Philip's [pg 15
peace of mind to any extent. It merely crystallised his opinion of his Housemaster. He possessed a large measure of his uncle's gift of terse summarisation of character.

"This chap," he observed to himself, "is the most almighty and unutterable sweep in the scholastic profession, besides being a silly baby. I must turn him down, that's all."

Henceforward Philip went his own way. He met his Housemaster but seldom, for he was naturally excluded from such unofficial hospitalities as Sunday breakfasts and half-holiday teas. Neither did the two come into official collision, for Philip was a glutton for work and reached the top of the Modern Side by giant strides. The only direct result of their strained relations was that Philip was not made a prefect when the time came. Mr. Brett could not reconcile his conscience to placing in a position of authority a boy who was neither in Classic nor a cricketer, who was lacking in *esprit-de-corps*, and made a fetish of football and science.

But Philip was contented enough. True, he could not take his meals at the high table, neither could he set fags running errands for him, but he possessed resources denied to most boys. He became the devoted disciple of one of the junior Science masters, Mr. Eden, who, almost delirious with joy at having discovered a boy who loved Science for its own sake and not merely because the pursuit thereof excused him from Latin Verse, took Philip to his bosom. Under his direction Philip read widely and judiciously, and was permitted in fulness of time to embark upon "research work"—that is, to potter about the laboratory during his spare hours and make himself familiar with the use and manipulation of every piece of apparatus that he encountered. [pg 15

He had his friends in the House, too. There was Desborough, a big lazy member of the Fifth, the son of an Irish baronet, much more interested in sport than games, though he was a passable enough athlete. Desborough disliked the rigidity of Mr. Brett's régime, and pined occasionally for the spacious freedom of his country home, with its dogs and guns by day, and bridge and billiards in the evening. Then there was Laird, a Scot of Scots, much too deeply interested in the question of his future career as a Cabinet Minister to suffer compulsory games and unprofitable conversation with any degree of gladness. And there was Lemaire, the intellectual giant of the House, who, though high up in the Sixth, was considered by Mr. Brett to have forfeited all right to a position of authority among his fellows by having been born into the world with a club foot. But though he could play no games, Lemaire exacted more respect and consideration from the House than Mr. Brett dreamed of, for he possessed a quick wit and a blistering tongue.

It was with these three that Philip foregathered during his later years at school. The Quartette, as they were called, resembled second-year undergraduates rather than third-year schoolboys in their attitude to life and their methods of recreation. Being endowed with no authority they escaped the obsession of responsibility which lies so heavily upon the shoulders of youthful officialdom, and they conformed to the rules of the House and School with indulgent tolerance, observing the spirit rather than the letter of the law. Which was just as well, for boys in their position could have done incalculable harm had they felt so disposed. The prefects were secretly afraid of them, and left them to themselves. The House as a whole venerated them, especially Philip and Desborough, and would gladly have been admitted to greater intimacy. But the Quartette would have none of them. They preferred to hold aloof from the turbulent *camaraderie* of the Common Room and congregate in one or other of their studies, where it was rumoured that they talked politics. [pg 15

But rumour was wrong, or at any rate only partially in possession of the facts, as you shall hear.

IV

The Studley masters were not a particularly gregarious body. The Head lived in secluded state with his wife and four daughters in his official residence on the north side of the Close, emerging periodically to overawe the Sixth, preach in Chapel, or discharge a thunderbolt in Big School. The Housemasters dwelt severally in their own strongholds, thanking Heaven that their Houses were not as other Houses were; and the Junior Staff lived roundabout, in cottages and chummeries and snuggeries, throughout Studley Village.

But once a week the whole hierarchy foregathered in the Masters' Common Room and dined together. Usually the Head presided in person; and from the soup to the savoury every soul present talked shop. [pg 15

Schoolmasters appear to be quite unique in this respect. For three months on end they live in everlasting contact with boys. Sleepy boys confront them in those grisly hours of school which occur before breakfast. Restless and inattentive boys occupy their undivided attention from breakfast until luncheon. In the afternoon they play games with, or watch games played by, energetic and overheated boys. From four o'clock till six they stimulate the flagging energies of boys who are comfortably tired and inclined to be drowsy. In their spare time they lavish individual pains upon backward boys, or castigate sinful boys, or fraternise with friendly boys, or comfort unhappy boys. At the very end of the day they pray with and for all the boys together.

A man who has never been a schoolmaster might be excused for supposing that when this overdriven band desisted from their labours and sat down to their evening meal, they would turn with a sigh of relief to some extraneous and irrelevant topic—politics; literature; sport; scandal,

even. But no—they never talk of anything but boys—boys' work, boys' games, boys' pranks, boys' crimes, boys' prospects. They bore one another intensely, these excellent men; for just as no young mother ever desires to hear of or talk about the achievements of any other baby than her own, so no keen cricketing coach will listen with anything but impatience to glowing accounts of his next-door neighbour's protégés. But they never desist. The shop varies, but boy is the only theme. [pg 16

This weakness is not confined to schoolmasters, of course. All bodies of men of the same calling herded together for protracted periods of time are inclined to the habit, but most of them take elaborate precautions to eradicate it. In military and naval circles, for instance, certain subjects are tabu. Even undergraduates mulct one another in pots of beer if the line be crossed. But schoolmasters are incorrigible. They talk boy and nothing else. The explanation is simple. Boys are the most interesting things in the world.

Studley Senior Common Room was no exception. At the top of the table the Head and his senior colleagues discussed high-school politics—scholarships, roseola, and the latest eccentricity of the Governing Body. About the middle of the table, where housemasters and form-masters were intermingled, a housemaster would explain to a form-master, with studious moderation and paternal solemnity, that owing to the incompetence, prejudice, and spite of the form-master a certain godly and virtuous youth named Jinks *tertius* was making no progress in his studies, and was, moreover, acutely depressed by the injustice with which he was being borne down. In reply to this the form-master would point out in the most courteous and conciliatory tones, that the said Jinks was an idle young scoundrel, and that until the housemaster abandoned his present short-sighted and officious policy of habitually intervening between Jinks and his deserts,—to wit, the rod,—no further progress could possibly be expected. Why couldn't housemasters back form-masters up a bit? And so on. Lower down the table, three single-minded partisans were hotly disputing as to whether, upon a given date last summer, in a given junior inter-form cricket match, one Maggs (of the Lower Remove) did or did not feloniously give one Baggs (of the Upper Fourth) out leg-before-wicket at the instigation of a muscular bowler named Craggs. The only two persons at the table who were not talking boy were Mr. Chigley and Mr. Cleeve. Mr. Chigley, between mouthfuls, complained bitterly and unceasingly of the food; while Mr. Cleeve remorselessly conducted an inattentive audience, hole by hole, step by step, stroke by stroke, through the intricacies of a battle fought by himself against apparently incredible odds that afternoon—and of a victory snatched away on the last green, seemingly by the sudden and officious intervention of Providence, after what must have been one of the worst and most uninteresting exhibitions of golf ever seen. [pg 16

Dinner ended, the company dispersed abruptly, summoned back from refreshment to the neverending labours of the schoolmaster, by House-prayers, scholarship coaching, or the necessity of administering justice. Mr. Brett and two other housemasters were invited by the Head to a rubber of bridge.

"By the way," observed the great man as they cut for partners, "you fellows must really see that your boys wear greatcoats on their way up to and down from football. Last Saturday I noticed four or five young idiots, in a most overheated condition, standing about on Big Side watching the Fifteen without so much as a sweater among them. It nearly gave me pneumonia to look at them. You and I, I think, Brett. We have choice of seats." [pg 16

"I think I will sit away from the fire," said Mr. Brett. "My deal, I think. Will you cut to me, Haydock? Personally, I never permit any boy in my House to go up to the playing-fields without his greatcoat. Hearts!"

"My feeling in the matter," said Mr. Allnutt, on Brett's left, "has been, and always will be, that we coddle boys a great deal too much. In my young days at—"

"Hearts!" repeated Mr. Brett loudly.

"In my young days at Chiddleham," pursued Mr. Allnutt, quite unruffled, "sweaters had not been invented, and"—he threw out his chest proudly—"we were none of us a penny the worse. Shall I play to a heart, partner?"

"If you please," said Mr. Haydock patiently.

Mr. Brett played the hand and won the odd trick.

"The nuisance about occasional apparel, such as a greatcoat," said Mr. Haydock, gathering up the cards, "is that a boy wears his some wet morning up to school, and at the end of the hour, finding that the sun is shining and being a forgetful animal, comes down without it. Net result—a greatcoat kicking about in a passage till it is lost or appropriated. Your deal, partner."

"It is merely a matter of taking a little trouble," said Mr. Brett precisely. "Once boys have been taught to grasp the fact that rules are made to be obeyed and not ignored, the thing is simple. My House—" [pg 16

"Partner, I leave it to you," said Mr. Allnutt, *fortissimo*.

"No trumps!" said Mr. Haydock.

"As a matter of fact, Brett," observed the Head, as the dummy was laid down,—he was a genial despot, and Mr. Brett's pedantic fussiness was a perpetual thorn in his flesh,—"the boys I saw on Saturday were yours."

Mr. Allnutt laughed loudly, and Mr. Brett, greatly put out, omitted to return the Head's lead, with the result that his opponents made four odd tricks.

"Game!" announced Mr. Allnutt, quite superfluously. "Thank you, partner. Pretty work!"

"It was a pity you did not return my diamond, Brett," remarked the Head mildly. He was counted one of the great Headmasters of his time, but he was as human as the rest of us where lost tricks were concerned. "I had the game in my hand."

Mr. Brett stiffly expressed regret, and continued:

"Would you mind giving me the names of the boys you saw? I simply can't understand it. I think there must be some mistake. No boy in my House—"

"As a matter of fact," said Haydock,—he was the acknowledged peacemaker and mediator of the Staff,—"it is very difficult to get boys to wear their greatcoats. I can't help sympathising with them. They usually don't require them at all, for they run straight up to their game and straight down again. But when, as sometimes happens, they find an exciting match going on on Big Side, they can't resist the temptation of waiting for a minute or two—" [pg 16

Mr. Allnutt interrupted. Listening to other people was not a foible of his.

"Nonsense!" he said with great gusto, as the Head began to deal the next hand. "You can't tether healthy boys with red tape. Always disregard red tape—that's my motto!" (By red tape Mr. Allnutt meant instructions from headquarters which did not happen to meet with his approval.) "Now, *my* boys—"

"Spades!" said the Head, gloomily.

"Shall I play to a spade, partner?" asked Mr. Haydock.

"Certainly, so far as I am concerned," said Mr. Allnutt. "Glad to be out of it!"

Mr. Brett, whose hand contained four aces, flung his cards upon the table and glared at his superior.

"Very sorry, Brett," said the Head, "but it had to be done. I had nothing above a nine in my hand. I was afraid they would double anything you declared. My cut, I think, Haydock."

For the next ten minutes, fortunately, Mr. Brett was too much chagrined to speak, and the topic of the overcoats was allowed to drop.

The game continued for another few rounds, with the luck fairly evenly divided and the scoring low. Presently the Head, who usually contrived to achieve a good deal of quiet legislation during these social evenings, remarked:—

"We shall have to create three new School monitors at the end of the term. Have you any candidates, Allnutt?" [pg 16

"You can select any boy in my House you like," replied Allnutt. He was habitually truculent to those set in authority over him,—he regarded them as a humanised form of red tape,—but the shrewd Head, who knew that Allnutt was a good man at bottom, suffered him with humourous resignation. "They are all equally incompetent. Luckily I am in the habit of looking after my House myself, and not leaving it to half-baked policemen."

"Thank you," said the Head. "That leaves me with a comfortably free hand. Have you any one to recommend, Brett?"

"Yes," said Brett. "I have. I have considered the matter most carefully. I have at least four boys who would make admirable monitors—"

"Game all!" said Mr. Allnutt impatiently. "Your deal, Brett."

—"And I have decided," continued Mr. Brett, bending his brows judicially, "to recommend Ericson and Smythe."

"Nincompoops, both of them," observed Mr. Allnutt at once.

"I fancy Brett was addressing the Headmaster," said Haydock drily.

"Oh, this is quite an informal discussion," said Mr. Allnutt cheerfully. "The best boys in your House, Brett, are Meldrum and Lemaire. Why don't you recommend them?"

With a great effort Mr. Brett kept his temper.

"They do not happen to be House prefects," he replied stiffly, "and are therefore ineligible for monitorships." [pg 16

Much to Mr. Brett's discomfiture, all three of his companions turned and gazed at him in undisguised astonishment.

"Why, man," burst out Mr. Allnutt, "Lemaire is the most brilliant boy in the School!"

"His bodily infirmity"—began Mr. Brett majestically.

"I see, I see," said Allnutt. "Bodily infirmity is a bar to promotion in your House; but not mental infirmity—eh? I suppose you have noticed that Ericson is a congenital idiot?"

Mr. Brett, pursing his lips, began to deal the cards with great stateliness.

"And what about Meldrum?" continued Mr. Allnutt, following up his attack. "He has more character than all the rest of your House put together."

"Unfortunately," replied Mr. Brett icily, "he has no brains."

Here Mr. Brett made a serious blunder. He offended the only man in the room who might have felt inclined to protect him from the bludgeonings of Mr. Allnutt. Mr. Haydock happened to be senior mathematical master at Studley, and like all broad-minded men hated anything like intellectual snobbery.

"Meldrum," he remarked, "is the soundest mathematician in the School, and quite the most brilliant scientist we have had for ten years."

"Possibly, possibly," said Mr. Brett; "but that does not affect my point. No trumps!"

Mr. Haydock flushed red at this gratuitous piece of offensiveness. But he said nothing, and took up his cards. [pg 16

"Shall I play to no trumps, partner?" enquired Mr. Allnutt.

Mr. Haydock glanced over his hand, and sighed to himself, softly and gratefully.

"I shall double no trumps," he said.

Mr. Brett grew greatly excited.

"I shall redouble!" he exclaimed.

"And I," replied Mr. Haydock gently, "shall double again."

The Head, upon whom the asperities of the last ten minutes (since he might not take part therein himself) had begun to pall, sat up, startled, and the game began—at ninety-six points a trick.

Mr. Brett's hand contained eight spades, to the ten, knave, queen, king; the aces of clubs, hearts, and diamonds; and two small clubs. It was a tempting but treacherous hand, for singleton aces are but broken reeds.

Mr. Haydock had nine hearts to the knave, queen, king; the ace of spades; and the king of clubs, singly guarded. His hope of salvation was founded on the sure and certain knowledge that Mr. Allnutt would lead him a heart, for they conformed to the heart convention. Assuming that Mr. Brett held the ace, the hearts could be established in a single round. After this he looked to his ace

of spades or king of clubs to regain the lead for him. Of course if Brett held an overwhelming hand of diamonds the game was lost. There was also the possibility that Allnutt had no heart to lead. But there seemed to be a good sporting chance of success. [pg 16

And sure enough the Fates—very justly, considering his recent behaviour to Mr. Haydock—fought against Mr. Brett. Mr. Allnutt led a small heart; the Head, with a rueful smile, laid down a hand containing two knaves and a ten; Mr. Haydock played the king; and Mr. Brett, having nothing else, took the trick with the ace.

Then Mr. Brett, scrutinising his hand and putting two and two together, broke into a gentle perspiration.

The ace of spades—the one card necessary to give him every trick but two—was in the hands of the enemy. Still, eight spades to the ten, knave, queen, king, mean seven tricks once you have forced the ace out. Hoping blindly for the best, and pretending not to hear the contented rumblings of Mr. Allnutt, the wretched Mr. Brett played the ten of spades.

Mr. Haydock promptly took the trick with the ace, and then proceeded to make eight tricks in hearts. After this he graciously permitted Mr. Brett to make his other two aces and remaining spade.

"Three tricks," said Mr. Haydock. "Game and rubber."

"Hard luck, partner," murmured the Head heroically.

"What exactly," enquired Mr. Allnutt, brimming over with happy laughter, "does three times ninety-six come to? Two hundred and eighty-eight? Thanks. What a lightning calculator you are, Haydock. A mathematician has his points—eh, Brett?"

V [pg 16

It was nearly ten o'clock. Most of the boys were in their dormitories by this time, either in bed or cultivating the rites of Mr. Sandow. Only the seniors lingered downstairs. Various young gentlemen who shortly meditated a descent upon one of the Universities sat in their studies with curtains closely drawn, painfully translating a Greek not spoken in Greece into an English not spoken anywhere. The Quartette were all together in Philip's study, engaged in one of the commonest recreations of English gentlemen.

Presently Desborough uncoiled his long legs from under the table, and stretched himself.

"Fairly average frowst in here," he observed. "Anybody mind if I open the window?"

Silence gave consent. The curtains slid back, and some much-needed oxygen was admitted. A long ray of light shot out into the darkness of the night.

It fell across the path of Mr. Brett, returning from his bridge party. The evening breezes played about his brow, but failed to cool it. He was in a towering rage. His management of his own House; his powers of selecting suitable lieutenants; these things had been called into question that night—called into question and condemned. And—he had lost five-and-sixpence to Allnutt.

Suddenly his homeward way was illumined by electric light. It came from the window of Philip Meldrum's study, which was situated upon the ground floor. Mr. Brett paused, drew near, and [pg 17
surveyed the scene within. In the confined space of the study he beheld four boys sitting closely round a table.

A minute later he was fumbling for his latchkey at his own front door. He was in a frenzy of excitement. He did not pause to reflect. Humour was not his strong point, or it might possibly have occurred to him that the present situation possessed a certain piquancy of its own. Had Mr. Allnutt been present he would have made an apposite reference to the Old Obadiah and the Young Obadiah. All that Mr. Brett realised was the fact that Providence had most unexpectedly put into his hand the means of vindicating his own infallibility as a judge of boy character, and—of scoring off Allnutt for all time.

With eager steps he passed through his own quarters, and hurried down the long panelled corridor in which the boys' studies were situated. He opened Philip's door quickly, without knocking, and stood glaring balefully through his spectacles upon the culprits.

Their heads were sunk upon their chests, but not with shame. In fact they entirely failed to observe Mr. Brett's avenging presence.

The first person to speak was Philip, who was sitting with his back to the door. He threw his

cards down upon the table and said cheerfully:—

"Well done, partner! Three tricks, doubled—that's seventy-two. Game and rubber, and you owe me fourpence, young Laird of Cockpen! Now, what about bed?"

VI

[pg 17

No one was expelled, though in the first frenzy of his triumph Mr. Brett was for telephoning for four cabs on the spot.

The Head gave judgment in due course, and though he had no particular difficulty in dealing with the criminals, he experienced some trouble in handling the counsel for the prosecution.

To him the overheated Brett pointed out that the delinquents had been caught redhanded in the sin of betting and gambling. He explained that smoking, drinking, and cards invariably went together, and that consequently nothing remained but to request the respective parents and guardians of the Quartette to remove them with all possible despatch before they contaminated any of the Classics or Cricketers in the House.

The Head heard him out, and remarked drily:—

"Mr. Brett, you should cultivate a sense of proportion. It is a useful quality in a schoolmaster. Your scheme of retribution, if I may say so, is a little lacking in elasticity. There are degrees of crime, you know. Under your penal code the man who has been caught playing pitch-and-toss is hurried to the gallows with the same celerity as the man who has garotted an Archbishop. Don't you think that this scheme of yours of uniform penalty for everything rather encourages the criminal to go the whole hog and have his money's worth? Now observe: the offence of these boys was a purely technical one. A game of cards between gentlemen for stakes which they can reasonably afford"—the Quartette played for twopence a hundred—"is not in itself an indictable [pg 17 offence. I only wish that boys would always employ their spare time so profitably!" added the Head regretfully. "Personally, I should sincerely like to see every boy in this School grounded systematically in the elements of whist or bridge. It would improve his memory and inculcate habits of observation and deduction, and would at least furnish him with an alternative to the cinematograph on a wet afternoon in the holidays. Unfortunately we have the British parent to deal with. However, that is a digression. These boys are not of the stuff that debauchees are made of. The trouble lies in the fact that they are rather more mature than their fellows. Do you know, I expect they play bridge because they like it, and find it a more pleasant relaxation at the end of the day than cooking unholy messes over their study fires or gossiping in the dormitory? I must also point out to you that by not appointing them to a position of authority you have thrown them more or less on their own resources. They may not associate with the aristocracy of the House, and they are more than a cut above the common herd. So they form themselves into a very snug and exclusive little coterie, and I for one don't blame them. But send them along to me, and I will deal faithfully with them."

To the Quartette the Head pointed out that there is a time and place for everything, and that rules, if not enforced, bring mockery and discredit upon their authors.

"Bridge is an excellent game," he said, "and a true mental gymnastic. But there happens to be [pg 17 a regulation here which forbids the playing of cards by boys among themselves. We need not go into the soundness of that regulation: the only relevant point is that you have broken it. You are big boys, and the bigger the boy the bigger the offence. I am going to make the punishment fit the crime by asking Mr. Brett to turn you out of your studies for the rest of the term. For the next four weeks you will consort with the *profanum vulgus* in your House Common Room, where I fancy that bridge and other intellectual pursuits are not much cultivated. Now you can go."

The Quartette turned dismally towards the door. It was a stiff sentence. But the Head had not quite finished.

"It would be interesting," he added drily, "to know whether you play bridge because you like it or because you think it a grand thing to do. Come and dine with me on Saturday night, and we will have a rubber."

"Sportsman, the old Head!" commented Philip, as they walked across the quadrangle.

"My word, yes!" said the other three.

CHAPTER XIV

THE IRON AGE

Mr. Mablethorpe was much interested when Philip told him the story in the holidays.

"The Head is all right," he said. "He was only a housemaster in my day, but there was no doubting his quality, even then. But this man Brett is a national disaster. Do you think you can derive any further profit from remaining his disciple?"

No, Philip thought not.

So Philip arrived at Coventry at last, having started some years previously, it may be remembered.

He was enrolled as a premium apprentice at the great works of the Britannia Motor Company. Here he learned to use his fingers and his fists, his muscles and his wits. He passed through the drawing-office, and the erecting-shop, and the repairing-shop. The last interested him most of all, for the Britannia Company repaired other cars besides their own; so here Philip could indulge in the pleasures of variety. He learned to handle cars of every grade and breed. There was the lordly Britannia car itself—the final word in automobilism—with its long gleaming body and six-cylinder engine, so silent and free from vibration that it was possible to balance a half-crown edgewise upon the faintly humming radiator. There were countless other makes—racing-cars, runabout cars, commercial cars, even motor omnibuses. Philip learned to know the inner economy and peculiar ailments of all. There were American cars so cheap that you could not believe it possible that they could be sold at a profit to the maker—until it became necessary to put in repairs or adjustments. Then the whole car seemed to fall to pieces like a house of cards. Exasperated mechanics in the Britannia repairing-shop had a saying that if you wanted to take up the engine-bearings in one of these cars you had to begin by taking down the back axle. There was sufficient truth in this adage to set Philip wondering why such a nation of born engineers should make a point of placing their nuts and bolts in almost inaccessible positions. [pg 17

"What is the reason of it all?" he enquired one day of a colleague from Pittsburg, who was assisting him to dismantle the greater part of the clutch and flywheel of a cheap American car as a preliminary to adjusting the magneto. "Why do you make cars like jig-saw puzzles?"

The colleague explained. He was a pleasant youth of twenty, with the studiously courteous manners of the American gentleman,—they contrasted quaintly with Philip's shy native *brusquerie*,—sent by a big-headed father to acquire a little British ballast before assuming the position of second in command at home.

"I conclude it is because our national point of view is different from yours," he said. "These cars aren't *meant* to be repaired. We make it as difficult as possible to do so. You in this country like to build a car that will last—like Westminster Abbey. Over there we say: 'What is the use of sinking good money in a design that will be out of date in two years anyway? Make it good if you can, but make it cheap, and when it wears out, make another. And whatever you do, don't fool around tinkering. Life's too short.' At least it is in our country," he added, smiling. "Over here you seem to make it go a bit further, like your automobiles. Unscrew that nut some more." [pg 17

They were full and profitable years, those at the Britannia Works. As Philip gradually emancipated himself from the hard manual labour of the shops and rose from practical to theoretical problems, his old mathematical and scientific ability cropped out again. His inventive genius began to stir. Petrol was going steadily up in price, so Philip set himself to experiment with substitutes. The result was the Meldrum Paraffin Carburettor, now a standard adjunct of the commercial motor. Later on came the Meldrum Fool-proof Automatic Lubricator, which achieved high favour with absent-minded amateurs who made a hobby of allowing their engines to seize. And later, in fulness of time, came the Meldrum Automatic Electro-magnetic Brake, which was destined to play a tremendous part in Philip's history, as you shall hear.

With all these burning interests to occupy him, Philip had little time for amusement. He played Rugby Football regularly for Coventry City; and any one who has had experience of that gentle pastime as cultivated in the Midland counties will realise the testimonial to Philip's muscle and general fitness involved in his selection. Every Saturday he fared forth with his colleagues to do battle with the men of Moseley and Leicester, or even penetrated to London, there to indulge in feats of personal but friendly violence at the expense of Blackheath or the London Scottish. He particularly enjoyed the occasional visits of the team to Oxford and Cambridge, for there he usually [pg 17

encountered some old friend—Lemaire, now a scholar of Balliol, or Desborough, coaching a crew upon the tortuous Cam.

But Rugby football was no fetish with Philip—which would have pleased Mr. Brett. All his heart was centred on his work. To Philip in those days Work was Life—a point of view which in due course Time would correct, or rather supplement. Each night when he said his prayers,—he had contracted the habit at the age of sixteen, after a certain Sunday evening sermon from the Head, backed by a particular hymn, which had awakened in his rapidly developing little soul the knowledge that there were more things in heaven and earth than were included in Uncle Joseph's scheme of education,—he asked his Maker, *tout court*, for work, and work, and more work, and health wherewith to perform it. Only that.

In addition to Collier, the American, he made other friends about the Works. Some were of humble station; others—like himself—premium apprentices who had paid to be taught their business, and hoped one day to direct businesses of their own, or at the worst lounge immaculately [pg 17] in a showroom in Bond Street or Pall Mall, intimidating wealthy but plebeian patrons into buying more expensive cars than had been their original intention. They were a rowdy, sociable, good-hearted crew, addicted to what they called "jags" on Saturday nights. Then there were the salaried staff of the Works. One, Bilston, director of the drawing-office, conceived a strong liking for the capable Meldrum, and it was mainly through his representations that Philip, when he emerged from his apprenticeship and began to pass examinations, was kept on at the Works and given a post which combined increased responsibility with further opportunities to perfect himself in his craft.

Occasionally Philip took a holiday. Sometimes he went to Cheltenham, where Uncle Joseph, roaring like any sucking dove, was devoting his reclaimed existence to Territorial Associations and Boy Scouts. To be quite frank, Philip was secretly conscious of a feeling of slight boredom at Cheltenham. A perfectly happy couple are undeniably just a little dull, and Uncle Joseph and the Beautiful Lady were so entirely wrapped up in one another and their daughter—an infant of quite phenomenal wisdom and beauty—that the ordinary pleasures of life were not for them. They held, rightly, that pleasure is the resource of those who have failed to find happiness, and consequently had no need of it; but their nephew, who had not yet arrived at the period when a man begins to ask himself whether he is happy or not, and possessed a frank and healthy appetite for the usual diversions of a young man on holiday, found existence at Cheltenham a trifle too idyllic to be [pg 17] satisfying.

He enjoyed himself more at Red Gables. Mr. Mablethorpe remained as incorrigibly Peter Pannish as ever. Although his hair was whitening and his figure becoming more spherical, he declined to grow up. His levity was a perpetual sorrow to his sensitive spouse. Once, in response to a more than usually tearful appeal, he made a resolute effort to reform. He read the "Times" at breakfast, supplements and all. He dressed himself in tight garments and accompanied his wife to tea-parties. He began to talk of engaging a chauffeur instead of indulging in personal bear-fights with Boanerges. In short, he became so unspeakably dull that Mrs. Mablethorpe grew more tearful than ever, and said it was breaking her spirit to have to keep on smiling and being cheerful for two. Whereupon Mr. Mablethorpe, removing his tongue from his cheek, reverted to his former state, to the great comfort of Red Gables.

Of the Dumpling, Philip did not see much. She was usually at school; but when they met during the holidays she always appeared to her former playmate to have lost yet more of her adiposity and to have shot up another six inches. But they continued to be firm allies; and though in time the dumpling grew reserved and *gauche*, after the manner of adolescent maidens, their old joyous *camaraderie* over such things as Boanerges and birds' nests was never suffered to die out.

One other haunt of his youth Philip visited—the house on Hampstead Heath.

He went twice. The first visit was paid during one of his school holidays, a trial trip on a new [pg 18] bicycle affording a pretext. (Philip was too much of a schoolboy by this time to admit even to himself that he proposed to ride forty miles just to see a girl.) It was midsummer. He arrived on the Heath about two in the afternoon, and, leaving his bicycle leaning against the trysting-gate of happy memory, cruised methodically about, stealthily watching the house in the hope that a certain slim figure would emerge from the side door and come skipping down the road.

But no such thing happened. The only member of the household whom he encountered was Montagu Falconer himself. He swung suddenly out of a side road, walking at his usual frantic pace, and, looking straight through Philip, whom he entirely failed to recognise, shot past him and was gone. But nothing further happened, and our knight, after lingering until dusk, pedalled home unrewarded by a glimpse of his Lady.

The second visit was paid two years later. This time Philip arrived at Hampstead by Tube, and walked boldly up to the Heath, big with resolution. He had decided to ring the bell like a real afternoon caller and enquire if Mrs. Falconer were at home.

As he drew near the house his footsteps faltered. Young women may wonder why, but the

young man who still remembers the agony of his first formal call will not. But Philip walked on resolutely.

Finally he arrived at the house of his Lady. It was shuttered and silent. The garden was weedy and the lawn unshaven. Beside the gate a staring board said:— [pg 18

TO LET

CHAPTER XV

OMEGA, CERTAINLY NOT!

Miss Sylvia Mablethorpe—"also known to the police," to quote her unfeeling papa, as Dumpling, Dumps, Daniel Lambert, and the Tichborne Claimant—sat upon the high wall which enclosed the demesne of Red Gables, gazing comfortably up and down the long white road. In her lap lay cherries, in her hand a novel. It was a hot summer afternoon. She had exchanged greetings with the local policeman, various school-children, and the curate, all of whom had passed by upon their several errands within the last half-hour. For the moment the road was clear, and Dumps had leisure to resume the pursuit of literature.

But she had barely covered half a page when there fell upon her ears the sound of a horse's hoofs. Dumps, however, did not raise her eyes from the not very interesting volume before her, though it may be noted that she had looked up readily enough upon the advent of the curate, the policeman, and the school-children. All of which was a sign that Dumps was growing up. Indeed, she had left school a month ago, and was to go abroad in a few weeks to undergo that mysterious feminine process known as "finishing."

The clatter of hoofs grew louder, slowed down, and came to a stealthy stop just opposite to that part of the wall whereon Dumps was seated. She looked up lazily, to find a pleasantly sunburned youth of twenty-two removing his cap. [pg 18

"Hello, Derek!" she observed casually. "That you?"

Master Derek blushed guiltily.

"Yes," he said. "Good-afternoon. I only got back from Aldershot last night."

"Oh. Have you been away?" enquired the heartless Dumps.

"Four months," replied Derek, in tones of respectful reproach.

"And now you are home for the holidays?" remarked Miss Mablethorpe brightly.

"Long leave," Derek corrected her, in a humble voice.

"What fun it must be," continued Sylvia, "living in a tent for weeks and doing nothing."

Second Lieutenant Rayner, who had just spent four strenuous months under canvas or on manœuvres, ending with a route march in which his battalion had covered a hundred and twenty miles in four days, smiled wanly. No man is a hero to the girl with whom he has played in infancy.

"Topping weather, isn't it?" he observed presently.

Dumps agreed, sunning herself luxuriously.

"Does your mare eat cherries?" she asked.

"No, but I do," said Derek with great boldness.

Dumps threw him down a couple, and continued:

"I am waiting for Dad. He is correcting proofs—very cross. When he has finished we are going out in Boanerges."

"Have you still got Boanerges?" asked Derek incredulously. [pg 18

"Yes, but he is on his very last legs. We have a new car coming."

"What sort?"

"A Britannia. It has been specially selected for us," said Dumps with pride, "by—by an official of the company. The front seat is being put a little forward, so that I can drive."

A few years ago Master Derek Rayner would have greeted this announcement with some exceedingly witty and caustic comments. Now he merely murmured reverentially:—

"I expect you will make a ripping little chauffeur."

"I shouldn't wonder," agreed Dumps complacently. "Where are you going?"

"Oh, just for a ride," said Derek. "Are your people quite well?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Tell Mrs. Mablethorpe I was asking for her, will you?"

"I will make a point of it," said the impervious Dumps. Then, relenting slightly, she enquired: "Are you going to tennis at Oatlands on Thursday?"

"Yes," said Derek eagerly. "Would you mind being my partner in the mixed doubles?"

"Is that a sudden inspiration?" asked Dumps.

"No, really. I have been meaning to ask you for weeks. That's why I rode over here this afternoon," blurted out Derek.

"I thought you said you were just out for a ride," remarked Miss Mablethorpe. (It is quite a [pg 18
mistake to suppose that it is only small boys who are cruel to the humbler members of creation.)

Derek floundered helplessly, and was dumb. From afar came the melodious toot of a well-modulated Gabriel horn. Dumps sat up, and looked sharply up the road.

"Well, anyway, will you be my partner?" asked Derek, lifting his eyes once more. He was surprised and not a little gratified to observe that Miss Sylvia had turned excessively pink.

"Yes—perhaps. No. All right," replied the girl shortly. "I must go now. Good-bye. See you on Thursday."

By way of intimating that the audience was terminated, Miss Mablethorpe swung her ankles—they had grown quite slim these days—over the wall and disappeared with a thud. Mr. Rayner, on the whole much puffed up, galloped away.

Two minutes later an automobile, consisting chiefly of a chassis, with a single wooden seat lashed to the frame, slid to a standstill outside the gates of Red Gables. On the back of the seat, in bold letters, was painted the legend, "Britannia Motor Company, Coventry." In the seat sat Philip.

The car had hardly stopped when the gates were swung open and Dumps appeared, smiling welcome.

"Hallo, Philip!" she said. "Is this our new car?"

"Not quite," said Philip, surveying his dingy but workmanlike equipage. "This is my service-car. They are sending yours on Monday."

By this time the girl had clambered on to the back of the chassis and ensconced herself on the [pg 18
petrol-tank. Philip, turning the car in through the gates, drove up the short straight avenue to the front door. The purring of the big engine ceased, and the pair, having alighted, passed arm-in-arm, like brother and sister, into the presence of Mr. Mablethorpe.

That excellent but volcanic author was discovered tearing his hair with one hand, and digging

holes in a long galley proof (employing a fountain-pen as a stiletto) with the other.

"Hallo, Philip!" he began at once. "Will you have a bet with me?"

"Certainly," said Philip. "What about?"

"I bet you one million pounds," said Mr. Mablethorpe with great precision, "that the condemned printing-firm employed by my unmentionable publishers has taken into its adjectival employment an asterisked staff of obelised female compositors. Consequently I shall have to retire to an asylum. It is a nuisance, because I have just bought a new automobile."

"How are you so certain about the female compositors?" asked Philip.

The author pathetically flapped the long printed slip in his face.

"I don't mind correcting misprints," he said. "I am used to it. Male compositors cannot spell, of course; in fact, very few of them can read. But they do understand stops; at least, they put in the stops that an author gives them. The female of the species, on the other hand, only recognises the existence of two—the comma and the note of exclamation. These she drops into the script as she would drop cloves into an apple-tart—a handful or two when she has finished setting up the type. At least, I suppose so. She also sets her face against the senseless custom of using capital letters to begin a sentence. Otherwise she is admirably suited to her calling. Look at this!" [pg 18

He exhibited a corrected proof—a mass of red ink and marginal profanity.

"I am feeling better now," he said. "I have written both to the publisher and printer. The letter to the printer was particularly good. Have a cigarette? What have you come to see us for—business or pleasure?"

"Business," said Philip.

"Public or private?"

Philip considered.

"Private."

Mr. Mablethorpe turned to his daughter.

"Inquisitive female," he thundered, "avaunt!"

"Oh, it's not private to Dumps," said Philip. "I have been offered a new billet, that's all."

"Then let us all sit down and argue about it," proposed Mr. Mablethorpe with zest. He threw his proofs on the floor. "My wife is upstairs, reading the mendacious prospectus of a new Continental spa, and I don't suppose she will develop the symptoms it professes to cure much before six o'clock. Go ahead, Philip."

"The directors want me to take charge of the London offices," said Philip.

"What are the London offices, where are they, and why do they require taking charge of?" enquired Mr. Mablethorpe categorically. Like all unmethodical and scatter-brained persons he cherished a high opinion of himself as a man of affairs. [pg 18

"The London offices," said Philip, "are in Oxford Street. They consist of a show-room, full of new cars—the Company gets most of its orders through this show-room—and a biggish garage and repairing-shop at the back, opening into somewhere in Soho."

"And do they want you to tell untruths in the show-room or wash cars in the garage?" enquired Mr. Mablethorpe.

Dumps stiffened indignantly, but Philip laughed.

"They want me to boss the whole place," he said. "Hitherto they have had a man in charge of the show-room and another in charge of the garage, and there has been everlasting trouble between them. I gather that the show-room man is young—an old public-school boy—"

"I know! Wears white spats, and sends for an underling to open the bonnet of a car when a customer asks to see the works," said Mr. Mablethorpe. "Go on."

"And the repair-shop man is elderly and Yorkshire and a ranker. I fancy they parted brass-rags from the start, with the result that working expenses are too high—"

"Surprising!" murmured Mr. Mablethorpe.

"—And I have been told off to go to town and supervise the pair of them," concluded Philip. "Shall I?"

"Why not?"

"Well—I shall be giving up my other work, you know." [pg 18

"What is your other work? Describe one of your ordinary days in detail."

Philip did so. When he had finished, Mr. Mablethorpe said:—

"Well, if that is the sort of life your tastes incline to, why not go the whole hog and get ten years' penal servitude right away? That strikes me as an equally suitable and much more economical method of satisfying your desires. Consider! You would get ten years of continuous employment, of a kind almost identical with your present occupation, and the State—people like me—would maintain you into the bargain. No rates, no taxes, no extortionate tradesmen, no women of any kind! Regular hours, rational diet, and free spiritual consolation! What more could a man ask? True, your hours of work would be shorter than at present, but I dare say that if you were good they would allow you an extra go at the oakum when no one else was using it. That's the plan, Philip! Put the thing on a business footing at once, and get arrested! Don't overdo it, of course. It is no use committing a crime they could hang you for: that would be *trop de zèle*. Supposing you burn down the Houses of Parliament—or, better still, the Imperial Institute—or get to work on some of your personal friends with a chopper, and carve ten years' worth out of them. Start on Dumps here. She would make a capital subject for experiment."

Miss Mablethorpe turned to the visitor with an apologetic smile.

"He will be all right presently," she said, indicating her parent. "He is always a little strange in his manner after correcting proofs." [pg 19

She was right. Presently Mr. Mablethorpe, who had been ranting about the room, to the detriment of waste-paper baskets and revolving bookcases, sat down and said:—

"And you are reluctant to give up your present berth, Phil?"

"Yes," said Philip, "I am. You see," he added a little shyly, "it's my work."

"Quite so," agreed Mr. Mablethorpe, suddenly serious. "You believe that work is the key of life. *Labor omnia vincit*—eh?"

Philip nodded, but Dumps enquired:—

"What does that mean, please?"

Her father translated, and continued:—

"Philip, let me tell you something. You are in danger of becoming a specialist. Life, roughly, is made up of two ingredients—Things and People. At present you are devoting yourself entirely to Things—to Work, in fact. How many years have you lived in Coventry?"

"About five."

"Very good. And how many people do you know there? I am not referring to your fellow stokers. I mean people outside the place. How many?"

Philip pondered, and shook his head.

"I don't know," he said.

"Half a dozen?"

"Perhaps."

"There you are, right away!" said Mr. Mablethorpe, with the intensely satisfied air of one who [pg 19

has scored a point. "You have spent five years in a place, and barely know half a dozen people there. You are becoming a specialist, my son—a specialist in Things. That is all wrong. You are lop-sided. Man was never intended to devote himself to Things, to the exclusion of People—least of all you, with your strong gregarious instincts and human sympathies. Isn't that true?"

Philip considered. Long dormant visions were awakening within him. His thoughts went back to the days when he had decided to follow the calling of a knight-errant. That decision had not occupied his attention much of late, he reflected.

"And therefore," continued Mr. Mablethorpe, "I counsel you to go to London and take up the new billet. Go and reason with the Yorkshire foreman, and pulverize the gentleman in spats, and argue with creditors—go and study *People*. Study the way they walk, the way they talk, the way they think, the way they drink. You won't like them. They will shirk their work, or blow in your face, or tell you anecdotes which will make you weep. But they will restore your balance. They will develop the human side of you. Then you will be really rather an exceptional character, Philip. Very few of us are evenly balanced between Things and People. All women, for instance, have a permanent list toward People. Things have no meaning for them. A triumph of engineering, or organisation, or art, or logical reasoning, makes no appeal whatever to a woman's enthusiasm. She may admire the man who achieves them, of course, but only because he happens to have sad eyes, or a firm mouth, or a wife in an asylum. If the personal touch be lacking, Things simply bore [pg 19
Woman. I once showed an aunt of mine—a refined and intelligent woman—round the finest cathedral in England, and the one solitary feature of the whole fabric which interested her was a certain stall in the choir, where a grandnephew of hers had once sat for eighteen months as a choir-boy! Yes, women are undoubtedly lopsided. Men, as a whole, are predisposed the other way —which largely accounts for what is known as sex-antagonism. Heaven help all novelists if no such thing existed!"

"Shop!" remarked the unfilial Dumps.

Mr. Mablethorpe, recalled to his text, continued:

"Very well, then. We agree that Things—by which we mean Work—are not the Alpha and Omega of Life. Alpha, perhaps; Omega, certainly not."

"Don't you mean, 'Archibald, Certainly Not!' Daddy?" enquired Miss Dumps, referring to a popular ditty of the moment. Mr. Mablethorpe took no heed.

"*Labor omnia vincit*," he said, "is only half a truth. There is another maxim in the same tongue which supplies the other half. You can easily commit it to memory if you bear in mind the fact that it ends a pentameter, while the other ends a hexameter. It is: *Omnia vincit amor*."

He translated for the benefit of his unlearned daughter, and swept on.

"Now, consider. If it is true that Work conquers All, and equally true that Love conquers All, what must be our logical and inevitable conclusion?"

It was Dumps who answered. [pg 19

"That Love and Work come to the same thing in the end," she said. Her eyes met Philip's, and dropped quickly.

Mr. Mablethorpe nodded his head gravely.

"Philip," he said, "you hear the words of this wise infant? They are true. That is why I want you to go and mix with People. You are getting a bit too mechanical in your conception of Life. You are in danger of becoming an automaton. You must cultivate your emotions a bit—Love, Hate, Pity, Joy, Sorrow—if you want to turn into a perfectly equipped Man. Taking them all round, it is impossible to get to know one's fellow creatures without getting to love them. That is the secret which has kept this old world plodding along so philosophically for so many centuries. So start in on People, my son. Go to London and take up that appointment. You will regret your old workshop at times. Machinery is never illogical, or unreasonable, or ungrateful; and though it may break your arms and legs, it will never try to break your heart. Still, it is only machinery. If you want to attain to the supreme joys of Life you will have to be prepared for the deep sorrows too, and you can only meet with these things by consorting with human beings. You have discovered for yourself—or think you have—that *labor omnia vincit*. Go on now until you realise the meaning of the other phrase of which I spoke. When that happens you will have found yourself. You will be poised and balanced. In short, my son, you will be a Man. Now let us scramble for muffins."

CHAPTER XVI

THINGS

THE Euston Road, which is perhaps the most funereal thoroughfare in Europe, furnishes their first glimpse of London to fully fifty per cent of all who visit our capital.

Philip was no stranger to London, for he had spent his youth in the wilds of Hampstead; and later on, like most young men, had formed a tolerably intimate acquaintance with that portion of the metropolis which lies within a radius of one mile of Piccadilly Circus. Still, as his cab hurried away from the unspeakable hideousness of Euston Station and turned into that congeries of tombstone-makers' yards and unsavoury lodging-houses which constitutes the Euston Road, even Coventry seemed pleasantly rural by comparison. Most of us are inclined to feel like this at the outset of a new undertaking. Fortunately we can support ourselves through this period with the reflection that every success worth winning is approached by a Euston Road of some kind.

Philip's first few weeks in the London offices were a prolongation of this journey. The young gentleman in the show-room proved to be unspeakably offensive and incompetent; the Yorkshireman in the repairing-shop was incredibly obstinate and secretive. The staff were slack, and the premises dirty. Letters were not answered promptly, and the accounts were in a shocking [pg 19
mess. Finally, every soul in the place (with the possible exception of the lady typist) greeted the intrusion of the new manager with undisguised hostility.

Philip, reminding himself of the period of time in which Rome was not built, set to work, in his serious methodical fashion, to master departmental details. He went through the repair-shop first, and mindful of Mr. Mablethorpe's admonition to observe People rather than Things, spent much time in studying the characters of each of the men employed. As a result of his investigations two mechanics, props of their Union, were tersely informed that unless their standard of performance was raised at least one hundred per cent, their services would not be required after the end of the current month.

Next came a brief but painful interview with Mr. Murgatroyd, the Yorkshireman, on the subject of perquisites and commissions. The motor industry lends itself to the acquirement of pickings more, perhaps, than any other trade of to-day, and the long-headed Mr. Murgatroyd had made good use of the opportunities thrown in his way for something like ten years. Henceforth, Philip explained to him, there must be no more clandestine *douceurs* from tyre-agents, no more strictly private rebates on consignments of petrol, and no more piling-up of unconsidered trifles in customers' bills. Before undertaking a repairing contract of any magnitude, Mr. Murgatroyd must present a detailed estimate of the cost, and the work was not to be put in hand until the estimate [pg 19
was approved and countersigned by the owner of the car.

To this Mr. Murgatroyd replied almost tearfully that if Mr. Meldrum proposed to run the establishment upon Sunday-school lines, the sooner they put up the shutters the better.

"Does that mean that you want to resign your post, Mr. Murgatroyd?" asked Philip hopefully.

Mr. Murgatroyd was not to be caught.

"Not at all, sir," he said. "I dare say we shall take a little time to get used to one another's ways, that's all; but in the end I'm sure we shall rub along grandly."

What Mr. Murgatroyd meant was:—

"You are a new broom. In a short time your youthful zeal for reform will have abated, and we can then slip back unto the old comfortable groove. For the present I must make a show of complying with your idiotic commands."

Philip understood this, and calculated that six months of commercial austerity would set his manager looking for a softer berth. Both sides having thus decided to wait and see, the interview terminated.

Philip next introduced his broom into the somewhat Augean garage. Car-washers were straitly informed that their duty was to wash cars and not to rifle the tool-boxes and door-pockets thereof. The current price of that fluctuating commodity, petrol, as fixed from day to day by the brigands who hold the world's supply in the hollow of their unclean hands, was chalked up in a conspicuous position every morning, in order that consumers might purchase at the market price and not at one [pg 19
fixed by the foreman. Sundry members of that well-organized and far-reaching Society for the Acquisition of Other People's Property—the brotherhood of chauffeurs who used the garage—were put through a brief but drastic course of instruction in the elementary laws of *meum and tuum*; and one particularly enterprising member of the craft, to whose possession a new and expensive jack, recently the property of a gentleman from the country who drove his own car, was traced after a

systematic and quite unexpected official enquiry, was directed to remove himself and his vehicle to other quarters as an alternative to prosecution.

Having in the space of three weeks achieved a degree of unpopularity almost incredible to a man who has hitherto encountered only the genial side of his fellow creatures, Philip turned from the garage to the office. Here his troubles were of a different kind. Commercial arithmetic had no terrors for him; the systematic filing of correspondence and the compilation of cross-references appealed readily to his orderly soul. His difficulties arose not so much from these mechanical aids to commerce as from the human agents in charge of them. Mr. Atherton, the young gentleman who presided over the show-room, was, as already indicated, a square peg. The careers open to a younger son of a well-connected but impecunious house are strictly limited in number. Presuming, as is probably the case, that the family resources are already fully taxed in maintaining his elder brother in the army, and that he himself is debarred through insufficiency of grey matter from [pg 19
entering one of the three learned professions, our young English friend is forced to the inevitable conclusion that he must earn his living in some less distinguished field of effort.

"Not in *trade*, of course, dear," says his lady mother, with the air of a female Euclid throwing off an elementary and self-evident axiom. "But anything else you like."

The unsophisticated observer might be excused for imagining that the maternal proviso extinguishes our young friend's prospects of a career altogether. Not so. To the upper classes of England there are trades and trades. You may become a land-agent, for instance, without loss of caste; presumably because you cannot possibly make any money out of being a land-agent. You may also become a stockjobber, possibly because a stockjobber's earnings cannot by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as the fruit of honest toil. You may go to Ceylon, or Canada, or California, and there, in the decent obscurity of a foreign clime, live by the work of your own hands. You may even go upon the stage, in a gentlemanly sort of way. But you must not go into trade. You must not buy or sell merchandise in the open market; though, as stated above, you are perfectly at liberty to sell what you have not got, and buy what you could not pay for if you received it, in the world of Bulls and Bears.

However,—no one seems to know why, but the undisputable fact remains,—you may sell automobiles for a living and remain a gentleman. It is not known who discovered this providential [pg 19
law of nature, but ever since its establishment well-born young men have swarmed into the profession; and now the humblest purchaser of an automobile may quite reasonably hope to have his cheque endorsed, and mayhap a cigar accepted, by the descendant of a duke.

The innovation has proved a commercial success, too, or we may be sure that it would not have endured in the unsentimental economic world for a twelvemonth. *Pace* Mr. Mablethorpe, the immaculate young man who attends to our wants in show-rooms knows his business. He is a fair mechanic, a fearless driver, and an excellent salesman. Customers of his own walk of life confide their wants to him as to a brother, while plutocratic but plebeian patrons frequently purchase a more expensive car than they originally contemplated through fear of losing his good opinion.

But there are exceptions, and Mr. Atherton was one. He was grossly ignorant of the elements of mechanics, he was unbusinesslike in his management of correspondence, and he was rude to customers without being impressive. He was also a frequent absentee from his post on matinée days. The indoor staff, down to the very office-boy, took their tone from him; with the result that Philip, in the execution of his duty in the office and show-room, was enabled without any difficulty whatever to eclipse the degree of unpopularity already achieved by him in the garage and repair-shop. But he ploughed resolutely on his way.

In order to be near his work he rented a small flat in Wigmore Street, and furnished it [pg 20
according to his ideals of what was requisite and necessary. He cooked his own breakfast, and took his other meals at Frascati's.

Each afternoon an elderly and incompetent female called, and—to employ her own grim expression—did for him. That is to say, she consumed what was left of Philip's breakfast, and made his bed by the simple expedient of restoring the bedclothes to their overnight position.

His bedroom furniture he bought *en suite* in Tottenham Court Road, for seven pounds fifteen. In his sitting-room he installed a large table, upon which to draw up plans and specifications, and an armchair. It did not occur to him that he required any more furniture. He cooked his food at a gas-stove and ate it off a corner of this table, sitting on the arm of the chair. The sole ornament, upon his mantelpiece was a model of the Meldrum Carburettor, recently perfected and patented. He made no friends and went nowhere. A woman would have (and ultimately did) shed tears over his *ménage*. But he was happy enough. Things, not People, still held him bound.

And yet he was not utterly at peace with his world. It is said that a woman is always happy unless she has something to make her unhappy, but that a man is never happy unless he has something to make him happy. Up to this period of his life Philip had never had to hunt for the sources of happiness. His work, and the ever-developing interests of youth, had kept him well supplied. But now, at times, he was conscious of a shortage. Under the increasing cares of [pg 20

existence mere *joie de vivre* becomes insufficient as a driving-power, and demands augmentation. Philip's present life—if we except odd hours in the evening devoted to the perfection of the Meldrum inventions—was an ungrateful business at best. He had few friends, and was not of the breed which can solace itself with the companionship that can be purchased in great cities. And therefore he began, inevitably, to draw his necessary happiness from the bank of the Future. Most of us come to this in time, for few there be that are fortunate enough to be able to subsist year in year out upon current income. When we are young we draw upon the Future, and when we are old we fall back (please God) upon the Past. So Philip began to live for the day on which his reforms should come to fruition, and the work in the London offices find itself running forward on oiled wheels. As for the Present—it was a rotten business, but difficulties were made to be overcome. *En avant!*

But beyond these practical aspirations lay a fairer region. Philip was in love. Not with any material pink-and-white charmer, but, after the perfectly healthy and natural manner of the young man before he grows cynical or *blasé* with experience, with Love itself. Only that. At present he was more concerned with the abstract than the concrete. At this period he was inclined to regard matrimony much as a child regards cake—namely, as a consummation to be achieved only after a long mastication of bread-and-butter. At present he was in the thick of the bread-and-butter. But [pg 20
when he had worked strenuously for perhaps ten years, he would assuredly encounter his Lady—he had no clear idea what she was like, but he was absolutely confident of her existence—and would marry her. Then he would be paid in full. Troubles would be halved and joys doubled, and life itself would be the sweeter for the long years of hard service and clean living and high endeavour that lay at present between the dream and its fulfilment.

Meanwhile he was content to hitch his wagon to a star and proceed with the day's work. Business first.

CHAPTER XVII

PEOPLE

FOR six months Philip continued to give rope to his esteemed colleagues Messrs. Atherton and Murgatroyd, and within that period the pair duly hanged themselves.

Mr. Murgatroyd went first. For a whole winter he waited patiently for Philip's reforming zeal to spend itself; and then, finding that things were no better but rather grew worse, he retired from the conflict like a prudent man, and invested his not inconsiderable savings in a wayside garage upon a lonely stretch of the Great North Road, where motorists, who are always in a hurry, would not be disposed to haggle over the price of petrol or the cost of tyre-repairs.

He parted from Philip without rancour, and another and younger man was sent up from headquarters to take his place.

Mr. Atherton was not so easy to eject, and was only disposed of in the fulness of time and by the process of filling up the cup. But he went at last, and the change of atmosphere throughout the entire establishment was most noticeable. The two clerks and the office-boy carried out their duties with what is known in transatlantic business circles as "a punch"; the books were put in order; accounts were straightened out; business increased; headquarters said encouraging things. [pg 20
For the present Philip decided not to ask for a successor to Atherton. He felt that he wanted to run the whole Universe single-handed in those days.

Of course there were still crumpled rose-leaves. There was Brand, for instance—Brand of the repairing-shop. He was a strenuous worker and an admirable mechanic, but he suffered intermittently from a severe form of the popular disease of the day—the disease which has its roots in the British national policy of educating a man sufficiently to make him discontented with his lot and then leaving off. Brand was a Socialist, or a Revolutionist, or an Anarchist. Philip could never find out which, and the muddled but pertinacious Brand could never enlighten him. The most noticeable feature of his malady was an over-copious supply of what the repairing-shop as a whole termed "back-chat." Mr. Brand was a stalwart upholder of what he called the dignity of labour. He declined to be patronised; he smelt patronage as an Orangeman smells Popery. He also refused to accept an order with any degree of cheerfulness; though, to do him justice, once he had expressed his opinion of it and the degradation which he incurred in accepting it, he usually carried it out with efficiency and dispatch. To one who knows his job almost anything can be forgiven. We shall hear of Mr. Brand again.

Then there was Alfred, the office-boy. He was a stunted but precocious child, with a taste for music of a vibratory nature. He believed firmly in the adage that a merry heart goes all the way,

and whistled excruciatingly from dawn till dusk. His *tremolo* rendering of "All That I Ask is Love" [pg 20
appeared to afford him the maximum of human enjoyment. The departure of Mr. Atherton involved him in some financial loss, for he had been employed by that vicarious sportsman to execute turf commissions on his behalf with an unostentatious individual who conducted his business in the private bar of an unassuming house of call in Wardour Street. Consequently he considered it only just to make things unpleasant for the new manager. This object he accomplished in divers ways, which will be obvious to any schoolboy. Philip suffered in silence, for he was disinclined to further dismissals, and, moreover, could not help liking the impudent youth. His patience was rewarded; for one day, with incredible suddenness, the nuisance ceased, and Master Alfred became almost demonstrative in his assiduity and doglike in his affection. Presently the mystery was unfolded. Alfred had discovered that that usurper, that tyrant, that slave-driver, Mr. Meldrum, was the identical P. Meldrum who had scored the winning try for the Harlequin Football Club against Blackheath on the previous Saturday afternoon. One day, after office hours, almost timidly, he approached his employer and presented a petition from his own club, the Willesden Green Vampires, humbly praying that the great Meldrum would honour this unique brotherhood by consenting to become one of its Vice-Presidents. Philip's heart warmed at the compliment, and he complied gladly. He achieved further and lasting popularity among the Vampires of Willesden Green by officiating as referee in their annual encounter with the Stoke Newington Hornets. Verily [pg 20
the road to the heart of healthy young-manhood is marked in plain figures.

A third and by no means unattractive rose-leaf was Miss Jennings, the typist. She troubled Philip considerably at first. He found her presence disturbing. To him it seemed fundamentally wrong that a man should sit in a room with his hat on while a young and ladylike girl stood waiting at his elbow for orders. He endeavoured to remedy these anomalies by removing his hat in Miss Jennings's presence and rising from his seat whenever she entered his private room—courtesies which his typist secretly regarded as due to weakness of intellect rather than the instinct of chivalry, though she valued them in her heart none the less.

It was a long time, too, before Philip grew accustomed to dictating letters. His first incursion into this enterprise gave him an uncomfortable quarter of an hour. He began by ringing for Alfred, and asking him to request Miss Jennings to be so good as to come and speak to him for a moment. His message was delivered by that youthful humourist with elaborate ceremony,—this was in the pre-Willesden-Green days,—coupled with a confident assurance that it portended either a proposal of marriage or "the sack." Miss Jennings's reply Philip did not catch, for only Alfred's raucous deliverances could penetrate closed doors, but it effectually silenced that young gentleman's guns. His only discernible retort was "Suffragette!"

Presently Miss Jennings appeared, slightly flushed, and shut the door behind her.

"You want me, Mr. Meldrum?" she asked. [pg 20

Philip rose to his feet.

"Yes. Would you mind taking down one or two letters for me, Miss Jennings?" he said.

"Oh, is that all?" replied Miss Jennings, quite composed again. "Mr. Atherton usually just shouts. I'll go and get my things."

She returned with her writing-pad, and taking a chair at Philip's elbow, sat down and regarded him with an indulgent smile.

Philip began, huskily:—

The Britannia Motor Company, Limited, Oxford Street, London, October.

Miss Jennings sat patiently waiting.

"I know that bit," she intimated gently.

Philip apologised, and continued hurriedly:—

"*Dear Sir*—No, I expect you know that bit, too."

"That bit's all right," said Miss Jennings calmly. "I wasn't to know who you were writing to. It might have been your wife."

Philip, who had not hitherto realised that it was possible for a man to correspond with the wife of his bosom by means of a machine operated by a third party, apologised again, and added quite gratuitously that he was not married.

Miss Jennings, having secured the information she required, smiled forgivingly, and the

dictation proceeded.

We are in receipt of your letter of October the fourteenth.

"They usually say 'esteemed communication,'" said Miss Jennings. [pg 20

"Thank you," said Philip humbly. "Please correct it." Miss Jennings did so. Philip, regarding the curving neck and prettily coiled hair close beside him, found himself wondering why such a beautiful thing as a young girl should be compelled to work for a living.

Miss Jennings looked up, and caught his eye.

"Well?" she enquired shortly.

Philip coloured guiltily, and continued:—

The cylinders you mention are cast in pairs, and their internal diameter is one hundred millimetres, or—

He paused again. It seemed to him monstrous that a woman should be compelled to waste her youth taking down dry technical stuff like this, when she ought to be outside in the sunshine. If a woman must earn her bread, at least let her do work that was woman's work and not man's leavings. Her real mission, of course, should be to stand apart from the struggle for existence, rendering first aid to her man when he was stricken and companionship when he was weary. But to sit—

Miss Jennings looked up again.

"We can go faster than this," she observed severely. "I'm a trained stenographer."

Philip, collecting himself, dictated an elaborate formula for ascertaining the indicated horse-power of the engine under discussion, at a pace which caused the trained stenographer to pant for breath.

When he had finished, he said:—

"There are two more letters to do, Miss Jennings, but perhaps you would like to rest for a moment." [pg 20

"No, thank you," said Miss Jennings. "I'm not made of sugar."

Possibly this statement was made—as many feminine statements of the kind are made—in order to be contradicted. More probably it was intended as a test of character. Whatever it was, it failed to intrigue Philip.

"Very well, then," he said, and proceeded to dictate another letter.

"Of course I see how it is, Mr. Meldrum," said Miss Jennings, unbending a little as their joint task came to an end. "You have not been accustomed to working with a woman, and you think she can't work the same as a man. You'll soon find out your mistake. She works twice as hard, and makes less fuss about it."

"I am sure she does," said Philip meekly.

"It's kind of you," proceeded Miss Jennings maternally, "to consider my feelings; but we shall get through a great deal more work if you look on me simply as a machine."

"I do not think that would be possible," said Philip. "I could not do my own work properly if I thought you were not comfortable."

For a moment Miss Jennings eyed her employer keenly.

"Well, try, anyway," she urged. Experience had taught her to beware of gentlemen who were too solicitous about her comfort, and she had not yet taken Philip's complete measure. "I've been earning my living for five years now—ever since I was sixteen," she added carelessly—"and I have found that we do our work better and are much more friendly and comfortable when the gentleman I am working for doesn't worry too much about whether I want a cushion for my back, and that sort of thing." [pg 21

"I see you are an independent lady," said Philip, smiling.

"Independent? Yes, that's me," agreed Miss Jennings. "You wouldn't take me for a Suffragette, though, would you?" she added, with a tinge of anxiety in her voice.

"I don't think I have ever met one."

"Well, go to one of their meetings—the Park on Sunday, or somewhere—and you won't want to meet one twice. What they're to gain by it all beats me, let alone the show they make of themselves. A woman has enough trouble coming to her in life, without going out in a procession and asking for it. That's how I look at it. Well, I'll go and type these letters."

Miss Jennings's presence gradually ceased to affect Philip's powers of concentration, and he soon dropped into the habit of regarding her as she had asked to be regarded,—namely, as part of the office furniture,—though he persisted in certain small acts of consideration not usually offered to articles of upholstery. Miss Jennings, finding that her defensive attitude was entirely unnecessary, promptly set out with the perversity of her sex—or perhaps quite unconsciously—to stimulate her employer's interest in her. It was a pleasant and quite innocuous diversion, for Philip was usually far too busy to take notice of her little coquetries, and had far too much regard for the sanctity of the unprotected female to respond to them if he did. [pg 21

He had grown so accustomed to regarding his typist as a mechanical adjunct to the office typewriter that he suffered a mild shock when one day Miss Jennings remarked:—

"So Mr. Atherton's gone? Well, he was no more use than nothing in the office, but he wasn't a bad sort—not if you took him the right way and kept him in his place."

"He was a friend of yours, then?" said Philip.

"Well, he used to take me out sometimes."

"Where to?"

"Oh, the White City, or a theatre. It's a nice change to be taken out by a gentleman sometimes. When you go by yourself with your sister," explained Miss Jennings, "you go in the pit. When any one like Mr. Atherton took me it was reserved seats and dinner somewhere first. I love the theatre. Don't you?"

"I don't go very often," confessed Philip.

"Why not?"

"I don't know. Perhaps it is because I have no one to go with."

Miss Jennings collected her papers and rose.

"Well, I must finish these," she said. "Will there be anything more this morning, Mr. Meldrum?"

"Thank you, that is all."

Philip surveyed the retreating form of Miss Jennings with thoughtful eyes, and his heart smote him. By evicting the incapable Mr. Atherton he had deprived this plucky, chirpy little city sparrow of one of her most cherished recreations. [pg 21

"Oh—Miss Jennings," he said nervously.

Miss Jennings turned.

"Would you care to come to the theatre with me?"

Miss Jennings's slightly anæmic features broke into a frank smile.

"It's no good my pretending I don't want to go to the theatre when I do," she remarked; "so why not say so? Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere you please."

"When?"

"To-night, if you like."

Miss Jennings considered.

"I must see if my sister's to be at home," she said. "There are just two of us, and one always stays in of an evening with mother. May I use the telephone? My sister is with Goswell Brothers, in Finsbury Circus."

"Certainly," said Philip.

Miss Jennings sat down at the roll-top desk and took the receiver off the hook. She flatly declined to accept the assurance of the operator at the exchange that the number she required,—

(1) was out of order;

(2) was engaged;

(3) had not replied;

and in the incredible space of four minutes succeeded in establishing telephonic communication with a place of business almost a mile away. A much briefer but equally decisive encounter with the Finsbury Circus office-boy ended with the production of Miss Jennings's sister, who was forthwith addressed:— [pg 21

"That you, May dear?"

"T'ck, t'ck," replied the instrument.

"I want to go out to-night. Can you stay in with mother, or are you doing anything?"

Apparently the reply was satisfactory, for Miss Jennings turned to Philip.

"That will be all right, Mr. Meldrum," she said.

They dined at Gatti's, and went on to the Gaiety. Philip dropped readily into the etiquette of the amphitheatre stalls, and provided Miss Jennings with chocolates and lemon squashes during the interval. Halfway through the second act he decided that this was the pleasantest evening he had spent since he came to London. What Miss Jennings thought of it all he did not know, for she did not tell him. Having speared her hat to the back of the seat in front and dabbed her hair into position, she sat absolutely silent, with her eyes fixed unwinkingly upon the stage. For the time her perpetual companion, the typewriter, was forgotten, and she lived and moved in the world of romance, where ladies were always fair and gentlemen either gallant or entertaining. Occasionally, without removing her gaze, she would call her host's attention, by a half-unconscious gesture, to some particularly attractive item of the entertainment.

When all was over she sighed resignedly and preceded Philip out into the roaring Strand. Philip, scanning the street for a disengaged cab, asked her where she lived. Miss Jennings gave him an address in Balham. [pg 21

"We had better walk down to the Embankment," he said. "We might pick up a taxi or a hansom outside the Savoy."

Miss Jennings murmured something perfunctory about the facilities offered to the public by the London General Omnibus Company, and then accompanied him to the Embankment.

Presently a hansom was secured, and Philip handed his guest in, at the same time furtively paying the driver.

"Good-night," said Miss Jennings, "and thank you."

They shook hands, for the first time in their acquaintanceship. The cabman and his horse, however, did not know this, and immediately feigned a studious interest in something on the Surrey side of the river.

Philip walked home, and let himself into his dark and silent flat. On turning up the light he found that the lady who "did" for him had omitted to clear the breakfast-table. He accordingly set to work to wash up himself, knowing full well that the task would be even less congenial to-morrow morning.

As he groped philosophically in his tiny pantry for a dish-cloth, it occurred to him that to a

lonely man female society is a very helpful thing. And he was right. For it is so helpful that though a man may, and often does, exist contentedly enough without it, once he has tasted thereof he must have it always or feel forever helpless.

And yet, every day, refined young women are surprised, and shocked, and indignant, when a brother in London suddenly telegraphs home to say that he has married a girl out of a tea-shop. [pg 21

CHAPTER XVIII

MY SON TIMOTHY

PHILIP and Miss Jennings resumed business faces next morning; and although they subsequently indulged in other jaunts, one of which—a Saturday-afternoon excursion to Earl's Court—included sister May, no cloud of sentimentality ever arose between them to obscure the simple clarity of their relations. Miss Jennings was much too matter-of-fact a young person to cherish any romantic yearnings after her employer. She was not of the breed which battens upon that inexpensive brand of literature which converts kitchenmaids into duchesses. She recognised Philip for what he was—a very kind, rather shy, and entirely trustworthy gentleman—and accepted such attentions as he offered her with freedom and confidence. Nor did Miss Jennings herself, beyond arousing in him a dim realisation of the fact that the elixir of life is not exclusively composed of petrol, make any direct impression upon Philip's peace of mind. At present his heart was too full of applied mechanics to have room for tenderer preoccupations—a very fortunate condition for a heart to be in when it belongs to a young man who has yet to establish a position for himself.

So life in the London offices went on for two years. It contained a great deal of hard work and a great deal of responsibility and a great deal of drudgery; but it had its compensations. Philip still played Rugby football in the winter and suffered upon a sliding-seat for the honour of the Thames Rowing Club in the summer. There were visits to Cheltenham to see Uncle Joseph, and to Red Gables to see the Mablethorpes. There was the ever-enthralling pageant of London itself. And there was the rapturous day upon which a high official of the Company arrived upon a visitation and announced, after compliments, that the merits of the Meldrum Automatic Lubricator (recently patented) had so favourably impressed the directors that they had decided to adopt the same as the standard pattern upon all the Company's cars. Would Mr. Meldrum enter into a further agreement with the directors to give them the first refusal of any further inventions of his? Those were days. [pg 21

Then, finally, with a hilarious splash, came Timothy.

He arrived one morning to take possession of a six-cylinder Britannia touring-car which had just been completed to his order—or rather, to the order of an indulgent parent. He was a hare-brained but entirely charming youth of twenty-two, and Philip, who encountered far too few of his own caste in those days, hailed him as a godsend. Each happened to be wearing an Old Studleian tie, so common ground was established at once.

Philip enquired after Mr. Brett, and learned that that "septic blighter" (Timothy's description) had retired from the position of Housemaster and had been relegated to a post of comparative harmlessness; but the old House was going strong.

All this time they were examining the new car. It soon became apparent that the technical knowledge of Mr. Rendle (Timothy) was not of a far-reaching nature, but his anxiety to improve it was so genuine that Philip sent to the workshop for a mechanic to come and lay bare various portions of the car's anatomy. Presently that fire-eating revolutionary, Mr. Brand, appeared. [pg 21

"If you are not in a hurry," said Philip to him, "we will take the top off the cylinders, and then I can give you a demonstration."

No, Mr. Rendle was in no hurry. He was a young man of leisure, it appeared.

"Only too glad to spend such a profitable morning," he said. "Usually in bed at this time of day."

Mr. Brand, whose views upon the subject of the idle rich were of a decided nature, looked up from a contest with a refractory nut, and regarded Timothy severely. Then, returning to his task, and having exposed the internal secrets of the engine, he plunged into an elaborate lecture, in his most oppressive and industrious-apprentice manner, upon big-ends and timing-gears. Philip did not

interrupt. Mr. Brand was fond of the sound of his own voice, and was obviously enjoying his present unique opportunity of laying down the law to a wealthy and ignorant member of the despised upper classes. He employed all the long words he could think of. Timothy positively gaped with admiration.

"I say," he said, "you ought to go into Parliament."

"P'raps I shall," replied the Industrious Apprentice haughtily. [pg 21

Evidently with the intention of resuming his interrupted discourse, he cleared his throat and took a deep breath. Then, suddenly, his mouth closed with a jerk, he turned a dusky red, and assumed an ostrich-like posture over the cylinders of the car.

"There's a trunk-call coming through for you, Mr. Meldrum," said a clear voice.

Philip turned round, to find Miss Jennings.

"I shall be back directly, Mr. Rendle," he said to Timothy, and accompanied the typist to the office.

"Brand is a great orator, Miss Jennings," he remarked, as he sat down to the telephone.

Miss Jennings sniffed.

"That hot-air artist?" she replied witheringly. "He's the laughing-stock of the place. Not that I know him. We on the office-staff keep ourselves to ourselves. We don't—"

At this moment the trunk-call came through, and the conversation terminated.

When Philip returned to the show-room, Mr. Brand had completed his task and departed to his own place.

"Our chatty friend," announced Timothy, "has put me up to most of the tips. I shall be a prize chauffeur in no time." He surveyed the gleaming car admiringly. "She's a beauty. What should I be able to knock out of her? Sixty?"

"Quite that."

"Wow-*wow*!" observed Mr. Rendle contentedly. "I don't mind laying a thousand to thirty that I get my licence endorsed inside three weeks." [pg 22

Philip, who regarded new machinery much as a young mother regards a new baby, turned appealingly to the cheerful young savage beside him.

"Don't push her too much at first," he said. "Give the bearings a chance for a hundred miles or two. And—I wouldn't go road-hogging if I were you."

Timothy turned to him in simple wonder.

"But what on earth is the use of my getting a forty-horse-power car," he enquired almost pathetically, "if I can't let her rip?"

"There are too many towns and villages round London to give you much of a chance," said Philip tactfully. "You will be able to find some good open stretches, though, if you get right out west or north," he added, as Timothy's face continued to express disappointment. "Or, I'll tell you what. Take the car to Brooklands, and see what she can do in the level hour."

The face of the car's owner—whose conscience upon the subject of road-racing was evidently at war with his instincts—brightened wonderfully.

"That is some notion," he cried. "You're right. Road-hogging is rotten bad form. We'll run this little lad down to Brooklands—oh, so gently!—and then go round the track all out. Will you come with me?"

"Rather," replied the primeval Philip with great heartiness.

"And come and dine at the Club afterwards," added Timothy, in a final burst of friendliness.

Within the exaggerated saucer constructed for the purpose at Brooklands they succeeded in [pg 22

covering seventy-three miles in sixty minutes, Timothy deliriously clinging to the wheel and Philip sitting watchfully beside him to see that centrifugal force did not send the new car flying over the rim into the conveniently adjacent cemetery of Brookwood.

Thereafter they dined together at the Royal Automobile Club, which seemed to Philip to contain several thousand members. Members swarmed in the great central hall, upon the staircase, and in all the lofty apartments opening therefrom. There appeared to be at least six hall-porters, and there were page-boys innumerable, who drifted about in all directions wearing worried expressions and chanting a mysterious dirge which sounded like "Mr. Hah-Hah, please!" There was a real post-office in one corner, and a theatre ticket-office in another. There were racquet courts, and a swimming-bath, and a shooting-gallery, and a gymnasium, and a bowling-alley, and a fencing-school. Timothy confidently announced that there was a golf links somewhere, but that he had not yet found time to play a round owing to the excessive length of the holes.

Eschewing what Philip's host described as the "cock-and-hen" dining-room (where the two sexes could be seen convivially intermingled, partaking of nourishment to the sound of music), they ascended in a lift to the first floor, where they sat down in a vast refectory of a more monastic type. Here one gentleman greeted them at the door, while a second took Timothy's order for [pg 22
dinner, and passed it on to a third. The dishes were served by a fourth and cleared away by a fifth. The same ceremony was observed in the ordering of wine.

"Less fuss up here than downstairs," explained Timothy.

Philip enjoyed his meal immensely, though he wondered, characteristically, if all these ministers to his comfort—especially the page-boys—had partaken, or would partake, of an adequate meal themselves. Timothy, who contracted friendships almost as impulsively as he purchased motors, chattered to him with all the splendid buoyancy and frankness of youth. His vocation in life, it appeared, was that of Assistant Private Secretary to a prominent member of His Majesty's Opposition. The post was unpaid, and the duties apparently nominal. But Timothy was quite a mine of totally unreliable information upon the secret political history of the day. He told Philip some surprising stories of the private lives of Cabinet Ministers, and foretold the date of the next general election with great assurance and exactitude.

Later in the evening, as they drank coffee and liqueurs in an apartment which reminded Philip of Victoria Station (as recently rebuilt), Mr. Rendle conducted his guest through a résumé of several love-affairs—highly innocuous intrigues, most of them—and added the information that "that sort of thing" was now "cut out" owing to the gracious and elevating influence of a being only recently encountered, whom he described as "the best little girl that ever stepped."

"I don't know her very well yet," he concluded, in a burst of candour. "In fact, I don't even [pg 22
know what her name is. I met her at a dance. All I could find on my programme next morning was 'tight pink head-band.' But I will find her again."

"I am sure you will," said Philip, who had yet to learn that these final reformations of Timothy's were of a recurrent character.

"Thanks, old friend, for your kind words," replied the love-lorn youth. "Tell me, how much does a man require to marry on?"

"Thirty-five shillings a week," said Philip. "At least, so some of my colleagues tell me."

"I have two thousand a year," said Timothy doubtfully. "I don't know how much that is a week, but I'll work it out some day in shillings and see. Anyhow, when I meet her, I shall take her out in the new car. Are you married?"

"No," said Philip.

"That's a pity. If you had been, your wife might have chaperoned us. But if you get married, let me know."

He looked at his watch.

"Ten o'clock," he announced. "Now, what shall we do next? The resources of the Club are at your entire disposal. Would you like to have a dry shampoo, or fight a duel, or buy a postal order, or what? Or shall we go to a theatre?"

Philip mildly pointed out that most of the theatres opened at eight.

"Then we will go to a music-hall," said the resourceful Timothy. "Waiter, is there a Tube Station in the Club? I always forget."

"No, sir," said the waiter compassionately. "But there is a cold plunge-bath," he suggested. [pg 22

"No good, I'm afraid; but thanks all the same," said the polite Timothy. "Get a taxi."

CHAPTER XIX

PLAIN MEN AND FAIR WOMEN

A FORTNIGHT later Philip filled the vacancy which had been caused two years previously by the removal of Mr. Atherton by offering the post to Tim Rendle—an offer which was accepted by that ornament of the leisured classes with an enthusiasm which would have surprised the horny-handed Brand.

The experiment turned out a complete success. It provided Master Timothy with some much-needed employment, the Britannia Motor Company with an admirable addition to its staff, and Philip with a companion. Tim was a capital salesman. He soon became a brilliant, if slightly reckless driver; and in time he absorbed a fair working knowledge of the mechanics of the automobile. He possessed a charm of manner of which he was quite unconscious, and a unique capacity for getting himself liked. He fell in and out of love on the slightest provocation, and rarely failed to keep Philip informed of his latest entanglement.

Once he offered, as a supreme favour, to introduce Philip to one "Baby," who presided over a small tobacconist's establishment in Wardour Street. The interview was an entire failure. The siren greeted Timothy and his abashed companion most graciously, and was on the point, doubtless, of [pg 22
making some witty and appropriate remarks, when a piano-organ came heavily to anchor just outside the door, and its unwashed custodians proceeded to drown all attempts at conversation with the reverberating strains of "Alexander's Rag-Time Band." Under such circumstances it was impossible to look either affectionate or rakish. A conversation conducted entirely by means of smiles, however affable, and nods, however knowing, rarely leads anywhere; and, Timothy having intimated by a tender glance in the direction of Baby and a despairing gesture towards the door, that his heart was forever hers, but that for the present they must part, the deputation filed ignominiously out, one half of it feeling uncommonly foolish.

Tim was fond of engaging in controversy with Brand, and Philip frequently overheard such epithets as "gilded popinjay," and "grinder of the faces of the poor," exchanged for "dear old soul," and "esteemed citizen," on the occasions when argument and chaff clashed together in the garage or show-room.

Tim created an impression in another quarter, too, as a brief scrap of conversation will show.

"I think, Miss Jennings, that it would be a pretty and appropriate thought if, for the future, on arriving at the scene of my daily toil, I were to kiss you good-morning."

"Think again," suggested Miss Jennings.

"Not necessarily for publication," continued the unabashed Timothy, "but as a guaranty of good faith. A purely domestic salute, in fact. These little things have a softening effect upon a man's [pg 22
character."

"They seem to have had a softening effect upon your brain," observed Miss Jennings swiftly.

"It would do me good," urged Tim. "I have no one to kiss me now that my dear mother has been called away."

Miss Jennings looked up, deceived for a moment.

"Is your mother dead?" she asked, more gently.

"Oh, no. She is very well, thank you," said Tim.

"But you said she had been called away."

"So she has."

"Where?"

"To Holloway Gaol," explained Tim softly. "She is a Militant Suffragette. She tried to burn down Madame Tussaud's. I miss her very much," he added with a sigh. "She comes out about twice a week, under the Cat and Mouse Act. I meet her at the prison gate with sandwiches, but she never kisses me, because her mouth is too full. Will you?"

"It seems to me, Mr. Rendle," remarked Miss Jennings, biting her lip, "that you and I are wasting our time. I have some work to do for Mr. Meldrum. I'll trouble you to get out of this office into the show-room."

"Certainly, Miss Jennings," replied Timothy, striking an attitude. "Good-bye! I will face this thing like a man. I will fight it down. I shall probably go and shoot big game—in Regent's Park. May I send you a stuffed elephant? Or would you prefer a flock of pumas? I don't know what a puma is like, but the keeper will tell me." [pg 22

The clatter of the typewriter drowned further foolishness, and Timothy departed to his duties. Here the incident would have ended, but for Miss Jennings's feminine inability to leave well alone.

"Haven't you got a young lady of your own?" she enquired one day of Tim, *à propos des bottes*.

"Yes," said Tim rapturously; "I have."

"Then, why—"

Timothy hastened to explain.

"Because I haven't met her yet. You cannot expect a lady to kiss you for your mother," he pointed out, "until you have spoken to her. The object of my affections lives in a castle in the air, and she has never actually come down to earth yet."

But Miss Jennings's attention had wandered.

"Kissing is a queer thing," she said musingly.

"It doesn't seem so after a while," Tim hastened to inform her.

"If you had got a young lady of your own," continued Miss Jennings, evidently debating a point which had occupied her attention before, "and you were to kiss another one, in a manner of speaking there would be no harm done."

"None whatever," agreed Tim heartily.

"What the eye doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve over," continued Miss Jennings sententiously.

"Selah!" corroborated the expectant Timothy.

"But if the eye *was* to see—my word!"

Miss Jennings inserted a fresh sheet of paper into the typewriter, and continued:—

"Seems to me, kissing another young lady's young gentleman is just like picking up her cup of tea and taking a drink out of it. If she don't get to know about it, no one's a penny the wiser or a penny the worse. But if she does—well, she feels she simply *must* have a clean cup! So don't you take any risks, Mr. Rendle. You've such a silly way of talking that I don't know whether you have a young lady or not. If you haven't one now, you will have some day. If you have—one that's at all fond of you—and go kissing me, you will be sorry directly afterwards." [pg 22

"The Right Honourable Lady," chanted the graceless Timothy, "then resumed her seat amid applause, having spoken for an hour and fifty minutes. Very well, I will leave you. I shall go and hold Brand's hand in the garage. He loves me, anyhow. Hallo! I say—"

Miss Jennings's serene countenance had flushed crimson.

"Have I said anything to offend you?" asked Tim, in some concern. "I am awfully sorry if I have. I was only rotting, you know. I had no idea Brand was a friend of yours."

Miss Jennings, recovering herself quickly, replied with some asperity that he was no such

thing, and again announced that she had some work to do and that the conversation would now terminate.

But it did not. There was a magnetism about Tim which invited confidences.

"I say, Philip, old son," remarked Tim, as they walked down Piccadilly the following Sunday afternoon, "are you aware that our office has become a home of romance?" [pg 23

Philip did not reply. His thoughts for the moment were centred upon more absorbing business. Presently he said:—

"I think I shall take a long run to-morrow and give it a proper trial on one or two really bad hills, and then go down to Coventry and see Bilston again."

Tim sighed gently, and replied:—

"Permit me to remind you, O most excellent Theophilus,"—this was his retaliation for being addressed as "my son Timothy,"—"that to-day is the Sabbath, and that we have left the Britannia Motor Company and all its works, including the Meldrum Never-Acting Brake, behind us for the space of twenty-four hours. In addition, we have washed ourselves and put on celluloid dickeys, and are now going to the Park to see Suffragettes. Let us be bright."

"Did I tell you the patent has been granted all right?" pursued Philip, referring presumably to the Meldrum Never-Acting Brake.

"You did," said Tim resignedly. "Seven times yesterday and five this morning."

"The Company simply must take it up," continued the single-minded inventor. "The brakes of the Britannia cars have always been their weakness, and now that we are building heavier and heavier bodies things are riskier than ever. Our present brake-power can't be developed any further: even Bilston admits that. My brake is magnetic—a different principle altogether. Its [pg 23 reserve of power is enormous. It would stop a motor-bus."

"Yes, dear old thing," said Tim soothingly. "I am sure it would. And if you don't come out of the gutter on to the pavement you will stop one, too, and then I shall have to waste a day taking you to Kensal Green in instalments."

He linked his arm in that of his preoccupied friend, and having drawn him into a place of safety, repeated his former question.

"Are you aware that our office has become a home of romance?"

Philip replied that he had not noticed it.

They were on their way to the Park, after the fashion of good citizens, to enjoy the summer sunshine and regale themselves with snacks of oratory upon divers subjects, served gratis by overheated enthusiasts in the neighbourhood of the Marble Arch. After that they were to take tea with Timothy's lady mother in Lowndes Square.

"Well, it has," affirmed Tim. "Citizen Brand is consumed by a hopeless passion for the haughty Jennings."

"Rot!" said Philip, interested at last. "How do you know?"

"I was having a brief chat with Miss Jennings the other day—"

"What about?"

"We were discussing the affections, and so on," was the airy explanation; "and when in the course of conversation I happened to mention Brand's name, the poor young creature turned quite puce in the face."

"That rather sounds," commented the unsophisticated Philip, "as if the hopeless passion were [pg 23 on Miss Jennings's side."

Tim wagged his head sagely.

"Oh, dear, no," he said. "Not at all. In a woman, that is a most misleading symptom. She told me all about it. I notice," he added modestly, "that people confide in me a good deal."

"My son Timothy," said Philip, "you are a gossiping old wife."

"The difficulty, I gather," continued Timothy, quite unmoved by this stricture, "lies in the fact that they seem to have nothing in common whatsoever. Otherwise they are admirably matched. Socially, Miss Jennings is a young lady, while the Citizen is only a mechanic, like ourselves. In politics, Miss Jennings is a Conservative, while Brand is an Anarchist. In religion, Miss Jennings is Church of England, with a leaning to vestments, whereas Brand thinks that heaven and earth were created by the County Council, under the supervision of the Fabian Society."

"I should have thought that it would have been a most suitable match," said Philip. "They would be able to bring each other such fresh ideas."

"That is just what I told her," said Tim; "but it was no use. She said he was only a common person, and did nothing but fill his head with stuff that would put him above his station—night schools, and debating societies, and Ruskin, and Eugenics, and—and Grape Nuts."

"It seems to me rather a laudable ambition on the part of a common person."

"So I said, but I soon gathered that I had said the wrong thing. It appears that the Citizen has been trying to elevate Miss Jennings's mental outlook, too. He took her to the theatre, and that seems to have put the lid on everything." [pg 23

"Why? I thought she liked the theatre."

"Yes; but the situation was mishandled. They met by appointment outside a Lyons' tea-shop—Miss Jennings in a dressy blouse and the Citizen in the suit which he only wears as a rule on the anniversary of the capture of the Bastille—and proceeded to a hearty meal of buttered buns. Then, instead of being taken to see Lewis Waller, as she had secretly hoped, Miss Jennings found herself at the Court, listening to a brainy rendering of 'Coriolanus' played by an earnest young repertory company without scenery or orchestra. I gather that they parted outside the emergency exit, and went home in different 'buses."

Philip listened to this highly circumstantial narrative in silence. Finally he said:—

"I'm sorry for Brand. He may not be up to Miss Jennings's standard of gentility, but he is the best man we have, and I intend to make him foreman next week. I bet you he finishes high up in the Company's service."

Tim shook his head.

"We shall see," he said. "Meanwhile, let us go and study the Suffragette in her natural state. I hear the Cause received a tremendous fillip last Sunday. Two policemen were jabbed in the eye with hatpins."

But the Suffragettes were not so conspicuous as they had expected. They did discover a group of intensely respectable and consciously virtuous females haranguing a small and apathetic audience from a lorry, but these had wrecked their chances of patronage from the start by labelling themselves (per banner) "Law-Abiding Suffragists." [pg 23

"We want Ettes, not Ists," said Tim.

At length their attention was attracted by what looked like a gigantic but listless football scrimmage, some four or five hundred strong, slowly and aimlessly circling about upon a wide grassy space. It was composed mainly of anæmic youths smoking cigarettes. But there was no sign of the ball. All that indicated the centre of activity of this peculiar game was the sound of some twenty or thirty male voices uplifted in song—Timothy explained that the melody was "Let's All Go Down the Strand and Have a Banana"—somewhere about the middle. A couple of impassive policemen appeared to be acting as referees.

Timothy addressed a citizen of London who was standing by.

"What is going on inside here?" he asked.

"Sufferingettes, sir," responded the citizen affably. "The police won't let 'em 'old no meetings now,—not off no waggin, that is,—so they 'as to just *talk* to people, standin' about, friendly like,

same as me and you. There's a couple of them in there just now"—indicating the scrimmage with his pipe. "You'll 'ear 'em arguin', now and then."

He was right. Presently there was a lull among the choristers. A high-pitched girlish voice became audible, trickling through the press.

"And I ask all of you, if *that* isn't woman's work, what is?" [pg 23

The speaker paused defiantly for a reply. It came, at once:—

"Washin', ducky!"

The crowd dissolved into happy laughter, and the choir struck up "Meet Me in Dreamland Tonight."

Philip and Tim moved on. Philip felt hot and angry that women—apparently young women—should be subjected to such treatment as this. At the same time he remembered Miss Jennings's dictum upon the subject of asking for trouble, and wondered what on earth the parents of the youthful orators were thinking about.

Presently they came to a group near the Marble Arch. It was being addressed by two speakers simultaneously. The first was an angry-looking old gentleman with a long white beard. He was engaged in expounding some peculiar and (to judge from his apparent temperature) highly contentious point of doctrine to a facetious audience; but it was impossible to ascertain from his discourse whether he was a superheated heresy-hunter, an evangelical revivalist, or an out-and-out atheist. This is a peculiarity of the Hyde Park orator. Set him on his legs, and in ten minutes he has wandered so far from the point—usually through chasing an interrupter down some irrelevant byway—that it is difficult to tell what his subject is and quite impossible to discover which side he is on. As Philip and Timothy strolled up, the bearded one parted company with the last shreds of his temper, chiefly owing to the remorseless hecklings of a muscular Christian (or atheist) who was [pg 23
discharging a steady stream of criticism and obloquy into his left ear at a range of about eighteen inches; and partly by reason of the distraction caused by the voice of the other speaker, a pock-marked gentleman in a frock-coat and bowler hat, who, with glassy eyes fixed upon some invisible textbook suspended in mid-air before him, was thundering forth a philippic in favour of (or against) Tariff Reform.

With gleaming spectacles and waving arms, the old gentleman turned suddenly upon the heckler.

"Out upon you!" he shrieked. "I despise you; I scorn you; I spit upon you! Plague-spot!"

"What abaht the Erpostle Paul?" enquired the Plague-Spot steadily, evidently for the hundredth time.

This naturally induced a fresh paroxysm.

"Miserable creature!" stormed the old gentleman. "Having eyes, you see not! Having ears, you hear not! What did Charles Darwin say in eighteen-seventy-six?"

The crowd turned to the heckler, anxious to see how this thrust would be parried. The heckler pondered a moment, and then enquired in his turn: "What did the Erpostle Paul say in one-oh-one?"

The crowd, evidently regarding this as a good point, laughed approvingly.

"I'll *read* you what Charles Darwin said," spluttered the old gentleman, producing quite a library from his coat-tail. He selected a volume, and turned over the leaves with trembling fingers.

"And now, gentlemen, as regards this question of Exports and Imports," chaunted the Tariff [pg 23
Reform expert. "I will give you a few facts—"

"Fictions!" amended a humorous opponent.

At this moment the old gentleman began to read, in a hurried gabble, what Charles Darwin had said in eighteen-seventy-six. The heckler allowed him two minutes, and then suggested cheerfully:—

"And *now* let's git back to the Erpostle Paul."

And so on. Our friends moved away, for not far off Philip's eye had discerned a familiar figure

gesticulating upon a rostrum. It was Brand. He was addressing a considerable crowd, upon the edge of which Philip and Timothy now took their stand. Philip had never seen his colleague out of his overalls before, and was struck with the man's commanding presence and impassioned delivery.

"Life?" shouted Brand. His face was dead white, but his eyes blazed. "Life? What does life mean to you?" He surveyed his audience with profound contempt. "*Beer!*"

The crowd accepted this bludgeoning in excellent part.

"What do you *do* with Life?" continued the speaker. "The Life that is left to you when you have worked twelve hours a day for some capitalist, and slept eight more, and spent another two coming and going from your work—your spare time, I mean? How do you employ your Sundays? Do you go and study Nature? Do you read elevatin' literature? Do you cultivate your starving minds? No! What do you do? You can't think of anything better to do than to come here and listen to fools like me! That's the sort of mugs you are!" [pg 23

This summary of the situation met with hearty endorsement from all parts of the audience.

"But it ain't your fault," continued Brand compassionately. "You haven't ever been taught what it *means* to enjoy Life. You haven't got the time!" He raised clenched hands to heaven. "Life! Life! It should be beautiful—glorious—sublime! Look round you now! Look at those trees! Listen to that music!"

The crowd, docile but a trifle mystified, obeyed. Faintly to their ears across the Park came the tremendous chords of the Pilgrims' Chorus from "Tannhäuser," played by the Grenadier Guards Band.

Brand sank down over the rail of his platform until his arms hung limply before him.

"Do these sights and sounds thrill us?" he demanded hoarsely. "Do they move us? I'm asking you. Do they? No! Not a thrill, not an emotion! Why? Because we haven't been educated up to them, you and me. We're only the People. We've always had to go to work, work, work! There's never been any *time* for us to learn of the beauty that Life holds for us."

The crowd was listening now, as it always will to a *cri du cœur*.

The man swept on, all aflame.

"Take music! What does it mean to us? Nothing—absolutely nothing! Can you and I interpret a symphony? Not on your life: we've never been taught!" His voice rose to a scream. "And what sort of music *do* they hand out to us as a rule—us, the People!—yes, and we lap it up? *Ragtime! R-r-ragtime!*" [pg 23

Philip and Tim turned away soberly enough. The spectacle of an immortal soul beating its wings against prison-bars does not lend itself to flippant comment.

"The Citizen may be a muddle-headed crank, Phil," said Timothy, "but he is a man for all that."

Philip did not hear, though he would have agreed readily. He was wondering why the haughty Miss Jennings should patronize Mr. Brand's meetings. Still, there she was, endeavouring to take cover from his observation behind a small but heated debate which had arisen between a gentleman with a blue ribbon and another with a red rose. Timothy caught sight of her, too, and promptly rushed in where Philip feared to tread.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Jennings," he said. "I'm surprised to find you, with your strict Conservative principles, coming out to encourage such a low entertainment as this." He indicated Mr. Brand, now working up to a peroration.

Miss Jennings stiffened indignantly.

"I suppose I can come out and amuse myself listening to a pack of nonsense if I like, Mr. Rendle," she said, "the same as any one else?"

"What do you think of Mr. Brand as a speaker?" asked Philip.

"I wasn't listening to him particularly," said Miss Jennings, untruthfully.

"What do you think of his views on ragtime?" enquired Tim.

"I think they are silly." [pg 24

"Can you interpret a symphony, Miss Jennings?" asked Philip.

"No," confessed the girl reluctantly; "I can't say I can."

"I believe you are a Socialist, too, Miss Jennings," said Tim, shaking his head sadly.

Miss Jennings, after an unsuccessful attempt to wither him with a glance, passed on.

Philip received a scalding cup of tea from his hostess, and lowered himself timidly to a seat beside her.

"I am so glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Meldrum," said Lady Rendle. "I have heard so much of you from my boy. One likes to meet some one one knows takes an interest in one's belongings, doesn't one?"

Philip, painfully unravelling this sentence, suddenly caught his hostess's eye, and realised that an answer was expected of him.

"Yes," he said, *sforzando*. "Oh, yes! One does."

Graciously directed to help himself to something to eat, he dipped blindly into the nearest dish, with the result that he immediately found himself the proprietor of a bulky corrugated tube of French pastry, with cream protruding from either end. He surveyed it miserably, wondering dimly if it would be possible to restore it without attracting attention. He was frustrated by Lady Rendle.

"I like to see a young man," she said approvingly, "who is not afraid of tea and sweet cakes. [pg 24
There are far too many of them nowadays who consider it beneath their dignity to take tea at all. Caviare sandwiches and whiskey-and-soda are all they will condescend to. And now," she added briskly, "I want to introduce you to a charming girl."

The quaking Philip, with his bilious burden, was conducted across the room and presented to a pretty girl in a hat which for the time being deprived its wearer of the use of one eye.

"This is Mr. Meldrum, Barbara dear," announced Lady Rendle. "Miss Duncombe."

Philip, still bitterly ashamed of his tea, achieved a lopsided bow, and Lady Rendle departed to her own place.

Timothy, who had been engaging Miss Duncombe in animated conversation, supplemented the introduction with a few explanatory comments.

"Babs, old thing," he announced to the damsel, rising to give his seat to Philip, "you must be gentle with my friend Theophilus. He is fierce if roused, and should on no account be irritated while having his tea; but when properly handled will be found perfectly tractable. He is not married."

"Tim," replied Miss Duncombe, "I hate you. Go away!"

"By all means," said the unruffled Timothy. "See you at the Venners' dance on Thursday. Keep me all the odd numbers up to supper and everything after, will you?"

"No," said Miss Babs.

"Thanks awfully," replied Timothy gratefully. "So long!"

He departed, leaving Philip alone with the girl. He regarded her covertly. Miss Babs Duncombe [pg 24
was a fair sample of the *ingénue* of the present day. She was exquisitely pretty, beautifully dressed; her complexion had been supplemented by art; and her tongue spoke a strange language.

"Tim is rather a little pet, isn't he?" she observed to Philip.

Philip, who had been blinking nervously at Miss Babs's sheeny silken insteps, looked up.

"He is a great friend of mine," he said, "but I am afraid I have never regarded him as a pet."

"I see you are a literal person," observed Miss Duncombe. "I must be careful. What shall we talk about? What interests you?"

Philip pondered.

"Machinery," he said at last.

"How pathetic!" was Babs's response. "What else? Do you tango?"

"No."

"Do you skate?"

"Yes."

"I have never seen you at Princes."

"I have never been there," confessed Philip, feeling very much ashamed of himself.

"How tragic! Where *do* you go? Is there another place?"

"I skate—whenever there is a frost," said Philip. "I am rather bucolic."

"Oh, you mean on ponds, and that sort of thing," said Miss Duncombe gently. "You shouldn't, you know. It's not done now. Are you very fond of exercise?"

"I take all I can." [pg 24

"So do I. I adore it. Do you hunt?"

"Once in a way."

"Polo?"

"No."

"You *are* a monosyllabic man! What do you go in for?"

"Rugby football."

Miss Duncombe shivered elegantly.

"How very quaint—and how squdgy!" she said. "I am afraid you are a Cave Man."

"What is that?"

"Some other girls and I," explained Miss Babs, "have a sort of little society of our own, called the Idealists. Our *séances* are simply too thrilling. We sit on cushions round the floor and smoke Russian cigarettes and drink the most divine liqueurs—pink or green or gold—and have the duckiest little debates."

Philip, dumbly gripping the tube of French pastry, gaped, quite frankly. This eccentric young female was an entirely new type to him.

"What do you debate about?" he asked respectfully, sipping his tea, which by this time was stone cold.

"Oh," said Miss Babs vaguely, "subconscious influences, and soul-harmonies, and things like that. We divide men and women into various classes. Men like you are Cave Men. Most of the Cave Men I know are soldiers. Then there are Soul Men—actors, and musicians. Then creatures who do nothing but crawl about in beautiful clothes are Thing Men. Men with shiny faces and hot hands [pg 24
are Butter Men. We divide women differently. Most of them are Impossibles, but there are a good many All-Buts. Life is so varied. The human soul, with all its infinite shades of colour—"

Philip, quite intoxicated by the exotic atmosphere in which he found himself, bit heavily and incautiously into the roll of pastry. Straightway from either end there sprang a long and sinuous jet

of clotted cream. The rearmost section shot violently down his own throat, nearly choking him; that in front descended upon the inlaid parquet floor in a tubular cascade, where it formed an untidy and conspicuous ant-hill.

In a moment one of Miss Duncombe's daintily-shod feet slid forward, her skimpy skirt forming a promontory which effectually hid the disaster from the eyes of others—especially Lady Rendle.

"Mop it up quickly," she said in an excited whisper. "Take your handkerchief—anything! No one will see." She spoke breathlessly, with all the zeal of a faithful sister screening a delinquent small brother from the wrath to come.

Philip, as he bent confusedly down to clear up the mess, recognised with genuine pleasure that for all her soulfulness and pose Miss Babs Duncombe was nothing more, after all, than a jolly little schoolgirl suffering from a bad attack of adolescence.

"That was the sweetest thing that ever happened," said Babs, after all traces of havoc had been obliterated. "If you could have *seen* yourself when the cream squirted out of the end! I must tell the Idealists about it at the next *séance*. Now, I must not laugh any more, or I shall get a purple face. Tell me, is my nose shiny?" [pg 24

She submitted her peach-like countenance to Philip's embarrassed inspection.

"It looks all right," he said.

"I don't believe you," said Miss Duncombe, and extracted a small mirror from a gold bag. She viewed herself with a gasp of dismay.

"How can you say such a thing?" she exclaimed indignantly.

Swiftly she produced a powder-puff, and proceeded to repair the ravages caused by excessive mirth in a warm room. The unsophisticated Philip gazed at her, speechless, and was still gazing when he was whirled away by his indefatigable hostess—Lady Rendle believed in keeping her male callers circulating: it enabled those whose conversational stock-in-trade was scanty to indulge in the luxury of repetition—to the side of one Sheila Garvey.

Miss Garvey began at once:—

"Do you play cricket at all?"

"No, not now," said Philip; "but I play—"

Apparently Miss Garvey had no desire to discuss other pastimes.

"Still, you go to Lords occasionally, I suppose," she suggested.

Yes, Philip went to Lords.

"And I hope you are Middlesex."

Yes; on consideration, Philip was Middlesex.

"My *fiancé* plays for Middlesex," mentioned Miss Garvey carelessly.

Philip, secretly blessing this unknown cricketer, said eagerly:—

"I should like to hear about *him*"—implying that the rest of Middlesex did not matter. [pg 24

After that he enjoyed a welcome rest. By occasionally supplying such fuel as, "What did he do against the Australians in the fourth Test Match?" or, "What does he think about the off-theory?" he maintained a full head of steam on Miss Garvey for something like twenty minutes. He sat thankfully listening and watching the clock, secure in the knowledge that time was slipping away and that Timothy had promised that their call should not extend beyond half-past five.

"Another five minutes and we are out of the wood," he said to himself.

But he was mistaken. He had just accompanied Miss Garvey (chaperoned, of course, by the *fiancé*) step by step, match by match, through an entire cricket-tour in the Antipodes, including five Test Matches (with a special excursion up-country in order to see the *fiancé* score a century against Twenty-Two of Woolloomoolloo), when his hostess once more intervened, with the

inevitable sentence:—

"Mr. Meldrum, I want to introduce you to a charming girl."

Once more, with leaden footsteps, Philip crossed the room. Timothy apparently had forgotten all about both him and the time. A despairing glance in his direction revealed him ensconced in a window-seat with Miss Babs Duncombe. In that fastness he remained for another forty minutes. When at length, restored to a sense of duty by the departure of Miss Duncombe and his introduction to a grim young woman interested in Foreign Missions, Master Timothy set out to [pg 24
reclaim his long-lost friend, Philip had passed through the hands, *seriatim*, of a damsel who had besought him to obtain for her autograph-book the signature of a certain music-hall comedian (mainly noted for an alcoholic repertoire and a deplorable wardrobe) whom she affirmed she "dearly loved"; another who endeavoured to convert him to the worship of Debussy, not desisting until she discovered that Philip imagined Debussy to be a French watering-place; and a third, whose title to fame appeared to be founded upon the fact that she had once bitten a policeman in order to demonstrate her fitness to exercise the Parliamentary franchise.

"Now, we will go to the Club and drink deep," said Timothy, as they turned out of Lowndes Square. "You haven't thanked me yet, O brother, for your P.S.A."

Philip eased his collar.

"Timothy, my son," he observed, "I fear I must give up all thoughts of becoming a social success. I am only a Cave Man."

CHAPTER XX

THE PROVING OF THE BRAKE

On Monday morning Philip rose early. He had a hard week before him, for besides performing his usual duties—and their name was legion at this busy season of the year—he hoped to devote an afternoon to an exhaustive trial of the Meldrum Automatic Electro-Magnetic (described by the ribald Timothy as the Ought-to-Scrap-It, Don't You-Forget-It) Brake. He was anxious, later in the week, to run down to Coventry and persuade the conservative Bilston to extend official recognition to his offspring.

He devoted two hours before breakfast to the more tender adjustment of the mechanism of the brake, which he had attached to the service-car provided for his use by the Company. The car consisted mainly of a long, lean, powerful chassis, destitute of ornament and fitted with a skimpy and attenuated body of home manufacture. He was assisted in his operations by Mr. Brand, once more unclothed and in his right mind. Brand had taken a reluctant but irresistible interest in the evolution of the Brake. Indeed, one or two practical suggestions of his had been incorporated in the final design.

At last the work was completed. Philip climbed out of the pit and disconnected the inspection lamp.

"That's great, Brand," he said. "Thank you for all your help. If the Company takes the invention [pg 24
up I hope you will accept five per cent of the first year's royalties as your just commission."

It was an unnecessarily handsome offer, but Mr. Brand was not particularly cordial in his thanks. He would have preferred, on the whole, to receive nothing whatever for his assistance, and so be able to announce that Labour (himself) had done the work, while Capital (Philip) drew the profits.

Early in the afternoon, after a crowded morning in the office, Philip ordered round the service-car and set off upon his trial trip. First of all he tested his Brake in the surging torrent of Oxford Street. In this enterprise he received invaluable assistance from that strange animal, the pedestrian, and wondered for the hundredth time, as he eluded a panic-stricken party of shoppers who had darted out of Marshall and Snelgrove's apparently for the express purpose of getting run over, why it is that the ordinary citizen—even the self-confident Cockney—who desires to cross a crowded street should invariably put his head well down and run rather than keep it well up and walk. However, he was gratified to find that the Brake performed its duties without undue suddenness and held the car without apparent effort.

At the Marble Arch he turned into the Park, and gliding sedately past the long rows of green chairs, emerged at Albert Gate and sped down the Fulham Road. Presently he was across Putney Bridge. Twenty minutes later he cleared Kingston, and leaving Suburbia, with its tramlines and other impedimenta, far behind him, headed joyously for the Surrey hills. [pg 25

It was a perfect afternoon in June, and Philip, who for some reason was in a reminiscent mood, wandered back in his thoughts to his first motor ride—that ecstatic and epoch-making journey in Mr. Mablethorpe's fiery chariot, Boanerges of blessed memory.

Boanerges, alas, was no more. A fighter to the last, he had met his Waterloo more than two years ago in a one-sided but heroic combat with a Pantechnicon furniture-van. Always a strategist, Boanerges had taken the van in the rear, charging through its closed doors with devastating effect and recoiling into the roadway after the impact, with the first fruits of victory, in the shape of a wash-hand stand, adhering firmly to his crumpled radiator. But his triumph was momentary. The radiator stood gaping open; the cooling waters imprisoned therein gushed forth; the temperature of Boanerges rose to fever-heat; and as the faithful engine refused under any conditions to stop running, the whole sizzling fabric rapidly heated itself to redness and finally burst into flame, furnishing the inhabitants of Maida Vale with the finest and most pestiferous bonfire ever seen in Watling Street. So perished Boanerges, and the wash-hand stand with him. *Pax cineribus.*

Roaming further down the avenues of remembrance, Philip came next to the *affaire* Pegs, and the house on Hampstead Heath. Performing a brief sum in mental arithmetic, he calculated that Pegs would now be about twenty-two. Perhaps she was married by this time. Indeed, it was highly probable, for Montagu Falconer was not precisely the sort of person with whom one would choose to dwell longer than was absolutely necessary. Still, it was odd to think of such a little girl being married. He recalled some of their quaint childish conversations, and was conscious of a sudden *desiderium*—there is no exact word for it in English—for the days that were no more. It would be pleasant, he reflected, to have some one beside him now—especially some one with kind brown eyes and wavy hair—to cheer him with her presence and act as a repository for his private thoughts and ambitions. However, his own proper Lady would come along some day. Would she be like Pegs, he wondered? [pg 25

He touched the accelerator with his foot, and the car began to breast the three-mile slope of Wickmore Hill. It was on the farther side that he proposed to test his Brake.

Meanwhile, along a road running almost parallel with Philip's and ultimately converging on Wickmore Hill itself, came another car. It was a Britannia, of a four-year-old pattern. It was driven by a gentleman with a yellow beard, into which streaks of grey had made their way. Beside him sat a girl. The gentleman, her father, had just completed a sulphurous summary of the character of the man who had designed the carburettor of the car—not because of any inherent defect in the carburettor itself, but because the gentleman, for a variety of reasons, the most cogent of which was an entire ignorance of the elements of motor mechanics, had twice stopped his engine in the course of five miles. [pg 25

Presently they emerged from the side road on to the summit of Wickmore Hill. The gentleman stopped the car by a fierce application of the brakes.

"I shall write to the band of brigands who sold me this condemned tumbril," he announced, "and ask for my money back."

"Considering that we have had the car for nearly four years now," remarked his daughter calmly, "won't they think we have been rather a long time making up our minds about it?"

"Don't be ridiculous! How could I detect the fault when I had never driven the car myself until to-day?" snapped the car's owner.

"I should think," said the girl, "that if there had been a fault Adams would have noticed it."

This apparently harmless observation roused quite a tempest.

"Adams? That numskull! That bumpkin! Haven't I been compelled to dismiss Adams from my service for gross incompetence only yesterday? How would *he* be likely to notice faults in a car?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," was the unruffled reply, "except that he was a trained mechanic and a good driver."

At this moment a Gabriel horn fluted melodiously in the distance. Philip was coming up behind them, climbing the hill at thirty miles an hour. Seeing a car in front of him at a standstill, he [pg 25
slowed down punctiliously and glanced in an enquiring fashion at its occupants as he slid past.

"Filthy road-hog!" bellowed the gentleman at the wheel; and Philip went on his way.

The gentleman turned to his daughter.

"Now, let's have no more nonsense about Adams," he said. "I admit he had a wife and four children, but you can hardly hold me responsible for that. Moreover, he was a yahoo. He decorated the interior of the garage—my garage—with chromolithographs, and his wife kept wax fruit under a glass case in her parlour window. I have dismissed him, and there is an end of it. Let us cease to be sentimental or maudlin upon the subject."

"You might have given him a character," said the girl.

"If I had," replied her father grimly, "he would never have obtained a situation again."

The girl changed the subject.

"Don't you think," she said, "that if we are really going to call on the Easts, we had better be getting on? And go gently. The foot-brake is a good deal worn, and the side-brake won't hold this heavy car if it gets on the run down this hill."

"If there is one thing," replied her amiable papa, "about this miserable and untrustworthy vehicle which can be relied upon at all, it is the efficiency of the brakes."

They set off with a jerk.

Meanwhile Philip, a little startled at the reception accorded to his tacit offer of assistance, was [pg 25
running down Wickmore Hill. It was a long descent—nearly three miles—but was not steep, and there were no sharp curves until near the bottom. It was a useful spot for brake-tests.

"I wonder who that old ass was," mused Philip. "Rum bird. One of our cars, too. There was something familiar about his voice. Road-hog, indeed!" Philip grunted indignantly, for he was a virtuous motorist. "Now I will really hog it a bit: this is a lovely piece of road. I'll let the old car rip for a couple of hundred yards and then see what the Ought-to-Scrap-It will do. There was a girl with him, too. I wonder what her face was like, behind that thick blue veil. Now, then, old friend, put your back into it!" He patted the steering-wheel affectionately. "Off you go!... No, steady! Wait a minute."

He closed down the throttle, for another car was coming down the hill behind him, and he intended to let it pass in order to have a clear road for his own operations. He looked round.

"What in thunder—" he began.

All was not well with the oncoming car. The horn was being blown unceasingly, and some one appeared to be shouting. As Philip looked, he saw that it was the Britannia car which he had passed at the top of the hill. It was going thirty miles an hour and swaying a little from side to side. Next moment it was past him.

The gentleman at the wheel turned to Philip as they shot by.

"We are running away, damn you!" he bawled.

It was what geometricians call a self-evident proposition, though why Philip should be damned [pg 25
because an incompetent stranger had allowed his car to get out of control was not readily apparent. Still, there was no time to sift the matter. Something must be done—promptly—or there would be a hideous disaster. Besides, the man at the wheel was no stranger. Philip recognized him now.

Philip's foot came down upon the accelerator, and the long low car leaped down the hill. Philip's mind was suddenly and tensely clear. There was only one thing to do, and the Meldrum Ought-to-Scrap-It, Don't-You-Forget-It Brake would have to do it. Otherwise—!

"Lucky there's no sharp turn for nearly two miles," he muttered to himself between his locked teeth. "Pray God we meet nothing coming up the other way! Now to get past! My word, they are swinging!"

Next moment he was abreast of the flying car.

"Get right behind me, if you can," he shouted, "and I'll try to stop you."

The only response to this appeal was another swerve on the part of the runaway, in avoiding which Philip nearly cannoned into a tree at the side of the road. The gentleman with the beard appeared to have lost his head altogether. His efforts to avoid disaster were now limited to swearing volubly and blowing his horn. Philip noted that the side-brake was full on; but it seemed to have little effect in checking the car.

"Stick to your *wheel*, you fool!" he shouted with the full strength of his lungs.

The gentleman responded with a fresh outburst of vocal and instrumental exuberance. But [pg 25
suddenly, just as Philip shot ahead, the girl in the blue veil leaned over and gripped the wheel in her two hands. Her parent immediately relinquished his hold altogether, and devoted his undivided attention to the horn.

Then followed the fullest and most eventful minute of Philip's life.

He was ahead now—going perhaps fifty miles an hour, but clear in front of the other car. He knew he must act at once, for there was barely half a mile of straight road left, and there were two sharp turns at the foot of the hill. What he had to do must be done instantaneously, and called for superb driving. He wondered if the girl behind could hold on long enough to give him a chance. To steer a car steadily from any position except the driver's seat is a difficult enough performance, but to accomplish it when the seat is occupied by a gesticulating lunatic is almost a physical impossibility. Still, Philip had had time to note the prompt and decisive way in which this girl had grasped his purpose and carried out his instructions. He felt somehow that those small gloved hands could be trusted to cling gamely on until the end of all things.

Glancing back, he saw that the other car was now right behind him—seven yards or so. The moment had come—the inventor's moment.

"I told Timothy it would stop a motor-bus," he observed to himself. "We'll see if it will stop two cars!"

The Brake was controlled by a switch upon the steering-pillar. The farther the switch was [pg 25
pulled over the stronger became the current which supplied the Brake's magnetic force. But it was not required yet. Philip hastily jammed on the side-brake, which, though it could not check, sensibly moderated the headlong speed of his car; and then, getting both hands back to the steering-wheel, braced himself, and leaning well back, waited for the impact of the runaway.

It came, but not too severely. By good luck or good management the pursuing car struck Philip's fairly and squarely in the back, and the two raced on together down the hill, locked together like engine and tender, the sorely handicapped little *chauffeuse* behind exerting all her small strength to keep her leading wheels from slewing round. The shock of collision, coming where it did, sent a thrill of satisfaction coursing up Philip's spine.

"Oh, well done, well done, little girl, whoever you are!" he murmured enthusiastically. "That gives us a Chinaman's chance, anyhow. Now!"

He pulled the switch of the Brake slowly over, three parts of the way.

For a moment nothing seemed to happen; and then—oh, rapture—the rocking cars began to slow down. The Brake was answering to the call. The strain was immense, but the work was good. On they tore, but more slowly and yet more slowly. They were barely going twenty-five miles an hour now.

Philip leaned hard back, gripping the wheel, and exulted. They were going to stop. The Brake
was proved. Suddenly his eye caught a glimpse of a red triangle. They were coming to the turns— [pg 25
sooner than he expected, for the pace had been terrific, and the whole incident had barely lasted a hundred seconds as yet.

Well, they would just manage it, he calculated, provided that the smoking brake-shoes held out. They were running at a comparatively moderate pace by this time. A single car could have taken the approaching corner comfortably. The danger lay in the likelihood that the car behind would skid. Still, the little girl was steering like a Trojan. They ought to get off with a shaking at the worst.

Round to the left they swung. Philip, glancing over his shoulder, could see the girl behind frantically wrestling with her steering-wheel. Next moment they were round. She had succeeded. The road was almost level now, but the second corner was imminent, and in the reverse direction, for this was what was technically known as an "S" turn.

Philip pulled his brake-switch into the very last notch and put his wheel hard over to the right.

What happened next he never rightly knew. His car took the corner well enough. But then, instead of proceeding upon its appointed way, it continued to come round, and still farther round, in a giddy, sickening circle, until it threatened to mount the bank beside the road. Philip promptly spun his wheel over to the left, but all in vain. Next moment his car was right across the road; for the car behind, instead of following its leader round the bend, had pursued a straight course, pushing the tail of Philip's long chassis before it. Philip could feel his back-tyres sliding sideways over the smooth asphalt. He felt utterly helpless. The Brake could do no more. It was not designed [pg 25
to prevent cars from running away laterally.

Suddenly there came a loud report. "Back tyre!" muttered Philip mechanically—and the car gave a sudden lurch to the left. Then, without warning, it turned completely upside down. The other car, like a victor who sets his foot upon the neck of the vanquished, mounted proudly on the wreck of its prostrate preserver, and there poised itself—stationary at last.

Philip, unable to free himself, went over with his car. "I rather fancy the old man must have been putting his oar in again," he said to himself, as the road rose suddenly up to meet him.

So the Meldrum Automatic Electro-Magnetic Brake was proved. When they examined the car afterwards it was found that though the brake-shoes were scorched and damaged beyond recall, the Brake itself was in perfect order.

The other car was hardly injured. Its occupants were unhurt.

But Philip did not know this. He had ceased to take any active interest in the proceedings.

Only for one brief moment during the subsequent twenty-four hours did he exhibit any sign of intelligence at all. This was when he woke up on his way back to London. He found himself lying in a smooth-running vehicle of some kind. The light was uncertain, and his vision was somewhat obscured by bandages; but he was dimly conscious that some one was sitting beside him—close [pg 26
beside him.

He made an inarticulate sound. Instantly the figure stirred and a face came very close to his.

Philip surveyed the face gravely, and remarked:—

"Hallo, Pegs!"

Then everything became blank again.

BOOK THREE
OMNIA VINCIT!

CHAPTER XXI

THE BIG THING

I

"NINE o'clock, sir."

The pert young housemaid entered Philip's bedroom, deposited a basin of hot water beside his bed, drew up the blinds, surveyed Tite Street, Chelsea, in a disparaging fashion, and announced that it was a nice day for the ducks.

Philip, gathering from this observation that the weather was inclined to be inclement, replied sleepily but politely that rain made little or no difference to his plans at present.

"I dare say," retorted the housemaid. "But it's me afternoon out. And please, sir," she added, recollecting herself, "Miss Marguerite wants to know if you are ready for your breakfast."

"Thank you," said Philip. "In a very few minutes."

When the housemaid had departed, he sat up in bed as completely as splints and bandages would permit, and prepared for breakfast. Then he lay back in bed and waited, with his eyes fixed unwinkingly upon the door.

Presently there was a rattle of silver and crockery outside, accompanied by a cheerfully whistled tune, and breakfast entered upon a tray.

Behind the tray came Peggy Falconer, who had been Philip's hostess now for the best part of three weeks. [pg 26

She greeted her patient with a maternal smile, and enquired:—

"Slept well?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Leg troublesome?"

"No. It seems to be joining up in first-class style now."

"Concussion all gone?"

Philip knuckled his head vigorously all over, to show that his skull was once more free from dents.

"In that case," announced Peggy, "I may possibly let you have some letters to read. But I shall wait until the doctor has seen you."

Philip, who had no desire whatever to receive letters,—nor would have, until Fate separated him again from Miss Peggy Falconer,—thanked his hostess meekly, and proceeded to decapitate an egg.

"Do you feel strong enough to receive a visitor to-day?" continued Peggy.

"Who? Tim?"

"I didn't mean Tim, though I haven't the slightest doubt that he will call," said Peggy, with an enigmatic smile. "This is a new visitor—Miss Leslie. She used to be mother's greatest friend, and—and she has always been very good to me. I should like you to know her."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by a roar from the foot of the stairs.

"That is Dad," explained Peggy, quite needlessly.

Montagu Falconer invariably adopted this method of announcing his readiness for breakfast. A commotion upon the ground floor merely signified to Philip the intelligence that it was about half-past nine, or half-past one, or eight in the evening. [pg 26

"I am afraid I am keeping you," he said.

"Quite right," assented Peggy. "You are. Eat up your breakfast like a good little boy, and perhaps I will come and see you again later."

And she sped out of the room and down the stair, to quell a bread-riot. A woman with two men on her hands is, indeed, a busy person.

Philip munched his breakfast in utter content. He was convalescent now, though the first week or so had been a bad time. He was only intermittently conscious, and his injuries had combined to render sleep a nightmare and wakefulness a throbbing torment. But he would have gone through it all again, and yet again, cheerfully, provided he could have remained in the hands of his present nurse. In the dim and distant past he had recollections of another attendant,—a deft and capable lady in a blue-and-white uniform,—but she had disappeared long ago (friction with the master of the house being the cause), and his whole illness and recovery were summed up to Philip in the single word, Peggy.

For the Big Thing had happened. Philip was in love. His long-expected Lady had come to him at last—or rather, come back to him, after an interval of years—grown up into a slim, elfin, brown-eyed piece of Dresden china. She had gathered him up, crushed and broken, from the middle of a [pg 26
Surrey highway, and had conveyed him straight to her home in Chelsea, to be nursed and mothered back into coherent existence. This, be it noted, in the face of a strongly-worded and most enthusiastic eulogy (from her parent) of the public hospitals of the metropolis.

But Peggy had been quite firm.

"Dad," she said, "I don't think you quite realise that he has saved your life."

"If he has," said Montagu Falconer magnificently, "he shall be suitably rewarded."

Peggy eyed her progenitor dispassionately.

"If you are thinking of tipping him half-a-sovereign," she said, "I advise you not to. I happen to know him. Now don't be a silly old curmudgeon, but go and see if the ambulance is coming."

Montagu obeyed, grumbling. There were only two women of his acquaintance who did not fear him, and Peggy was one. In fact, Peggy feared nothing, except spiders and the revelation of her own feelings.

II

"And how is the *tibia* of Theophilus this morning?"

Timothy, entering the room like a gust of ozone, sat down heavily by the patient's bedside and slapped the counterpane heartily.

"Just making both ends meet," replied the owner of the tibia, shrinking nervously towards the wall.

"Good!" said Timothy. "And is it well with the solar plexus?" [pg 26

"Try again," said Philip.

Timothy paused, thoughtfully.

"I was under the impression that it was the solar plexus," he said in a troubled voice. "I know it was a heavenly body of some kind. Ah, I have it. The semilunar cartilage! How is the semilunar cartilage this morning?"

Philip reported favourably.

"Cavities in the cranium now permanent, I gather?" continued Tim sympathetically. "Prospect of ultimate mental weakness confirmed—what? Never mind! I'll get my late boss to provide you with a permanent post under Government."

"My skull," replied the patient mildly, "is all right, except when you make such an infernal noise."

Timothy was contrite at once.

"Noise? Tut-tut! Am I making a noise? This will never do. Nervous and irritable patient—eh? Must be kept quiet. I see. We will get some tanbark down outside. *Street Cries Prohibited!* and so on. But how are you getting along generally, old thing? How are all your organs? Fairly *crescendo*, I trust."

"Leave my organs alone, curse you!" growled the invalid.

"Certainly," said Timothy soothingly. "Organs *and* Street Cries Prohibited! We'll have a notice to that effect pinned up on your bedroom door. It will please Falconer. By the way, how is—er, Miss Falconer, this morning?"

Thereafter the conversation pursued a line far remote from Philip's health. Needless to say, the impressionable Timothy had fallen an instantaneous victim to Peggy. Striding about the room, absently munching some grapes which he had brought as a present for Philip, Timothy embarked upon a whole-hearted panegyric of his present adored one, heedless of the fact that the same panegyric had been delivered, *mutatis mutandis*, to the same audience by the same rhapsodist many times before. [pg 26

Philip lay back and listened contentedly—nay, approvingly. He experienced no feeling of jealousy. No man, he considered, could know Peggy Falconer without loving her, so why blame Timothy?

"Have you noticed the neat little way she puts her head on one side, and smiles right up at you, when she wants something done that you don't want to do?" enquired the infatuated youth.

"What sort of thing?" asked Philip, glad to discuss Peggy in any aspect.

"Oh, going away, and things like that," said Timothy, naïvely. "And her complexion, and her arms—my word! Have you seen her in evening kit? Fancy you knowing her when you were kids! I suppose you were great pals?"

"I dare say," admitted the reticent Philip.

"Only in a childish sort of way, though, I suppose?" pursued Timothy, with a touch of anxiety.

Before his suspicions could be allayed there came a vigorous but rhythmatic tattoo played upon the tiny brass knocker of the door.

Tum-ti-tum-ti-tiddle-i-um, Tum-ti-tum-ti-tum-tum! [pg 26
Officers' Wives getting pudding and pies,
Soldiers' Wives get skilly!

it said. This was Peggy's regulation way of announcing to her patient that she was about to enter the room. When her hands were full she whistled it. Philip knew every beat of it by heart.

After the usual brief interval the door opened and Peggy entered, to announce to Timothy, with her head upon one side in the manner which he had just described with so much tenderness and enthusiasm, that it was time for him to depart.

"I have another visitor," she said.

The newcomer proved to be a gigantic Scotswoman, of forty or more, with humorous blue eyes and a slow, comprehending smile.

"This is Miss Leslie, Philip," announced Peggy. "Mr. Rendle, I want to show you our front door. The exterior is greatly admired."

III

Miss Leslie sat down in the chair vacated by Timothy, and remarked, in a soft Highland drawl: "It is very shocking, being left alone with a young man like this."

She smiled, and Philip's heart warmed to her at once. He felt instinctively that Miss Leslie was going to be a less bewildering companion than Miss Babs Duncombe, for instance.

"My only excuse for my unmaidenly conduct," continued the visitor, "is that I am a very old friend of Peggy's. I have known her ever since she was so high." She indicated Peggy's infant stature by a gesture. [pg 27

"So have I," said Philip proudly. "Did you know?"

No, Miss Leslie did not know: Peggy had not told her; so Philip, with wonderful fluency for him, explained the circumstances under which he had first entered the house of Falconer.

Miss Leslie chuckled.

"It would be a fine ploy for Montagu," she said, "scarifying a little boy. But I am glad you met Peggy's mother, if only for five minutes."

"She was very kind to me during those five minutes," remarked Philip.

"She was my greatest friend," said Miss Leslie simply. "But she has been dead for seven years now. I suppose you knew that?"

Philip nodded: Peggy had told him.

So the conversation proceeded comfortably, understandingly. Jean Leslie was one of those women in whose presence a man can put his soul into carpet-slippers. It was not necessary to select light topics or invent small-talk for her benefit. She appeared to know all about Philip, and the Brake, and the accident. She also gave Philip a good deal of fresh information about Peggy and her father.

"I hoped," she said, "that when Montagu was made an A.R.A. he would be less of a bear. But he is just the same. Success came too late, poor body. He is as morose and pernickety and feckless as ever. Peggy is hard put to it sometimes."

"I expect you help her a good deal," remarked Philip, with sudden intuition.

Miss Leslie smiled grimly. [pg 27

"Yes," she said, "I put my oar in occasionally. Montagu dislikes me, I am sorry to say. He is not afraid of Peggy,—nor she of him, for that matter,—but she is too soft with him: so whenever I see her overdriven I just step in and get myself disliked a little more. But he usually comes to me when he is in trouble, for all that. I am the only person who has any patience with him."

After that they talked about London, and Philip's work, and the future of automobilism. Miss Leslie apparently saw nothing either "pathetic" or "quaint" or "tragic" in a man liking to talk about what interested him. At any rate, she drew him out and lured him on. For all her spinsterhood, Jean Leslie knew something of masculine nature. She knew that the shortest way to the heart of that self-centred creature Man is to let him talk about himself, and his work, and his ambitions. So Philip discoursed, with all his shyness and reticence thawed out of him, upon subjects which must have made his visitor's head ache, but which won her heart none the less. That is the way of a woman. She values the post of confidante so highly that she will endure a man's most uninteresting confidences with joy, because of the real compliment implied by their bestowal.

"I am a silly sentimental old wife," she mused to herself afterwards, "but it warmed my heart to have that boy turning to me for advice on things I knew nothing about. It would be good for him, too. He would never talk like that to Peggy; he would be afraid of wearying her. I do not matter."

CHAPTER XXII

THE INARTICULATE KNIGHT

I

Philip departed from Tite Street, Chelsea, without having invited Peggy to go with him. Getting married, except in the case of the very young, is not such a simple business as it appears. The difficulty lies in the fact that a man's conception of the proper method of wooing is diametrically opposed to that of a maid; and since the maid has the final word in the matter, it stands to reason that the campaign must ultimately be conducted upon her lines and not her swain's. Hence Romeo usually finds himself compelled, at the very outset, to abandon a great many preconceived and cherished theories, and adapt himself to entirely unfamiliar conditions of warfare, and he usually suffers a good deal in the process.

On paper, the contest should be of the most one-sided description; for the defending force (as represented by the lady) is at liberty to choose its own ground and precipitate or ward off an

assault as it pleases, while the invader has to manœuvre clumsily and self-consciously in the open, exposed to shafts of ridicule, fiery days of humiliation, and frosty nights of indifference. He marches and countermarches, feeling sometimes tender, sometimes fierce, not seldom ridiculous; but never, never, never sure of his ground. Truly it is a one-sided business—on paper. But woman [pg 27
has no regard for paper. Under the operation of a mysterious but merciful law of nature, it is her habit, having placed herself in an absolutely impregnable position, to abandon her defences without warning or explanation—not infrequently, at the moment when the dispirited lover at her gates is upon the point of striking camp and beating a melancholy retreat, marching out, bag and baggage, into the arms of her dazed and incredulous opponent.

But Philip, being unversed in the feminine instinct of self-defence, did not know this. To him, from a distance, Love had appeared as a Palace Beautiful standing on the summit of a hill—a fairy fabric of gleaming minarets, slender lines, and soft curves—a haven greatly to be desired by a lonely pilgrim. Now that he had scaled the height and reached his destination he found nothing but frowning battlements and blank walls. In other words, he had overlooked the difference between arrival and admission. To sum up the situation in the language which would undoubtedly have been employed by that master of terse phraseology, Mr. Timothy Rendle, Philip was "up against it."

There is nothing quite so impregnable as the reserve of a nice-minded girl. The coquette and the sentimental miss are easy game: there is never any doubt as to what they expect of a man; and man, being man, sees to it that they are not disappointed. But to make successful love to a girl who is neither of these things calls for some powers of intuition and a thick skin. It is the latter priceless qualification which usually pulls a man through. Philip possessed rather less than the [pg 27
average male equipment of intuition, and his skin was deplorably thin. Peggy meant so much to him that he shrank from putting everything to the touch at once. Like all those who have put all their eggs in one basket, he feared his fate too much. So he temporised: he hung back, and waited. If Peggy had ever given him an opening he would have set his teeth and plunged into it, blindly and ponderously; but she never did. She was always kind, always cheerful, always the best of companions; but she kept steadily to the surface of things and appeared to be entirely oblivious of the existence of the suppressed volcano which sighed and rumbled beneath her feet.

Philip became acquainted, too, with the minor troubles of the love-lorn. If a letter lay on Peggy's plate at breakfast he speculated gloomily as to the sex of the sender. He sat through conversations in the course of which his Lady appeared to make a point of addressing every one present but himself. He saw what Mr. Kipling calls "Christian kisses" wasted upon other girls and unresponsive babies. He would pass from the brief rapture of having his invitation to a drive in the Park accepted to the prolonged bitterness of having to take the drive in company with a third party, casually coöpted into the expedition by Peggy at the last moment. He purchased little gifts, and kept them for days, not venturing to offer them for fear of a rebuff. Once or twice he embarked upon carefully prepared conversational openings of an intimate character, only to have these same caught up, tossed about, and set aside with unfeeling frivolity by the lady to whom they were [pg 27
addressed. He sometimes wondered what had become of the Pegs he had once known—the wistful, dreamy, confiding little girl with whom he had discussed all things in heaven and earth under the wintry skies of Hampstead Heath. Mental myopia is a common characteristic of young men in Philip's condition.

So he departed from Tite Street without having delivered himself, and returned to his own place. And yet not even that. For the garret in Wigmore Street was no more. One day during his convalescence he had desired certain books and papers, so Peggy and Miss Leslie made an expedition to fetch them.

They drove up to the door of the house, and having ascended to the fourth floor, let themselves into Philip's retreat with his latchkey.

"It is terribly thrilling," observed the romantic Miss Leslie, "to find yourself alone in a man's rooms."

Peggy said nothing, but looked round the dusty sitting-room with wondering eyes. She thought of her own private den at home, with its pretty curtains, soft cushions, fresh flowers, and the thousand useless but companionable knick-knacks that make a woman's room look cosy. This gaunt, pictureless, carpetless eyrie made her shiver. There was not even a grate in the fireplace: only a rusty gas-stove.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Miss Leslie. "Can the man not afford a cover for the table? And where does he sit if a visitor comes?"

She disappeared into Philip's bedroom, and returned dragging a portmanteau. [pg 27

"The only chair in there has a leg missing," she mentioned. "Take the armchair, child."

Peggy obeyed, and Miss Leslie, seating herself cautiously upon the portmanteau, enquired:—

"How long has the creature been living here?"

"Two or three years, I think."

"Has he no friends?" continued Miss Leslie scathingly.

"I don't know, I am sure."

"No mother, of course?"

"No."

Miss Leslie nodded.

"I have always maintained," she observed, "that there ought to be a law appointing women inspectors to go round and look after the rooms of young men that live alone in London. Their motives would be misunderstood, of course, but it would be worth while, all the same. Is there a servant-body of any kind in this place?"

"He says that a woman comes in every morning and tidies up."

"I should like to meet her," said Miss Leslie grimly. "I expect she could a tale unfold. Where does he get his food, and how does he eat it? Off the floor?"

"I don't know," said Peggy, who had sat very silent through this tirade. "I—I had no idea it was as bad as this."

They invaded the tiny pantry. Here they found a teapot, together with a cup and saucer, two plates, a knife, a fork, and a spoon. There was also a small frying-pan, and a tarnished cruet-stand. [pg 27
A very dingy dishcloth hung upon a nail at the back of the door. There were receptacles which had evidently at one time contained tea, sugar, and salt, but they were empty. The lady who tidied up had seen to that. The place was dusty, and smelt of mice.

"And he told me only yesterday that he was very happy here," remarked Miss Leslie. "Poor, poor body!"

They returned to the sitting-room, and, having selected the necessary books from a heap upon the floor, turned to go. But Miss Leslie's attention was arrested by something upon the mantel-piece.

"Bless me," she exclaimed, "what's that?"

"That" was the Meldrum Carburettor, the original model—the solitary ornament of the apartment.

"He invented it, I think," said Peggy. "Didn't he tell you about it?"

"He did," replied Miss Leslie, "several times. Well, let us be stepping. This place gives me the creepies."

She marched out of the room and began to descend the staircase. Peggy, hanging back for a moment, unexpectedly produced a diminutive pocket-handkerchief from her belt, and put it furtively to one of its uses.

After that, flinging a defiant glance round the empty room, she picked up the books from the table and turned once more to the door. Suddenly her eye was caught by a gleam of colour at her feet. It was a pink carnation—one of a small bunch which Philip had given to her. He had bought [pg 27
them in the street during his first outing in a bath-chair, and after keeping them for three days had taken the flowers in one hand and his courage in the other and made the presentation. They were slightly faded—a fact upon which their recipient had not failed to comment. Indeed, she had accused the donor, to his great distress, of having bought them second-hand.

Well, here was one of the bunch lying on the dusty floor: Peggy had dislodged it from her belt in replacing her handkerchief.

She picked it up, and gazed thoughtfully about the room. Then she tiptoed across to the mantelpiece, and proceeded to ornament the Meldrum Carburettor with a floral device. Then she ran guiltily down stairs after Miss Leslie.

II

"Philip," enquired Miss Falconer of her patient that evening, "how much money have you got?"

Philip ruminated.

"I don't quite know," he said. "How much do you want?"

"I want enough to find decent rooms for you to live in. Can you afford it?"

"I suppose so. I don't spend half my income at present. My father left me a good deal, and I have my salary as well. But what is the matter with my present abode?"

"It is poky, and dirty, and unfurnished, and quite impossible," said Peggy with finality. "You must move into something better."

"The rooms suited me well enough," objected Philip. "I got through a good lot of work there. [pg 27
Besides, they were handy for Oxford Street."

"Nevertheless, you will leave them," announced Peggy.

Philip glowed comfortably. He liked being ordered about by his Lady. It showed that she took more than a passing interest in him, he argued.

"If I do," he said cunningly, "will you come and see me there sometimes? Tea, or something? You could bring Miss Leslie," he added.

"Mayhap," replied Peggy indulgently. "But listen: I have a plan. I think you and Tim Rendle ought to take rooms together. At present he is in a very stupid, expensive set of chambers in Park Place, wasting a lot of money and getting into bad habits. You could club together and take a lovely little flat, say in Knightsbridge, and have a proper servant and decent meals. Will you? Philip, what are you frowning about?"

Philip's little glow of happiness had died away as suddenly as it came. That Peggy should make plans for his future was gratifying enough. But to be urged by one's Best Beloved to set up a permanent bachelor establishment is not an unmixed delight. Such a recommendation points in the wrong direction. Philip would have been better pleased had Peggy advised him to take a real house somewhere.

Besides, the mention of Timothy had spoiled everything. Not that Philip was jealous, but Timothy's inclusion in the scheme had shorn the situation of its romance at a single blow. For one [pg 28
foolish moment Philip had imagined that Peggy's concern for his welfare and comfort had their roots in deep soil; but now the whole enterprise stood revealed for what it was—a mere feminine plot: a piece of maternal officiousness. Timothy and Philip were to be put into chambers together—Timothy to brighten up that dull dog Philip, and Philip to act as a check upon that irresponsible young idiot Timothy. Hence the ungracious frown. But his spoken objections took a different line.

"Knightsbridge is a long way from Oxford Street," he said.

"I know," replied Peggy calmly. "That is why I chose it."

"Tim would rather interfere with my work," Philip continued.

"I know," repeated Peggy. "That is why I chose *him*! He will be a nice distraction."

"He will," growled Philip.

Suddenly Peggy flared up.

"Philip," she asked hotly, "why are you so cross? Don't you like Timothy?"

"Yes, of course, I do; but—"

"And wouldn't it be pleasant to have his company?"

"Yes, rather! But—"

"But what?"

Philip reddened.

"I don't know," he said helplessly. But he knew well enough, and so did Peggy.

"Then don't be a baby," she said severely. "It is not very nice of you, considering that I am only trying to make you comfortable and—" [pg 28

But Philip was already doing penance.

"Peggy," he burst out,—he called her Peggy because she called him Philip: they had never returned to "Pegs" and "Phil," although she sometimes addressed him as "Theophilus,"—"I am a brute. Forgive me!"

Peggy relented, and smiled.

"No, you are not a brute," she said; "you are just a child. However, since you are an invalid, I forgive you. But you must not be sulky when people take trouble on your behalf. You are getting a big boy now, you know! Say 'thank you,' nicely!"

"Thank you," said Philip obediently.

"That is *much* better," remarked Peggy approvingly. "But tell me, why don't you want to settle down in nice comfy rooms with Tim?"

Philip hesitated, and his throat went dry. Was this his opening—at last?

"I don't want to settle down—in that way," he said hoarsely. "Peggy, I—"

"Shall I tell you why?" interposed Peggy. "Because you are far too much wrapped up in your work. You work too hard. You think of nothing but Oxford Street and—and carburettors, and things. I want you—I mean, you ought to go about more, and see people, and enjoy yourself, and have a lot of friends."

"I don't want—" declared Philip rebelliously.

"Think how interesting and amusing you could be, if you went about and met more people," continued Peggy. [pg 28

She got home that time. Philip winced.

"I'm a dull dog, I know," he said.

"No, you are not," said Peggy; "so don't be foolish." Then, softening again, for she had averted the danger, she continued gently:—

"All I meant was that it would do you good to have a little more leisure and distraction. 'All work and no play,' you know! Now, will you look about for nice rooms when you get well—for yourself and Tim?"

"Yes—if you will help," replied Philip, with great valour.

"Of course I will," said Peggy heartily; "but not if you are going to be cross with me."

Philip assured her that she need never again have any fears upon that score. And he was as good as his word.

CHAPTER XXIII

MAINLY COMMERCIAL

As soon as Philip's bodily mechanism would permit, flat-hunting expeditions were organised, and eventually resulted in the leasing of an *appartement* near Albert Gate. The rooms stood high up, overlooking the Park, and were described by the agent and Timothy as "a lovely little bachelor suite," and "a self-contained monkey-house" respectively.

Furnishing followed. One fine morning a party consisting of Peggy, Miss Leslie, Philip, and Timothy set out to purchase household equipment of every kind. It was a disastrous expedition. All four were in a mood for enjoyment, and their high spirits, as very often happens when the young of the two sexes combine to transact business jointly, took the form of helpless, speechless, and unseemly laughter. If a majestic shop-walker, addressing the party as a whole, enquired what he might have the pleasure of showing to them, every one waited for some one else to reply: then, after a pause, every one replied at once. An untimely explosion followed, and the party turned on its heel and hurried, panic-stricken, into the street.

Timothy was at the bottom of the trouble. He began the day by marching into Harrods's and ordering a funeral; repudiating the contract, after ten minutes of ghoulish detail, upon the plea of having suddenly remembered that the deceased had expressed a desire to be buried at sea, and asking instead to be directed to the Canadian canoe department. [pg 28

Later, he conducted his followers to the establishment of an extremely select and most expensive bootmaker in St. James's. The whole party were ushered with much solemnity into an apartment upon the first floor—Timothy wearing a face of intense gravity, Philip in a gentle perspiration, and Peggy and Miss Leslie dumbly gripping one another's fingers. The room was plainly but expensively furnished. Upon a pedestal in one corner stood a plaster cast of a Royal foot.

Two serious gentlemen in frock-coats stood awaiting them. These, after providing chairs and offering a few observations upon the weather and the Parliamentary situation, inquired Timothy's pleasure.

"I want a Wellington boot," said Timothy.

The stouter of the two serious gentlemen touched a bell; whereupon a third gentleman in a frock-coat appeared.

"A pair of hunting-tops," announced the stout man.

The newcomer brought a small stool, and lowering himself upon knee with knightly grace, began to grope under Timothy's chair for one of Timothy's feet.

"Not for myself," explained Timothy. "For a grand-uncle of mine—Lieutenant-Colonel Busby, of the Indian Army."

"If the Colonel," suggested the senior frock-coat deferentially, "would favour us with a call, we could measure him for a pair more satis—" [pg 28

"Not a pair," corrected Timothy. "I said just one. My grand-uncle had the misfortune to lose a leg in Afghanistan in eighteen-sixty-seven, so naturally he does not require two boots. Besides, I doubt if he could call on you. He goes out very seldom now: he is almost bedridden, in fact. All he wants is a number nine Wellington boot. Have you got one?"

The frock-coats conferred in mysterious whispers, while the two ladies did not cease to cling to one another.

"We should be happy to make the boot, sir," was the final verdict. "Is it for the right foot or left?"

Timothy's face expressed the utmost dismay.

"I have entirely forgotten," he said. "It is unpardonably stupid of me."

He turned to the cowering Philip.

"Cousin Theophilus," he said, "can you recollect which leg it was that Uncle Hannibal lost?"

"The right, I think," said Philip hoarsely. "Not sure, though. Don't rely on me."

Tim turned to Peggy.

"Cousin Geraldine?" he enquired.

"The left, I believe," replied Peggy composedly.

Timothy gave a perplexed smile, and turned to Miss Leslie.

"We must leave it with you to decide, Aunt Keziah," he said. "What have you to say?"

"Honk, honk honk!" replied Aunt Keziah wildly. Timothy rose to his feet, and smiled [pg 28
apologetically upon the gentlemen in frock-coats.

"I fear," he said, "that there is nothing for it but to go home and look. Good-morning!"

After two hours of this sort of imbecility the troupe found itself consuming ices in Bond Street, having become possessed so far of two bath-mats and a waste-paper basket.

"Now we must be serious," announced Miss Leslie, wiping her eyes. She had learned to her cost this morning that no woman is ever too old to be immune from a fit of the giggles. "Mr. Rendle, will you kindly go home?"

Timothy's only reply was to dash out of the tea-shop and into an optician's on the other side of the street. Presently he returned, putting something in his pocket.

"Fall in and follow me!" he commanded.

"Where are we going to?" enquired Peggy, as the expedition meekly complied.

"International Furniture Company," was the brisk reply.

Timothy's dupes regarded one another more hopefully.

"That sounds like business," said Philip. "Come along!"

But Timothy's exuberance was not yet exhausted. On approaching the stately premises of the International Furniture Company he suddenly produced a pair of tinted spectacles from his pocket and put them on. Then, assuming the piping voice and humped shoulders of doddering senility, he [pg 28
took the scandalised Miss Leslie by the arm, and limping through the great doorway of the shop, demanded the immediate presence of the manager of the Antique Furniture Department.

On the appearance of that functionary, Tim bade him a courtly good-morning, and said:—

"I desire first of all to inspect your dining-room suites. We are setting this young couple"—indicating Philip, who flushed crimson, and Peggy, who exhibited no confusion whatever—"up in a flat."

The manager, a short-sighted young man with a nervous manner, after a startled inspection of the decrepit figure before him, turned upon his heel and led the way to the dining-room suites. Timothy hobbled after, leaning heavily upon Miss Leslie's arm and coughing asthmatically.

"Tim, you young ass," urged Philip, hot with shame on Peggy's account, "dry up!"

The relentless humourist took not the slightest notice. Instead, he addressed the back of the manager.

"The young folk!" he wheezed—"the young folk! The old story! The time comes when they must leave the nest. My little bird"—here he laid a palsied hand upon the shoulder of Peggy, who choked noisily—"has flown away at last. It took her a long time to find her wings,—at one time I thought she was never going to do it,—but all's well that ends well, as Will Shakespeare puts it. My little bird has found a nest of her own—with honest John, here; and damme! her old grandad is going to furnish it for her! Are these your dining-room suites? They don't make furniture like they did in my [pg 28
young days, when Bob Chippendale and Nick Sheraton were alive. I remember—"

"I like this oak table very much," said Miss Leslie to Philip, in a high and trembling voice. "I wonder if there are chairs to match it."

But before any business could be transacted the irrepressible octogenarian was off again.

"Dearest Pamela," he said affectionately to Miss Leslie, "how well I remember the day that we two bought our wedding furniture together! We made a handsome couple, you and I. You wore a crinoline, with a black bombazine tippet; and I was in nankeen overalls and a fob. I was a mad wag in those days: I remember I offered to fight the shopman to decide the price of a harpsichord—or

was it a spinet?—that I considered he asked too much for. But times have changed. I suppose you never fight your customers now to save chaffering, young man? If you do, all honour to you! I like to see ancient customs kept up." He surveyed the flinching vendor of dining-room suites with puckered eyes. "I am an old fellow now, and I fear I would hardly give you full measure. But if you have any inclination for a bout with the mufflers,"—a relentless hand descended upon the fermenting Philip and drew him forward,—"my son-in-law here, honest John—"

But the manager, murmuring something inarticulate about a telephone-call, turned tail and fled, his place being taken by a man of more enduring fibre.

And so on.

They got home about six, having purchased an imitation walnut wardrobe which they did not want. [pg 28

"We simply *had* to buy something after all that," said honest John.

A week later the flat was sufficiently furnished to be habitable, and the new tenants moved in.

It was about this time that Philip began to realise the portent and significance of a mysterious female figure, resembling an elderly and intensely respectable spectre, which had been dogging his footsteps and standing meekly aside for him upon staircases ever since he entered into possession. With the arrival of the furniture the apparition materialised into a diminutive and sprightly dame in a black bonnet, who introduced herself as Mrs. Grice, and asked that she and her husband might be employed as the personal attendants of Philip and Tim. The pair resided in some subterranean retreat in the basement, and their services, it appeared, were at the disposal of such of the tenants of the building as possessed no domestic staff of their own. Mrs. Grice could cook, darn, scrub, and dust; while Mr. Grice (whose impeccability might be gauged from the fact that he suffered slightly from gout and possessed a dress-suit) could wait at table and act as valet to the gentlemen.

Philip was alone when the assault was delivered, and capitulated at once, a natural inclination to wait until he had consulted Peggy being overridden by constitutional inability to say "No" to a lady. The bargain concluded, Mrs. Grice advanced briskly to practical details. [pg 29

"Now, sir," she said, "I see you 'ave your furniture comin' in. And very nice furniture, too," she added encouragingly. "But if you'll allow me, I should like to consult you about the fixtures. I always likes to be businesslike with my gentlemen. There's that curtain-pole over the window. That was given me by Sir Percy Peck, the gentleman what had the flat last. He said to me, just as he was leaving,—he was leaving to be married to Lady Ader Evings, and they sent me a pink ticket for the wedding, but I couldn't go, what with my daughter losing 'er 'usband about that time and Grice getting one of his legs, so it was wasted, not bein' transferable—well, he says to me, says Sir Percy: 'That curtain-pole is a present from me to you, Mrs. Grice.'"

The recipient of the departed Sir Percy's bounty paused to inhale a large quantity of sorely needed breath. Philip, who had written out a cheque only two days previously for all the fixtures in the flat, waited meekly.

"Now, sir," continued Mrs. Grice briskly, "what shall I do with that curtain-pole? Shall I 'ave it took down, or would it be any convenience to you to buy it from me?"

"I have an idea, Mrs. Grice," said Philip, plucking up courage, "that I took over all the fixtures from the landlord."

"Right, sir, *quite* right!" assented Mrs. Grice promptly. "But those were landlord's fixtures. I'm talking about tenant's fixtures. I dare say," she added indulgently, "that you didn't know about them. Perhaps you haven't taken a flat before. Well, Sir Percy, he says to me: 'That curtain-pole is a present from me to you, Mrs. Grice.' Now, sir, will you have that pole took down, or will you take it off me 'ands?" [pg 29

"After all," argued Philip to himself, "I daresay the old lady needs the money more than I do; and in any case she appears to think the rotten thing is hers, which will mean my getting another; so—"

"Certainly I will take it, Mrs. Grice," he said. "Er—how much do you want for it?"

At the mention of money Mrs. Grice became greatly flustered.

"Really, sir, I would rather leave it to you," she protested. "A gentleman knows more about such things than what I do. I am quite sure you will give me a fair price for it."

Philip, feeling perfectly certain that he would not, again pressed Mrs. Grice to name a figure. Finally the old lady overcame her extreme delicacy of feeling sufficiently to suggest ten shillings.

"But we must be fair about it, sir," she insisted. "I don't want to overcharge you." She paused, as if struck by a sudden thought. "I'll tell you what, sir,—we'll ask a third party!"

Next moment Mrs. Grice was at the door.

"Grice!" she called shrilly.

"Commin', Emmer," replied a husky voice, and Mr. Grice sidled into the room with uncanny suddenness.

"How much, Grice," enquired his helpmeet, pointing to the curtain-pole, "would you think was a fair price for that pole? A *fair* price, mind!" [pg 29

Mr. Grice fixed his wandering and watery eyes upon the article under consideration, and ruminated. Finally:—

"Ten shillin'," he said.

Mrs. Grice turned to Philip with a smile of delighted surprise.

"Well, I declare!" she exclaimed. "I was about right, after all, sir."

Philip, quite overwhelmed by this convincing coincidence of judgment, announced humbly that he would take the curtain-pole.

"I had better pay for it now," he said.

"One moment, sir, if you please!" replied Mrs. Grice.

Darting out on to the landing she reappeared almost instantly, heralded by a sonorous clang, carrying a bedroom ewer and basin.

"Now these things, sir," she announced, "belongs to Grice. They were Sir Percy's present to him. 'Grice,' he said, just as he was leaving to marry Lady Ader Evings, 'this jug and basin are yours now: they are my present from me to you.' Didn't he, Grice?"

Mr. Grice was understood to mumble assent. Mrs. Grice took another breath. It is hardly necessary to add that within the next thirty seconds Philip had become the reluctant owner of a chipped jug and basin, recently the property of a baronet.

Mrs. Grice swept on.

"Now, sir," she continued, with unabated vigour, "these fire-irons—"

But at this moment, to Philip's unspeakable relief, Timothy arrived, and took command of the situation at once. Philip put on his hat and went for a walk in the Park. [pg 29

"We had great fun," reported Timothy on his return. "The last thing she tried to sell me was the fireplace. (I think it was Sir Percy's parting gift to the cat.) I said that I had no money and that they had better take it away. That spiked her guns. And now, my lad, you are going to put on your best duds and come poodle-faking with me!"

CHAPTER XXIV

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

THE enterprise thus mysteriously designated turned out to be nothing worse than an afternoon reception, and was the first of many.

Philip, remembering why Peggy had sent him to live with Tim, began conscientiously to school himself to the rigours of a society life. He went everywhere and flinched at nothing. He learned to converse with the modern *ingénue* without feeling like an infant of five; he learned to endure the cross-examination of dowagers without looking as if his one idea was to bolt. He went to balls and crushes. He was introduced to Ranelagh, and became acquainted with mixed foursomes.

He did the thing thoroughly. It was all a means to an end, he felt. He was a dull dog: he had no parlour tricks. In Peggy's eyes, although in her kindness of heart she endeavoured to conceal the fact, he was only Most Excellent Theophilus, a worthy person. Ergo, he must overcome these defects in his character and then try his luck again. So he attached himself to that admitted social luminary, Tim Rendle, as a humble disciple, acquiring merit by abandoning some of his favourite recreations and going out at night when he would rather have been in bed.

It was an ingenuous and characteristic method of procedure, and it puzzled Peggy more than a little. [pg 29

"You are becoming quite a butterfly, Theophilus," she said to him one day. "I thought you did not like gadding about."

"Neither I do, very much," confessed Philip. "Excepting, of course, when—except at such times as—well, *now*, in fact!" he concluded bluntly.

They were walking along the Chelsea Embankment together on their way to the new flat,—completely equipped at last,—where Peggy and Miss Leslie were to be entertained at a great housewarming tea-party. It was the first time that they had been alone together for nearly a month.

"Thank you, kind sir," replied Peggy, with a gracious inclination of her head. "But why don't you like it? Isn't it pleasant to go out somewhere after a hard, dull day, and meet your friends, and talk about things that don't matter, and forget all about Oxford Street?"

"Yes," agreed Philip, "I suppose it is. I will confess this much: I know I should hate to go back to my old life at Wigmore Street now. I have widened out to that extent. But the worst of these social functions is that you have to put in a terrible lot of spadework before you get down to what you came out for."

"You mean supper?" suggested Peggy, with intentional flippancy. She found it difficult to control Philip's movements in conversation. He had no small talk. Introduce him to a topic, and in five minutes he had brushed aside the flimsy superficialities to which we are content to confine ourselves in our social encounters, and was digging heavily at the fundamental root of the matter. [pg 29

"No, not supper," replied Philip gravely. "I mean this. A man usually regards these gatherings as a means to an end. He doesn't turn out after a hard day's work, to stand wedged in a hot room for hours on end, just because he likes it. He does not want to meet a chattering mob in the least. But he does want to meet one particular person very much, indeed; and perhaps the only way in which he can achieve his object is by plunging into a crowded room and talking to fifty bores first. It seems a terrible waste of energy,—like installing an entire electric light plant to illuminate one globe,—but sometimes it is the only way. And usually it is worth it!"

He paused, feeling a little surprised at himself. He could never have talked like this to Peggy a few months ago. Peggy said nothing.

"I often wonder," continued Philip presently, "when I find myself at one of these entertainments, how many of the men there have come because they like it and how many have come simply in the hope of encountering one particular pair of bright eyes. Women, I suppose, go because they really do enjoy it—the dresses, and the gaiety, and the opportunity to sparkle, and because it is the right house to be seen at—"

"Not always," said Peggy. "But why do *you* go, Philip?"

She repented of the question the moment she asked it, but Philip, who had planned the lines of this conversation months beforehand, and was not nearly nimble enough to take advantage of unexpected short cuts, blundered straight on. [pg 29

"I go," he said frankly, "to try and get polished up a bit. I think I confessed to you once before that I was a pretty dull dog. I'm trying to cure that. So I go out tea-fighting."

"And all the time you would rather be at home with your feet on the mantelpiece?"

"Not necessarily. Supposing, as I sat with my feet on the mantelpiece, that some one—some one particular—came into the room and tapped me on the shoulder, and said: 'Now then, wake up! I have a new frock on, and I want you to take me out somewhere where I can show it off'—Well, that would make all the difference in the world. I—I should be proud to go, then!"

These words were spoken hurriedly and awkwardly, for Philip's heart was beating furiously. He was getting near the climax of this laboriously engineered conversation, and it seemed almost too much to hope that he would be permitted to deliver the grand attack without being headed off. But he certainly was not prepared for Peggy's next remark.

"I see. Well, Theophilus, there is nothing else for it: we must find you a wife."

This was said quite deliberately, and needless to say, it entirely disorganised Philip's plan of campaign. With a sudden cold shock he realised that the conversation had taken another short cut, and that the crisis was upon him before he was ready.

"You are the sort of man," continued Peggy, in the same unruffled voice, "who would get along better in the world with a wife than without one. There are two kinds of men who marry, you know. One likes to make a position and then ask a woman to come and share it, and the other cannot make any position at all unless he has got the woman first. You are the second kind. Now"—Peggy bent her brows judicially, like a panel doctor prescribing for an out-patient—"do I know of any one who would suit you?" [pg 29

Philip made a desperate attempt to release his tongue, which was cleaving to the roof of his mouth; but before he could do so Peggy had resumed her discourse.

"She must be the sort of girl," she said, "who likes being killed with kindness; because you are that sort, Mr. Philip."

"Don't all girls like being—" began Philip.

"No—not all. There are lots of women who rather despise kindness in a man. They prefer to be bullied by him, and regarded as tiresome, inferior creatures. For some mysterious reason it helps them to look up to him."

"Do you mean to say," exclaimed that simple-minded gentleman, Philip Meldrum, "that a woman would like a man just because—not although, mind, but because—he was a brute to her?"

"Yes," said Peggy; "it is true enough of some women. They don't want to be considered, or studied, or understood: they would rather be swamped by the man's personality and give up thinking about themselves altogether."

"But not all women?" persisted Philip, whose conception of the sex was trembling on its base. "Some of them like being considered and studied and understood, Peggy, don't they?" [pg 29

"Oh, yes, most of us do," admitted Peggy, smiling. "Not that we ever are, poor things!" she added resignedly.

Philip saw an opportunity of getting back to prepared ground again.

"I say, Peggy," he began, "wouldn't you like to be—"

"To be understood? Yes, indeed! Do you want me to practise on, Philip?"

"Yes," said Philip with sudden fire, "I do. And I want to say this—"

Peggy laughed serenely.

"You may study me and consider me as much as you like, Mr. Theophilus," she said; "I shall enjoy it. But you won't ever understand me."

"I would have a thundering good try, all the same," replied Philip doggedly. "I understood you once—when we were children together."

"Yes," agreed Peggy more soberly, "I believe you did. Life was a simpler business then. As we grow up we grow more complicated—at least, women do. But you seem to be very much the same as when I first met you, Philip."

"Is that a compliment?" asked Philip dubiously.

"It is the greatest compliment I have ever paid you," said Peggy, flushing suddenly. "What a sunset! Look!"

They paused, and leaned over the parapet. The October sun was dropping low, and the turbid flood of the Thames had turned to crimson. Philip glanced at his Lady. The hue of the water seemed to be faintly reflected in her face. [pg 30

Suddenly something took hold of him—a power greater than himself. For once the gift of tongues was vouchsafed him.

"You are right, Peggy," he broke out. "I believe I am exactly the same as when I was a boy; in one thing anyhow; in my views on"—he boggled at the word "Love," and finally continued—"in my feelings about the biggest thing of all. Perhaps it is because I have always been shy and awkward, and have not sought out adventures that would correct my illusions. Anyhow, I am an idealist—a sentimentalist, if you like. I believe my father was, too, and even the knowledge that his ideals were shipwrecked does not discourage me. In my Utopia the men work and fight, and take all hard knocks and privations cheerfully, and run straight and live clean. They work because they like it, and not simply to make money. A man may work for fame, too, if he likes, but not the sort of thing we call fame nowadays—titles, and newspaper paragraphs, and stuff of that kind. If one of my knights achieves a big thing he is not excited about it: he just polishes up his armour and goes and does another big thing, without hanging about until a reporter turns up. I think the title of knight is the grandest honour a man can win; and it makes me mad to-day to see how that title has been stolen from its proper place and bestowed on men who have subscribed to party funds, or who happened to be Mayor when Royalty opened a new waterworks. My knight is a man who has *done* things, and done them for just one reason—for the joy of doing them; and who dedicates the glory and the praise, however great or small, to"—Philip's voice dropped suddenly—"to the honour of his Lady." [pg 30

"And what is his Lady like?" asked Peggy softly.

She knew she ought not to do so. If a maid permits herself to embark with a young man upon a romantic discussion, it is sometimes difficult to prevent the conversation from taking an uncomfortably personal turn. But for the moment Philip had carried her off her feet.

"The Lady?" Philip descended from the clouds abruptly, and replied: "Well, I think you would make a very perfect Lady for a knight, Peggy."

The Rubicon at last! One foot at least was over. Dumbly he waited for Peggy's next word.

It came.

"Unfortunately," said the girl lightly, "I am not eligible for such a post. Knights are not for me. You see, Philip," she continued hurriedly, avoiding his eyes, "times have changed. Knights are too scarce and Ladies are too numerous. There are about a million women in this country alone who will have to get along without a knight for the whole of their lives."

"But not you," said Philip eagerly. "Any man would be proud—"

"Thank you," said Peggy, "for the compliment. But perhaps I prefer to be one of that million. There are so many things that a woman can do now which were impossible in the days of chivalry, that she can live her own life quite happily and contentedly, knight or no." [pg 30

"It's all wrong, all wrong!" cried Philip passionately. "It's all against every law of God and man! I won't believe it!"

"Wrong or right," pursued Peggy quietly, "it is a fact that many a woman nowadays would find a knight rather—what shall we say?—an encumbrance. For instance, I—"

"Not you, not you!" said Philip.

But Peggy continued relentlessly:—

"If ever I *do* encounter a man who wants to be my cavalier—which is of course extremely unlikely—"

She paused.

"You ought to say, 'No, no!' or 'Impossible!'" she pointed out severely.

Philip summoned up the ghost of a smile, and Peggy proceeded steadily:

"If ever I do meet a would-be Knight, I shall tell him that I am greatly obliged, but that I have other things to occupy me, and that I prefer to remain independent. So it is no use, my romantic friend," she concluded with a whimsical smile, "for you to select me as a suitable helpmeet for one of your imaginary knights. Now we really must get along: the other two will be wondering what has become of us."

She turned from the parapet to resume her walk. But Philip looked her straight in the face.

"Is that—final?" he asked.

For a moment they regarded one another unflinchingly, these two reserved and reticent people. Then Peggy's eyes fell. [pg 30

"Yes," she said in a subdued voice, "that is final. So don't go hunting up a knight for me, Philip."

When Peggy returned home after the tea-party she found her parent sitting in front of a dead fire, wearing his overcoat and a face of resigned suffering.

"Hallo, Dad!" she remarked cheerfully. "Why have you let the fire go out?"

"It is of no consequence," replied Montagu Falconer. "I am fairly warm in this overcoat." He coughed and shivered. "Are we having any dinner to-night?"

Peggy bit her lip, and kneeling down, began to coax the remnants of the fire into flame.

"Dinner will be at the usual hour," she said. "If you don't put coal on a fire it usually goes out, doesn't it?"

"At my time of life and in my state of health," replied her amiable parent, "I think I have a right to expect a certain modicum of comfort and attention. This room, for instance, might be kept decently heated, without—"

"If you don't like putting on coal yourself," Peggy pointed out, "you can always ring for a servant."

Suddenly the querulous Montagu blazed up.

"Servants! Exactly! I am left to the servants! I have a daughter, a grown-up daughter, who nominally directs my household. But I am left to the tender mercies of half-witted domestics, in order that my daughter may go out to tea—may trapese from one scandal-exchange to another! Do you ever consider me at all?" [pg 30

"Yes, Dad,—sometimes," said Peggy, bending low over the smouldering fire. At the same moment one of the hot cinders sizzled.

CHAPTER XXV

CONFESSIONAL—MASCULINE AND FEMININE

I

"Well, I have one thing to be thankful for; there might have been another man in the background. Now we must get back to work. *Labor omnia vincit*, my son."

Thus Philip to himself.

Then he continued, less philosophically:—

"I suppose I had better keep right away from her. I simply couldn't stand any half-a-loaf sort of friendship. All the same, I'll keep in the offing, in case I am wanted."

Then he went back to Oxford Street, and told himself that work was the salt of life.

But the spell was broken. *Labor omnia vincit* proved to be exactly what Julius Mablethorpe had said it was—only half a truth; and Dumps's conclusion that Love and Work are interdependent terms was borne out to the letter. Philip worked as hard as ever—harder, in fact: never had the business in Oxford Street been more efficiently conducted—but the zest of it all was gone. Without Peggy—or prospective Peggy—the day's work, which had been a series of absorbingly interesting enterprises, was now a monotonous round. The whirr of machinery had been music; now it was merely an unpleasant noise. To overcome difficulties and grapple with emergencies had been a [pg 30
sheer joy; to do so now was a weariness to the flesh. Philip could not but recall, as he slogged on, Uncle Joseph's description of his beloved regiment after the episode of Vivien:—*The only difference was that whereas the regiment had formerly been commanded by a Damascus blade, it was now commanded by a broomstick.* Family history appeared to be walking in a circle.

But he had no blame for Peggy. She had never encouraged him, never led him on, never deliberately appropriated his services. She had been infinitely kind to him—and that was all. If this hitherto unsuspected hardness in her nature was a permanent thing; if she was determined to live her own life and be independent—well, here was a unique opportunity for a knight to prove his metal—to justify his boast that he could serve without ulterior motives or hope of reward. If his Lady had selected another knight in preference to him, matters would have been different: proper pride would have driven Philip away. But so long as Peggy walked alone and unprotected, his vocation in life was clear and unmistakable.

But it was an uphill business; until by a fortunate chance it occurred to those in authority at Coventry that Philip's abilities were being wasted upon the mechanical routine of the London Office. Straightway he was transferred to headquarters, where he was put in charge of the Design and Construction Department of the Company—at liberty to invent and experiment to his heart's content.

Here he felt better. He was relieved of the constant fear of encountering Peggy, and of the [pg 30
exasperating effervescence of Tim. He also felt absolved from any further obligation to cultivate social graces. So he reverted whole-heartedly to the realm of Things, determined to eliminate People from his scheme of life for good and all. Machinery, as Mr. Mablethorpe had said, might break your arms and legs, but it left your heart alone.

Still, it was a black winter. Extreme tragedy is the privilege of the very young—those of riper years do not hug tragedy to their bosoms; they know too much about it; and in this respect Philip, for all his twenty-eight years, was youthful, indeed. But no human experience is without ultimate profit. Most of us have to live some portion of our lives under circumstances which make it necessary to keep our eyes resolutely averted from the future; and once we have acquired the courage which this performance demands,—and it demands a great deal,—we have acquired the most valuable asset that experience can give us. Any one can be happy who has no doubts about the future; that is why children laugh and sing all day; but the man who can keep a stiff upper lip when there is no confidence in his heart can fairly count himself one of those who have graduated with honours in the school of adversity. During those months Philip acquired the priceless art of taking life as it came, and, abandoning the pernicious habit of drawing upon the bank of the Future,—his account was sadly overdrawn there already,—of living within the income that the Present supplied to him. True, it was a mere pittance, but he learned to live on it. Upon such [pg 30
foundations is character built up.

Mr. Mablethorpe summed up the whole situation in his own fashion, when Philip, in the course of a week-end visit, had unburdened his soul over the last whiskey-and-soda on Saturday night.

"Philip, my son, you are learning: your education is proceeding apace. But it hurts, and you are puzzled and indignant. But never mind! Hold on, and things will right themselves. Your sense of proportion will come to the rescue and pull you through. I know, old man, I know! I have been through it all. I wasn't always a dull British householder with an expanding waistcoat. I have been young and now I am old—or perhaps middle-aged—and I know! Middle age has its compensations. When we are young, we alternate between periods when we feel that there is nothing on earth that we cannot do and periods when we feel that there is nothing on earth that we can. Advancing years bring us a comfortable knowledge of our own limitations. Though we may not have so many moments of sheer sublimity—moments when we touch the stars—as the young man, we have fewer hours of blackness. So carry on, Philip. Steer by dead reckoning, if necessary: you will get your bearings in time. This experience will do you no harm, provided you face it between the eyes. I know nothing of your little lady friend, but she does not sound to me like a member of the third sex. On the contrary, she appears to be gratifyingly feminine. Her present attitude is probably a [pg 30
pose of the moment. They can't help being made as they are, you know. I fully expect to find my beloved Dumps suffering from the effects of some germ or other when she comes home from abroad next month. That reminds me. In the spring Dumps is to come out—not of gaol, but of the schoolroom, which at eighteen is very much the same thing—for ever. The festivities will include what she calls a Joy-Week in Town. You had better come and stay with us during that period, and

join me in contracting dyspepsia. In fact, I have a ukase from my daughter to that effect. Will you come?"

Philip assented, listlessly. Joy-Weeks were not for him.

II

Miss Jean Leslie lived in a roomy flat high up in a tall block of buildings that overlooked the Thames at Chelsea. The larger of the two rooms was her studio. Hither fat, sweet-scented, and rebellious little boys and girls in expensive laces and ribbons were brought by mothers or nurses; and after they had been coaxed into smiles by the arts and blandishments of their hostess,—and for all her spinsterhood she excelled in that accomplishment,—Jean Leslie painted miniatures of them, for which their doting and opulent parents paid fancy prices.

"My dear, you must be very rich," observed Peggy one afternoon, inspecting three portraits of cherubic innocents, recently completed and awaiting despatch.

Jean Leslie poured out the tea complacently. [pg 31

"Thank you," she said; "I scrape a living. Sit down and eat something. I have some of your favourite Valencia buns."

But Peggy seemed restless. She wandered round the little sitting-room, minutely examining photographs and pictures which she already knew by heart.

"Peggy Falconer," enquired Miss Leslie at last, "will you come and sit down in that chair, or will I take you by the shoulders and put you there?"

"Sorry, dear," said Peggy; "I have the fidgets."

She dropped rather listlessly into a chair, and then, for no apparent reason, got up and sat in another.

"Why is my best chair not good enough for you?" enquired Miss Leslie sternly. "At your age, you ought not to be manœuvring to get your back to the window."

"It wasn't that, really," protested Peggy.

"It just was," replied Miss Leslie.

She rose from her seat, and taking the girl by the elbows, turned her toward the light. Peggy submitted, smiling.

"And now," resumed Jean Leslie, sitting down again, "what is the trouble?"

"You really are very Early-Victorian, Jean," said Peggy severely. "You yearn for sentimental confidences and heart-to-heart talks. But it's simply not done now: hearts went out with chignons. Give me a large and heavy piece of that muffin, please, and I will pander to your tastes by talking about Prince Adolphus."

Prince Adolphus was the exalted title of a purely hypothetical Fairy Personage who was one day to lead Miss Leslie to the altar. He had been invented by Miss Leslie herself, and formed a stock subject of humorous conversation with her younger friends. [pg 31

Miss Leslie said no more, but passed the muffins.

"How is that boy Timothy?" she enquired. The mention of Prince Adolphus had brought Timothy into her thoughts: Timothy had always expressed profound jealousy of His Royal Highness.

Peggy laughed.

"Very careworn," she said. "Since Philip was sent to Coventry he has been in sole charge at Oxford Street. By the way, he wants us to lunch with him on Sunday. Can you manage it?"

"I don't know. I am half-expecting a visit from a fellow countrywoman of mine."

"Do I know her?"

"I doubt it. Her husband is second engineer on a liner that plies between London and Melbourne. She has a good deal of leisure on her hands, poor soul."

Peggy asked the question that a woman always asks another in this connection.

"No," replied Miss Leslie; "neither chick nor child; so when her man has been away for a month or so, and drinking tea with the wives of other second engineers in Gravesend begins to pall, she likes to come round here and crack with me. I knew her in the old days: her father was head forester to us. She would be disappointed if she found me from home. She never tells me when she [pg 31
is coming: she would regard such a proceeding as presumptuous. So"—Miss Leslie sighed resignedly—"I just have to stay in for her. Her husband sailed four weeks ago, and there has been a hurricane in the Indian Ocean this week; so I fancy she is about due."

"Everybody seems to bring their troubles to you, Jean," said Peggy.

Miss Leslie looked up.

"Troubles? Oh, no! I assure you, when Eliza Dishart and I drink tea together, there is no talk of troubles. We are very grand. We talk about the Court, and freights, and the possibility of Union between the Established Kirk and the Free. But trouble—oh, dear, no! Once only did we consent to be informal. That was one wild night in December two years ago. Half the chimney-pots in London were flying about in the air, and she knew that his ship was in the Channel, homeward bound. She came chapping at my door about ten o'clock, just as I was going to bed, and asked me if I would let her sit here for the night. Indeed, I was very glad of her company. I remember I managed to pick out the tune of the 'Hymn for Those at Sea' for her on my piano, and we sang it together. Very ridiculous we must have looked. We have never mentioned the occurrence since."

During this narrative Peggy sat silent and preoccupied. Finally she said:—

"It must be a great relief to be able to unload your worries on to some one else. A girl has just been unloading hers on to me."

Jean regarded her friend's averted face curiously. [pg 31

"Indeed?" she replied.

"Yes. A man—"

Miss Leslie nodded.

"Quite so," she remarked drily. "She has presumed too far, and he won't come back."

Peggy looked up.

"Now you are getting romantic again," she said reprovingly. "No, it is nothing of the kind. My friend has had to be rather brutal to a man, and she feels sorry for him, and she is afraid he must think rather badly of her—that's all."

"Has she been flirting with the poor creature?" demanded Jean Leslie, in a voice of thunder.

"No. She is not that sort of girl."

"Then where does the brutality come in? There is no brutality in putting a man in his place, provided you do it in time. As soon as a woman sees that a man is preparing to fall in love with her —and she can usually tell about five minutes after she has made his acquaintance—and she doesn't feel like wanting him, she should get him at arm's length at *once*! Have—has your friend not been overlong in adopting that precaution?"

"She couldn't do it before," explained Peggy, rather eagerly. "They were thrown together in a very unusual way. She saw it coming, but could not do anything to prevent it. And now the man has gone away; and I'm—she is sure he thinks—"

Jean Leslie handed her guest a fresh cup of tea.

"Are you certain," she enquired, "that this friend of yours *wanted* to keep the young man at [pg 31
arm's length?"

Peggy twisted her long fingers together.

"I rather fancy, from what she said, that she cared for him a bit," she admitted.

"Then why send him away?" demanded Miss Leslie.

Peggy summoned up a troubled smile.

"Dear old Jean," she said, "you are so practical!"

"Practical? Aye!" replied Jean Leslie grimly. "If women were a little more practical and a little less finicky about what they are pleased to call their hearts, this world would be a more understandable place to live in. Listen! I had a girl friend once—as intimate a friend as yours, I dare say—and when the man she wanted asked her to marry him, she said 'No.' She meant 'Yes,' of course,—she merely wanted him to ask her another half-dozen times or so more,—but the stupid man did not understand. He went away, and married some other body whom he did not love, just to be quit of thinking about her. Men are made that way. They will do any daft thing—take to drinking or marry another woman—to drown the pain of remembrance. But this friend of mine, being a woman, could not do that. She just stayed single, and in course of time became an old maid —and a practical one, I promise you! But let us get back to the other girl. Why did she send her lad away?"

"Because there was some one else whom she could not leave."

"A relative?" [pg 31

"Yes."

Jean Leslie nodded her head slowly and comprehendingly.

"I see," she said at length. "That is different. You mean that the relative would have been helpless without her?"

"Helpless and—friendless," said Peggy gravely.

"Did she tell the young man that that was the reason?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because—because I fancy he was the kind of man who, if he had known the real reason, would have persisted in staying single on her account."

"And why not? Men like that are rare."

"Well, he—she told me that he was the sort of man who had no idea of looking after himself, or making himself comfortable—the sort of man who really *needed* a wife. It would have been cruel not to let him go. She might have had to keep him waiting twenty years, and she couldn't bear to think of him living in discomfort and loneliness all that time; so—"

"So she gave him another reason?"

"Yes."

"What reason?"

"Oh, the reason a girl usually gives nowadays. Other interests—freedom to live one's own life—and so on. You know."

"Yes, I know," said Jean Leslie bitterly. "You need not tell me. I should like to have just five [pg 31
minutes' talk, in here, with the man that invented the higher education of women! However, that is a digression. Your friend's case, as I have said, is different. Evidently she is not *that* sort of girl. I don't know what advice to give her, poor soul. She is in deep waters. But you can tell her from me —"

"Yes?" said Peggy eagerly.

"That she is doing the wrong thing"—Peggy caught her breath—"for the right reason. You can also tell her that she is a brave lass. Perhaps it may help her a little to be told that."

"I know it will," said Peggy getting up. "Goodbye, Jean, dearest! I think I will go and tell her now."

Jean Leslie sat long over the teacups, deep in thought. Mechanically, she found and lit a cigarette, and smoked it to the end. Then she lit another. Darkness had fallen by this time, but still she sat on, gazing into the glowing fire.

At last she rose, and turned up the electric lights. Having done this, she surveyed herself intently in the mirror over the mantelpiece. For all her forty-three years she was a youthful woman. She possessed the white teeth and fair complexion that Scandinavian ancestry has bequeathed to the northeastern Highlands of Scotland. Her hair was abundant, and with a little better dressing would have looked more abundant still.

She turned from the mirror with a quaint little *moue*, and her eyes fell upon a framed photograph which stood upon her writing-table. It was a portrait of Peggy's mother. She picked it [pg 31
up, and regarded it long and thoughtfully.

"Thank God, Death cannot always close the account," she said softly.

Then, with a resigned sigh and a downward glance at her comfortable but unfashionable attire, she seated herself abruptly at the bureau and wrote a letter to her dressmaker.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RIVALS

It was five o'clock on a fine spring afternoon. The model had just resumed his ordinary raiment and departed, and Montagu Falconer was cleaning his palette. To him entered a timorous maid.

"If you please, sir, Miss Leslie has called."

"That is quite possible," replied Montagu calmly, "but it does not interest me."

"But she wants to see you, sir."

"I fear I cannot oblige her. It is Miss Marguerite's duty to receive afternoon callers."

"Miss Marguerite is out, and Miss Leslie specially asked for you, sir," persisted the maid, trembling beneath her employer's cold blue eye.

Montagu Falconer ruminated for some moments. Unfortunately he omitted to remove his eye from the maid, and that sensitive young person was on the verge of an hysterical yell when he turned upon his heel and said curtly:—

"Ask her what the devil she wants."

The maid humbly withdrew. Having closed the studio door behind her she indulged in a few grimaces of a heartfelt and satisfying character, and after pausing to admire herself for a brief space in a Venetian mirror conveniently adjacent, returned to the drawing-room, where she took her stand before Miss Leslie with downcast eyes.

"Mr. Falconer sends his compliments, miss," she announced deferentially, "and would be very [pg 31
much obliged if you could say whether you wanted him particular, because he is painting a picture."

Jean Leslie smiled. She was wondering what Montagu really had said. But to the maid she merely replied:—

"Is the model there?"

"No, miss. Models go at five."

"Then say to Mr. Falconer that I should be greatly obliged if he could see me for a few minutes,

as I wish to consult him upon an important matter."

When the maid had departed, Miss Leslie rose and walked to the window, through which the afternoon sun was shining. Peggy's tastes rather leaned to rose-coloured curtains and silk blinds. Jean Leslie arranged these to her liking. Then, having adjusted her hat to the proper angle, she sat down with her back to the light, and waited.

Presently Montagu entered.

"Well, Jean," he said affably,—he was flattered by his new rule of consultant,—"you are looking very smart to-day."

"This testimonial is most gratifying," said Miss Leslie. "Do you like my furs?"

Montagu surveyed her critically. He had a real eye for form and tone; and he nodded approval.

"Yes," he said; "they suit you perfectly. And that bunch of violets adds just the right touch of subdued colour."

"Thank you," said Miss Leslie meekly.

Montagu sat down on the other side of the hearth. [pg 32

"However," he said importantly, "I believe I am correct in supposing that you did not come here to show me your clothes." (In this he was not so correct as he thought.) "I understand you wish to have my opinion on some matter."

"Yes," said Miss Leslie. "It is a matter which I could confide to no one but a very old and very trustworthy friend."

"Quite so, quite so," said Montagu, much gratified, but a little staggered. For the last twenty years he had rarely encountered the lady before him for more than five minutes without becoming embroiled with her in a skirmish of some description; and pitched battles had been not infrequent.

"I want to ask what you *think*, Montagu," continued Miss Leslie. "You are one of the few people I know whom I would describe as a true man of the world."

Montagu Falconer began to purr gently.

"Possibly," he said—"possibly! Well?"

"The fact is," confessed Miss Leslie, after a momentary hesitation, "I have received an offer of marriage."

"Good God!" exclaimed Montagu. "Who is the"—he was about to say "idiot," but corrected himself—"gentleman?"

"His name," said Miss Leslie, casting down her eyes, "is Adolphus Prince. I have known him for many years."

"Extraordinary name! Is he old or young?"

Miss Leslie considered.

"He is about fifty," she said. [pg 32

"Rather elderly," commented Montagu Falconer, who was only forty-eight. "How old are you, by the way?"

"Forty-two," said Miss Leslie coyly.

"I am bound to say, Jean," remarked Montagu handsomely, "that you don't look it. Now, what of this fellow? Is he a gentleman?"

"I hope so," said Miss Leslie humbly.

"But are you *sure*? You dear women, Jean, if I may say so, are too apt to be carried away by your feelings. What is his station—his position?"

"He is a retired colonel of militia," replied Miss Leslie. (This statement would have surprised Timothy, who would have it that his rival was a superannuated tea-taster.) "He has lived a great deal in India, and is now quite alone in the world."

"I see. One leg and no liver, I presume!" said Montagu facetiously.

Miss Leslie laughed appreciatively.

"You are as caustic as ever, Montagu," she said. "You spare none of us. But what do you think I should do? I am a solitary woman. It is a dreich business, living by one's self, is it not?"

"It is, it is," agreed Montagu, lapsing straightway into self-pity. "Too true! Believe me, Jean, I know what it means, better than most."

"Still, you are not entirely alone," Miss Leslie reminded him. "You have Peggy."

"It is a fact," admitted Falconer with an air of gloomy sarcasm, "that I do possess a daughter; but for all practical purposes I might as well be Robinson Crusoe. I never see her by day, for I am busy in the studio and naturally do not want to be pestered. In the afternoon, as often as not, she goes out or invites some people in. In either case I take my tea alone, for I cannot stand her associates. When she does go out she frequently returns only just in time to give me my dinner." [pg 32

Miss Leslie nodded sympathetically.

"I am sorry," she said. "I had not realised things from your point of view. It all shows how little we really know of one another's inner lives."

"And the only nights upon which she ever seems to stay at home," concluded the neglected parent, "are those on which I go out."

Montagu was accustomed to go out about five nights a week, and his daughter perhaps twice a month; so this statement may have been approximately correct.

"I see I have often been thoughtless in my previous attitude toward you, Montagu," said the contrite Miss Leslie. "We women are apt to forget that a man—even a strong, self-reliant man—may sometimes unbend. He, too, may desire companionship,—the right sort of companionship, of course,—as much as the weakest woman. Forgive me!"

Montagu, highly appreciative of the very proper spirit displayed by Miss Leslie, forgave her freely, and then launched into a further catalogue of grievances, Adolphus Prince retiring for the time modestly into the background.

When he had finished, Miss Leslie said:—

"Peggy is young, and perhaps thoughtless. When she marries—"

Montagu Falconer nearly bounded out of his chair. He was genuinely alarmed. [pg 32

"Marry? That child marry? Good God, Jean, don't suggest such a thing! What would become of me, I should like to know. What does the girl want to marry for? Hasn't she got a comfortable home of her own? Hasn't she got me—her father—her only relation in the world—to take care of her? My dear Jean, do not be romantic at your time of life, I beg of you! You haven't been putting notions into her head, I hope?"

Miss Leslie hastened to still the tempest which she had created.

"How masterful you are, Montagu!" she said. "I declare, I am quite afraid of you."

Again Montagu purred. In the course of a long and stormy acquaintance, extending over twenty or more years, this was the first indication that he had ever received that Jean Leslie regarded him with aught else than a blend of amusement and compassion. A less vain and self-centred man might have felt a little suspicious of such sudden and oppressive adulation, but he did not. Montagu was one of those persons who like flattery laid on with a trowel.

"I am sorry if I alarmed you," he said graciously; "but I feel very strongly upon the subject. I haven't forgotten the trouble I had in getting rid of that bargee, Whatsisname—that chauffeur-fellow! Curse it! What was he called?—I have it—Meldrum! I foresaw trouble, of course, from the day upon which my daughter persisted in dragging his mangled remains into my best bedroom, instead of sending them to the workhouse. During his convalescence I had to be perpetually on guard. The fellow followed her about like an infernal dog. Once, when I had occasion to reprove my [pg 32

daughter—my own daughter!—for some fault, he showed his teeth and nearly flew at my throat! Oh, I had to be pretty firm, I can tell you! However, I got him out of the house at last, and I am glad to say that he has not shown his face here for some months."

"I like a man to be master in his own house," said Miss Leslie approvingly. "I fear my friend Adolphus Prince has not your strength of character, Montagu. I wonder if I should be happy with him," she added musingly.

"He sounds to me," remarked the courteous Montagu, "a confirmed and irreclaimable nincompoop. Has he a weak chest?"

"Yes. I wonder how you knew."

"Any money?"

"I believe not."

"Then why marry him?"

"Well," said Jean Leslie slowly, "I think I might be able to help him a little. A lonely man is a very helpless creature. Not a man like you, Montagu, but an ordinary man. Such a man lives, we will say, in chambers or a flat. He may even have a comfortable house; but he lives alone for all that. He is at the mercy of servants; when he is in doubt about anything, he has no one to consult; when he has done a good piece of work, he has no one to show it to; when he is out of heart, he has no one to encourage him. If he wants company, he has to go out and look for it, instead of finding it ready to hand by his own fireside. Altogether, if he has not your great spirit and resources, Montagu, he is a very miserable man." [pg 32

The worst of the artistic temperament is that it is intensely susceptible to the emotion of the moment. Describe joy, and it becomes hilarious; describe sorrow, and it becomes tearful; describe fear, and it becomes panic-stricken. Montagu Falconer positively shuddered.

"Yes," he said quakingly, "that is true—very true. And more than that. It is not the weak man who suffers—or suffers most. The strong have their moments of dejection, too, Jean. You would hardly believe it, but even I—"

Miss Leslie, like a naughty little girl who is determined to make her small brother's flesh creep before he retires to bed, continued remorselessly:—

"And what has he to look forward to? Nothing! Nothing but old age, with its increasing feebleness, and helplessness, and friendlessness. That is all!"

She looked across at the shaking figure in the armchair, and suddenly there was real pity and kindness in her eyes.

"I should like to be able to save a man from that, Montagu," she remarked gently.

Montagu nodded his head. For once he had nothing to say.

"That is why," continued Jean Leslie in the same even tone, "I am thinking of marrying Adolphus Prince. I am no longer a girl. I should understand his moods, which are many: I could manage his house, and I would not be likely"—she smiled modestly—"to go losing my heart to some younger man after a year or two. And of course, when I saw that my husband wanted to be left to himself and not bothered,—as all husbands have a right to expect,—I should have my painting to occupy me." [pg 32

"I will say the same for you, Jean," said Montagu Falconer almost effusively; "you always had an appreciation of Art. But come, now! What of this fellow? Is he a philistine—a bourgeois—a chromolithographer?"

"I am afraid poor Adolphus has little knowledge of Art—Art as you and I know it," replied Miss Leslie regretfully. "But he is a good creature in other respects."

Montagu Falconer began to walk excitedly about the room.

"There you are!" he said. "There you are! Isn't that a woman all over? Here are you, Jean, with your splendid talents and comparative youth, with a strongly developed sense of what is right and beautiful, prepared to throw yourself away upon a half-pay, knock-kneed, blear-eyed militiaman, who probably wears Jaeger boots and furnishes his rooms with stuffed parrots and linoleum. The idea is unthinkable—impossible! You cannot do it!"

"Then you forbid me to marry him?" said Miss Leslie timidly.

"Certainly I do," replied Montagu, noting to himself with intense gratification that a man has only to be thoroughly firm with a woman to win her complete submission. "You don't *care* for the creature, I suppose?" [pg 32

"Not very deeply," confessed Miss Leslie. "He is just a friend—a very old friend."

She sighed, rose from her seat, and held out her hand.

"Good-bye, Montagu," she said, "and thank you! I must be going now. It was good of you to have such a long talk."

"I say, don't go yet," said Montagu. "I mean—" He hesitated. He hardly knew what he did mean.

"I think I really must," replied Miss Leslie.

Montagu accompanied her silently to the door.

"You are going to take my advice, I trust?" he remarked as they stood upon the steps.

Jean Leslie pondered.

"I suppose so," she said slowly. "A man's logic and common sense are so invincible. Still, I owe you a grudge, all the same, for having deprived me of my one romance. I am not likely to have another, you see! Good-bye, Montagu, and thank you!"

She gave her counsellor a shy but grateful glance, and departed down the street—a well-dressed, well-carried, and well-bred figure.

Next morning Montagu Falconer, after a disturbed and introspective night, came down to breakfast at ten o'clock, and dismally surveyed Tite Street through the dining-room window. There was a piercing east wind, which penetrated through every nook and cranny. Peggy had breakfasted an hour ago.

Montagu rang the bell for his coffee, and shivered. He was feeling stiff in the joints this morning: could it be rheumatism? He would like to consult some one about this. But of course there was no one to consult. His daughter, naturally, was not at her post: she was downstairs ordering dinner, or something of that kind. Besides, it could not be rheumatism: rheumatism was an old man's complaint. Old man! Old men suggested thoughts of Adolphus Prince. He had some one to consult about *his* troubles: he could take them to Jean. Montagu consigned Adolphus to perdition. Who was Adolphus Prince, to monopolise— [pg 32

Next moment Montagu, seized with a sudden idea, was at the telephone.

"Number, please?" said a haughty voice.

"I want seven-six-seven-one Chelsea, and I'm in a devil of a hurry," he replied frantically; "so put me on as quick—"

"Br-r-r-r-r-r-! Ch'k! Number engaged," announced the instrument dispassionately.

Montagu hung up the receiver, and swore. He was quite panic-stricken by this time. So Adolphus Prince rang her up at ten o'clock in the morning, did he? He would show the old dotard who was the better man!

Five minutes later he had secured his call, and was inviting Miss Leslie to lunch with him at the Ritz.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SECOND BEST

"WHERE shall we go to-night?" enquired the insatiable Dumps.

"Bed," replied her exhausted papa, before any one else could speak.

The Joy-Week was nearly over. For five days and nights the newly emancipated Miss Sylvia Mablethorpe had been allowed a free hand. Each morning she had conducted her mother relentlessly to shops. Once or twice her devoted father had accompanied the expedition, but after being twice warned by an officious young policeman for loitering outside a modiste's in Dover Street, had excused himself from further attendance.

"They are a most amazing sex," he observed to Philip. "My precious pair actually spent an hour and a quarter in a hosiery establishment in Knightsbridge yesterday morning (into which my modesty prevented me from accompanying them), and when they came out neither of them could say for certain if she had bought anything or not. I wonder how they do it: if a mere man were to spend an hour and a quarter in a shop, he would by the end of that time either be lying dead on the floor or else equipped with several thousand pairs of everything. No! Henceforth they shop alone! I decline to run any further risk of contracting flat-foot through standing about on a hard pavement, [pg 33
or mental prostration from thinking out topics of conversation suitable to retired heroes who open carriage doors. To-morrow morning, Philip, I will give them one shilling each—they don't really need so much, for it costs nothing to have things dragged off high shelves and put back again; but they will probably require ices or some other poison about eleven—and you and I will get up an appetite for lunch by going for a ride."

At the present moment the party were taking tea at the Carlton, after a matinée.

"I think it would be nice," continued Sylvia in a far-away voice, entirely ignoring her male parent's suggestion, "if we went to a music-hall. I haven't been to one yet; and I am getting a bit tired of theatres." (Which was not altogether surprising, considering that Miss Sylvia and suite had visited seven in five days.) "Then you could smoke, daddy," she continued artfully. "You will come, won't you, Philip?"

"It may possibly have escaped your memory," Mr. Mablethorpe mentioned, "that we are engaged to dine to-night with Derek Rayner."

"Oh, bother!" said the ungrateful Dumps; "so we are. Has he invited you, Philip?"

"No," said Philip; and Mr. and Mrs. Mablethorpe exchanged glances.

"Well, I'll tell you what," announced Sylvia, who was not of an age to have any regard for the feelings of young men; "we will dine with Derek, and you must join us afterwards, and we will all [pg 33
go to the Arena together. I hear it is the best place. Derek won't mind, will he?"

"I am sure the arrangement will meet with his entire approval," remarked Mr. Mablethorpe solemnly.

"In that case," continued Sylvia with great cheerfulness, having gained her point, "we had better telephone to him that we shall want dinner earlier. What time do music-halls begin?"

"The performance," said her father, "is timed to commence at eight P.M., but attendance during the earlier turns is not compulsory."

He spoke bravely, but without hope, for he knew his daughter.

"I insist," announced the voracious Dumps, "on being there when the curtain goes up. I shall tell Derek that we will dine at a quarter to seven. Do you think this hotel is on the telephone?"

"Possibly. If not, we can always climb to the top of the Haymarket and light a beacon-fire," replied the caustic Mr. Mablethorpe, still sore at the thought of yet another scrambled dinner.

His daughter ignored the pleasantry.

"Will you come and help me to find it, Philip?" she said.

Philip complied, and the pair went out to the hotel telephone exchange, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Mablethorpe to regard one another curiously.

"Poor Derek!" said Mrs. Mablethorpe.

"Poor Dumps!" said Mr. Mablethorpe, to himself.

Meanwhile, at the telephone, Sylvia was saying to Philip:— "It would never do to leave you out, Philip, on the last evening, would it?" [pg 33

For a moment their eyes met. Then Sylvia's dropped quickly.

Philip dined in solitary state in his own flat. He still retained his holding therein, for his duties involved a good deal of travelling, and it was convenient to have a *pied-à-terre* in London. Timothy was out, and he had the premises to himself, for which he was not altogether sorry. He had a good deal to occupy his mind just at present, and he wanted to think.

But his thoughts had made no appreciable progress when he arrived at the Arena Palace of Varieties at five minutes to eight.

He found the party already assembled in the *foyer*, under the radiant direction of Sylvia and the thundercloud escort of Mr. Derek Rayner, who greeted Philip gloomily but politely. A mincing damsel in a lace tucker conducted them to their seats, which were situated in the fourth row of an unpeopled desert of stalls.

"It's lucky we got here in time," mused Mr. Mablethorpe, surveying the Sahara around them. "We might have had to stand."

"If people," remarked Sylvia with asperity, "think it grand not to come to a heavenly place like this till ten o'clock, so much the worse for them!"

She sank down luxuriously in the armchair which called itself a stall, and commanded Philip and Rayner to dispose themselves upon either side of her, leaving her parents to shift for themselves. Rayner, with the air of a conjuror who is a little doubtful as to whether his audience are not getting slightly tired of this trick, produced a box of chocolates out of his hat, and the party settled down to enjoy the performance. [pg 33

The ladies and gentlemen who figured in the earlier portion of the programme were obviously surprised and pleased to find the stalls inhabited. Accustomed to shout across an ocean of blue plush to an audience of pigmies situated upon the distant horizon, their gratification at finding human beings within a few yards of them was extreme. More than one of the comedians worked an allusion to the fact into his "patter."

About a quarter to nine the ranks of the stallholders were stiffened by the arrival of a magnificent gentleman in evening dress, with a gardenia in his buttonhole. He took a seat in the front row.

"I told you there would be lots of people soon," announced Sylvia.

But alas! her triumph was premature. Shortly after the arrival of the gentleman with the gardenia the drop-curtains ascended upon Turn Number Five—Professor Boko, the Man of Mystery, assisted by a stout lady in mauve tights. The Professor, speaking with a French accent which had plainly served an apprenticeship in New York, opened the proceedings by appealing to the audience to send up an impartial and unbiased body of gentlemen upon the stage, to act—why, Heaven knows—as "Committee."

"You go, dad!" said Sylvia.

"I expect the Man of Mystery has made his own arrangements," replied Mr. Mablethorpe. [pg 33

And sure enough, almost before he had spoken, the gentleman with the gardenia left his seat and scrambled up a pair of plush-covered steps to the stage.

He must have repented bitterly of his public-spirited precipitancy; for instead of being treated with respect due to a Committee,—no one else had come forward,—he was subjected by the Professor to a series of humiliating and embarrassing experiences. Showers of playing-cards were squeezed from his nose; flapping goldfish were extracted from his ears; bullets were fired point-blank into his shirt-front and discovered (by the lady in tights) in his coat-tail pockets. His silk hat was turned into a coffee-urn. His very gardenia was snatched from him and shaken out into a Union Jack. Still, he maintained a heroic attitude throughout, smiling woodenly at each successive outrage, and loudly proclaiming his entire satisfaction with the genuineness of the performance before resuming his seat. However, it was plain that the strain had been too great for him; for presently he put on his hat, stole quietly away, and was no more seen.

"Poor thing! I wonder where he has gone to," said the sympathetic Sylvia.

Derek Rayner, who was at the age for which the drama has no secrets, explained that this gentleman was now probably travelling in the same cab with the Man of Mystery and the lady in tights to undergo further humiliations at another music-hall.

Presently the stalls began to fill up in real earnest, and turns came thick and fast. Some were sentimental, some were funny, a few were vulgar, and some were merely idiotic. Once or twice Mr. Mablethorpe held his head and said his brain was going; but on the whole they enjoyed themselves greatly, especially that unspoiled child of nature, Miss Sylvia. [pg 33

Sylvia was particularly pleased with Mr. Arthur Mow, Comedian. When that gentleman's number went up there was a round of applause, and the orchestra dashed into a merry tune.

There came a pause. Then the tune was played again. Then another pause. Slight uneasiness among the audience.

"He hasn't turned up," remarked the worldly-wise Rayner. "These chaps do four Halls a night. He's probably on the other side of London, in a broken-down taxi."

The band played its prelude once more, and then some one—presumably the manager—appeared upon the stage and offered an apology for Mr. Mow's absence.

"He was here a moment ago, ladies and gentlemen," he declared.

"Rats!" observed a disappointed lady in the gallery.

The manager redoubled his assurances. They had searched high and low, he said, but could not find Mr. Mow anywhere. Would the audience—

His speech was interrupted by the conductor of the orchestra.

"If Arfur Mow reelly 'asn't arrived," he announced, rising to his feet, "I'll give you a turn meself." [pg 33

And bounding upon the stage, the conductor turned and faced the audience with a flourish. He was none other than the missing Arfur Mow! Having chased his apologist into the wings amid shouts of delight, the great man proceeded to the serious work of the evening—a ditty entitled:—"A Glorious Death; or, How I was Drowned in the Brewery."

"What is the next item?" enquired Mr. Mablethorpe in a hollow voice, after the audience and Mr. Mow had taken a reluctant farewell of one another. "The thumbscrew, or boiling oil?"

"'High Jinks in a Parisian Café,'" announced Sylvia with great satisfaction.

Mr. Mablethorpe coughed.

"Be prepared to read your programmes sedulously until further notice," he said to his wife and daughter.

But his fears were groundless.

The only occupant of the café when the curtain rose was a waiter of melancholy aspect. To him entered a lady and gentleman in evening dress, arm-in-arm,—the gentleman carrying an umbrella and smoking an unlighted cigar,—who intimated in pantomime that they required an abundant and satisfying meal. The waiter responded by stepping forward and bowing so low that he fell right over on to the back of his neck, coming up again to a standing position after one complete revolution. With a deeply injured expression he went down upon his hands and knees and began to search for the obstacle over which he had tripped. Presently he found it. It was so minute as to be quite invisible to the audience, but when thrown into the wings it fell with a reverberating crash. [pg 33

Any further doubts as to the nature of the entertainment were now dissipated by the gentleman in evening dress, who, instead of hanging up his opera hat in the orthodox fashion, gave his head a backward jerk which sent the hat flying backwards on to an adjacent gas-bracket. He next removed his evening coat, and having lighted his cigar from a candle upon the table, proceeded to give a juggling exhibition with the candle, the cigar, and his umbrella.

At this his lady friend withdrew, possibly in search of a less eccentric host. The waiter, instead of serving supper, remained a fascinated spectator of the gentleman's performance. Presently, fired with a spirit of emulation, he took a plate and a raw egg from the table,—with the exception

of a property chicken the egg was the only edible thing in the restaurant,—and having thrown the egg into the air endeavoured to catch it upon the plate. He succeeded. While he was wiping his face, the lady made an unexpected reappearance. She had left her opera cloak and evening gown in the cloak-room, and was now attired in what looked like a bathing-suit of tight pink silk. Evidently having abandoned all hope of supper, she had good-naturedly decided to come and lend a hand with the juggling exhibition. She incited her companion to further enterprises. At her instigation he took the table by one leg and balanced it upon his forehead,—fortunately the chicken [pg 33
appeared to be clamped to the dish and the dish to the table,—keeping three plates in the air with one hand and a fourth spinning horizontally upon the ferrule of his umbrella with the other.

The waiter, discouraged and fatigued by his want of success with the egg, here opened an ingenious little door in his own stomach, revealing a small cupboard; and taking out a bottle and glass, proceeded to refresh himself in the usual manner. Then, catching the eye of the lady, who was regarding this somewhat unusual arrangement of nature with pardonable astonishment, he hastily returned the bottle and glass to their place and shut the little door. But feminine curiosity is not easily allayed. As soon as her companion had completed this performance with the table, the lady drew his attention to the phenomenon which she had just witnessed. The gentleman promptly stepped behind the shrinking waiter, and holding him firmly by the elbows, invited the lady by a nod to investigate the mystery for herself. This she did. But the opening of the door only revealed a tiny venetian blind, drawn down and bearing the legend, BAR CLOSED.

"I wonder how they *think* of such things!" said Sylvia rapturously.

"They do that to give the juggler a rest," explained the undeceived Mr. Rayner.

After this the band played louder and faster, and the gentleman took all the furniture within reach and proceeded to hurl it into the air, keeping it there with incredible ease through the whole of a frenzied rendering of "Il Bacio." His lady friend, quite carried away by her enthusiasm, skipped [pg 33
about the stage clapping her hands and uttering shrill whoops. The waiter, roused to a final effort, rushed off into the wings, to reappear with a perfect mountain of plates. These he hurled hysterically heavenward. They descended in all directions, splintering into fragments amid appreciative yells from the audience. Having caught exactly one plate out of the avalanche, the waiter displayed it to the house with great pride; and then (evidently afraid of spoiling the ship for want of a ha'porth of tar) produced a small coal-hammer from his pocket and smashed it to atoms. The performances concluded with a general mêlée, in which the gentleman and lady combined to bombard the waiter with all the plates they could lay their hands on. But he caught them, every one of them, two at a time; and then, once more unlocking the door in his waistcoat and pulling up the venetian blind, was seen generously offering liquid refreshment to his discomfited assailants as the curtain fell.

By this time the majority of Sylvia's party were enjoying themselves thoroughly. Sylvia herself was bubbling over; Julius Mablethorpe was shouting like a child, and his wife, weak with laughter, was wiping her eyes. Mr. Derek Rayner was in the seventh heaven, for his young hostess had devoted her entire attention to him and had hardly given her other companion so much as a look.

"Perhaps the chap is just a family friend, after all," he said to himself optimistically.

Philip alone was preoccupied. That morning he had received a letter from his firm, offering him [pg 34
what was practically a year's holiday. Sometime previously the representative of a great industrial corporation in the United States had visited England as the guest of the Britannia Company. He had been royally entertained; several excellent understandings had been reached, and an important commercial alliance cemented. Now Philip was invited to represent the Company on a return visit. It was a signal honour and a tempting prospect. He would encounter fresh people and new ideas; he would be able to enlarge his technical knowledge, for he would go everywhere and be shown everything; and—well, he might be able to get a little further away from his thoughts. He was suffering at present from a satiety of thought, and the morning's letter had brought matters to a crisis. Numerous forces were at war within him.

Chivalry said: "If you may not live with her, live for her; go your own way as far as you must, but do not go too far: she may need you."

Common sense said: "Why sigh after a girl who does not care for you, and never did? You are nothing to her: why offer her what you do not owe and what she cannot take?"

To-night a third voice had joined in the debate. It said: "Love is not entirely a matter of twin souls and divine passion: it has a very material side. Life is short; we live but once: it is given to few to encounter their affinity in this world: it is foolish to waste one's youth waiting for a thing which may not exist. Why not be practical? Why not cut the Gordian knot? Marry some nice pretty [pg 34
girl, with no nonsense about her, and have done with it. Then you will have a comfortable home and a loyal mate, and be able to turn out some decent work."

Thousands of men, and tens of thousands of women, have debated this problem in their time; but Philip did not know this. We are apt to think that our own human experiences are unique.

Suddenly Sylvia turned to him. Her dark eyes were full of reproach.

"Philip, you are not listening a bit. This next song ought to be lovely."

Philip, apologetically conning the programme, recognised therein the name of a great singer—the latest recruit to the variety stage—who, having achieved a European reputation as the leading operatic baritone of his day, had abandoned that strenuous calling in the zenith of his drawing powers in order to earn an ambassadorial income by singing selections from his repertoire—which means the hackneyed ballads beloved of the British Public—for some fifteen minutes *per diem*.

Presently the great man appeared. He began with the Toreador's song from "Carmen," which set heads nodding and toes beating time. Then came "O Star of Eve"; and last of all, "I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby."

Struck by an unwonted stillness at his side, Philip glanced at Sylvia. Her effervescence was gone. With a child's instant susceptibility to external influences her mood had changed: she was [pg 34
raptly drinking in the limpid notes that came floating to her through the smoke-laden atmosphere of the Arena Palace of Varieties. A humorous remark from Derek Rayner fell upon unheeding ears. Her eyes shone, her breath came quickly; her flower-like face was alight with tender enthusiasm.

"And all my song shall strive to wake
Sweet wonder in thine eyes!"

crooned the singer. Certainly he had achieved his purpose in one case, Philip thought.

"To cheat thee of a sigh!
To charm thee to a tear!"

The words died away to nothingness in the absolute stillness of the great audience. Then, after a brief interval, came the applause, in mighty gusts. But during that interval Philip had had time to hear the sound of a long tremulous sigh close beside him.

"My reason has been saved at the eleventh hour," said Mr. Mablethorpe gratefully. "Talking of the eleventh hour, shall we go home? Nothing but the cinematograph now!"

But Sylvia insisted upon seeing the programme out. Accordingly the party sat on, what time such of the audience as still remained were plunged into darkness and a flickering travesty of life in the American backwoods was thrown upon the screen.

First came the announcement:—

> *"I love you," says the Sheriff to the pretty Station Mistress.*

There followed a picture of the Station Mistress at home. The only visible furniture was a [pg 34
writing-table, but technical detail was supplied by a lever standing up in the middle of the floor evidently designed to control the railway traffic of the district. The only other notable feature of this interior was a strong breeze. Presently the Sheriff, a theatrical-looking young man in a slouch hat and trousers like a pair of door-mats, sidled in at the door; and an interpolated line of explanatory matter enquired:—

> *"Will you come riding with me?"*

Apparently the lady was willing, for next moment she was discovered in a stable-yard blowing a whistle. Instantly a horse appeared, saddled and bridled, and after performing several tricks with obvious reluctance, consented to allow itself to be mounted, and departed at full gallop, apparently to join the Sheriff.

"I guarantee that we shall meet that animal again," prophesied Mr. Mablethorpe.

Meanwhile the plot began to obtrude. As a direct result of the Station Mistress's culpable negligence in leaving the railway traffic to direct itself, the way was now open for an attempt to hold up the "bullion express." This enterprise was engineered by a gentleman called "Mexican Steve," assisted by a gang of six. Being apparently familiar with the unbusinesslike habits of the Station Mistress, Mexican Steve very sensibly selected the Station Office as a suitable place wherein to confer with his associates. The conference took place forthwith, the members thereof [pg 34
huddling close together in order to keep within the picture.

"The express does not stop here; we must flag her,"

said the next line of print.

"What does that mean?" enquired Sylvia.

"I fancy it means that they are going to put the signal at danger, and so stop the train," said Philip.

This, as it turned out, was a correct surmise; but much had to happen first. As the audience had fully expected, the symposium in the Station House was now interrupted by the intrusion of the Station Mistress herself, whose horror and astonishment at finding her home in the possession of Mexican Steve and party was a little unreasonable, considering that she had been absent some hours and had left the door unlocked. The ensuing mêlée was not depicted, the screen being suddenly changed to a railway track, with a train approaching in the distance. There was a signal-post at the side of the line. The signal suddenly rose to danger, after which the scene was switched back to the Station Office, where Mexican Steve had just finished pulling over the lever. The Station Mistress, it is regrettable to have to add, was sitting bound hand and foot to her own table. The rest of the gang disappeared, doubtless to hold up the train. Before joining them, Mexican Steve addressed his victim:—

"Now, Maimie Matterson, escape if you can!"

"And she will!" remarked Mr. Mablethorpe with conviction. [pg 34

"Hush!" said Sylvia under her breath. "Don't spoil it!" She was on tenterhooks: it was all real to her.

Any doubts as to Miss Matterson's ability to escape from her present predicament were at once set at rest. With a few convulsive wriggles she succeeded in getting her lips to the horse-whistle which hung round her neck.

"Thank Heaven, we can't hear her!" said Mr. Mablethorpe to his wife, as the lady's cheeks distended themselves in a resounding blast.

Next moment the door was kicked down, and Maimie's performing horse entered the room and pawed the floor politely. Sylvia clapped her hands.

"I knew it!" remarked Mr. Mablethorpe resignedly.

In obedience to a frenzied signal from his mistress the sagacious animal first proceeded to operate the lever in the middle of the floor, pulling it back (presumably) to safety. This feat accomplished, he set to work, amid thunders of applause, to unpick with his teeth the knots which kept Maimie Matterson bound to the table. He was rewarded for his gallantry by being promptly mounted and ridden at full gallop across a heartbreaking line of country, apparently for a distance of about twenty miles.

Then for the last time the scene changed to the railway track. The train, which had covered quite two hundred yards in the last quarter of an hour, was now close to the post, and Mexican Steve and his friends were crouching by the line armed with six-shooters. Above their heads the [pg 34
signal-arm still stood at danger. Suddenly it dropped.

"Who did that?"

inquired an indignant line of print.

"That was the dear horse!" replied Sylvia triumphantly.

The train, which had been exhibiting signs of indecision, suddenly quickened its pace and shot past, to the discomfiture of the desperadoes, who childishly fired a volley at the wheels. Next moment an armed band, headed by the Sheriff and Miss Maimie Matterson,—they must have covered forty miles in something like fifteen seconds,—dashed out of an adjacent wood. After a perfunctory struggle the incompetent criminals were duly taken into custody and marched off by their captors. The Sheriff, having got rid of his posse, seized the opportunity to indulge in an

exchange of tender endearments with Miss Matterson.

"We will find the preacher-man, right now!"

he declared.

Miss Matterson's reply was not recorded in print, but to judge from the last few yards of the film, it was of an encouraging nature.

As the Sheriff's arms closed round the unresisting form of his athletic bride, Philip was conscious of a gentle movement beside him. Then a small, warm, gloved hand was slipped into his own in the darkness. He made no sign: he merely allowed the hand to rest where it lay. Presently it was withdrawn as softly as it came. It was a brief, almost momentary episode, but it settled the course of Philip's life for him. [pg 34

The lights went up; a blurred and bearded figure was thrown upon the screen; and the band, rising to its feet, offered a hurried tribute of loyalty.

"Supper?" suggested Mr. Mablethorpe to the company in general.

"You must all be my guests to-night," said Philip. "I may not have another opportunity."

At supper he told them that he was going to America for a year at least.

"I presume," said Mr. Mablethorpe, as they sat alone together after Sylvia and her mother had gone to bed, "that when you do return from your travels we must not expect to see—quite so much of you as hitherto?"

"No, I think not," replied Philip. Then he added awkwardly, "You understand the situation?"

Julius Mablethorpe nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I do, and I know you are right. There is a power of difference between giving one's best and one's second best. You can't compromise over the really big things of life: with them it must be everything or nothing. You are doing the right thing. But we shall miss you, my son Philip,—all of us!"

So our knight rode away, exceeding sorrowful. His departure was mourned by many, notably one,—but not by Mr. Derek Rayner.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A BRAND FROM THE BURNING

THE liner Bosphorus, after a comfortable nap of some eight days in the Mersey, was making a reluctant effort to tear herself from the land of her birth and face an unfriendly ocean upon her seventy-eighth voyage to New York. Motive power for the time being was supplied by four fussy tugboats, three of which were endeavouring to speed the parting guest by valiant pushings in the neighbourhood of her rudder, while the fourth initiated a turning movement at her starboard bow. An occasional rumble from the engine-room announced that the tugs would soon have no excuse for further officiousness.

The cabin passengers were leaning over the rails of the upper deck, surveying the busy landing-stage. They were chiefly males—their wives were down below, engaged in the unprofitable task of endeavouring to intimidate stewardesses—and were for the most part Americans. Philip stood apart, watching the variegated farewells of the crowd.

The etiquette of valediction at the sailing of a great ship varies with the three classes of passenger. The friends of cabin passengers accept a final drink, say good-bye, leave the ship, and are no more seen. The friends and relations of the second class—and they are *all* there—line up [pg 34
along the landing-stage and maintain a running fire of chaff and invective until the ship has been warped out into the stream and the engines begin to run. The steerage and their friends, being mainly aliens and knowing no better, weep and howl.

Philip knew that the second-class passengers were on the deck below him; but as he could not see them (though he could hear them) his attention wandered to the throng which was engaging them in conversation. They were of many types. There were people who shouted cheerfully, "Well, send us a line when you get there!" and then, after a laborious attempt to discover another topic, cried despairingly, "Well, don't forget to write!" And so on. "Give my love to Milly when you see her," commanded a stout matron in bugles, "and say I hope her cold is better."

Farther along, a girl with tears raining down her cheeks was more than holding her own in an exchange of biting personalities with a grimy gentleman at a porthole—apparently her *fiancé*—whom she had come to see off. A comic man, mistaking a blast upon the siren for a definite indication that the moment of departure had arrived, took out a dirty pocket-handkerchief and wept loudly, periodically squeezing the handkerchief dry and beginning again. But it was a false alarm: the ship did not move; and his performance, which was to have been the crowning effort of a strenuously humorous morning, continued perforce to halt lamely along for another ten minutes. Finally, in response to an urgent appeal from a matter-of-fact lady friend that he would not act the [pg 35
goat, the unfortunate gentleman, submitting to the fate of all those whose enterprises are born out of due time, put his handkerchief sheepishly in his pocket and took no further part in the proceedings.

At last the Bosphorus swung clear. There was a jingle of bells deep down in the engine-room, followed by a responsive throb of life throughout the hitherto inert mass of the great vessel. The voyage had begun.

The crowd on the landing-stage broke into a cheer, which was answered from all parts of the ship. As the sound died away a girl stepped forward and waved her handkerchief for the last time. She was a short girl, with a pleasant face, and wore glasses.

"Good-bye, Lil, dear!" she cried.

There was an answering flutter from directly below where Philip stood, and a clear voice replied:—

"Good-bye, May, darling!"

Philip scrutinised the girl on the landing-stage.

"Who on earth is that?" he said to himself. Then he remembered. It was Miss May Jennings, sister of Miss Lil Jennings, typist at the office in Oxford Street.

Having taken part, with distinction, in the free fight round the person of the second steward which our great steamship companies regard as the only possible agency through which seats at table can be booked for a voyage, and having further secured a position for his chair and rug from the deck-steward, Philip took stock of his surroundings. [pg 35

Transatlantic ship's company is never very interesting. The trip is too short to make it possible for the pleasant people to get to know one another: only the bores and thrusters have time to make their presence felt. On this occasion the saloon appeared to be divided fairly evenly between music-hall artistes and commercial travellers of Semitic origin; so Philip, wrapped up in a rug, addressed himself to the task of overtaking some of the arrears of sleep due to him after the recently completed Joy-Week.

Next morning, experiencing a desire for society, Philip descended a deck upon a visit to the second class, feeling tolerably certain that here, at least, he would find a friend.

He was right. Miss Jennings was sitting by herself under the lee of the boiler casing, perusing a novel.

"Yes," she said, after an exchange of greetings, "I dare say you are a bit surprised to see me. I'm a trifle that way myself. I only settled to do it a week ago."

"I did not even know you had left the Britannia Company," said Philip, sitting down. "Tell me about it."

"Well," explained Miss Jennings, "there isn't much to tell. I got tired of Oxford Street. It didn't seem to be leading to much, and I wasn't getting any younger; and just about six months ago I had had a letter from a girl friend of mine who had settled in New York, saying that a good [pg 35 stenographer could do twice as well there as in London. So I decided to go—if only for a bit of a change."

"What about your mother and sister?" asked Philip.

"Oh, you haven't heard. Poor Mother died over a year ago, when you were away at Coventry. I'm just out of black for her now. May is married. I have been living with her and Tom for some time back. I didn't like it much. Makes you feel inferior-like, living in a house belonging to a married sister that's plainer than yourself. That's all about me. I hope you are very well, Mr. Meldrum. You are out on the Company's business, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Philip. He explained the nature of his trip.

"They were saying at Oxford Street," pursued Miss Jennings, with the air of one who is anxious to avoid all appearance of asking for information, "that you were going to be made a partner."

"It was talked about," said Philip, "but nothing at all came of it. They wanted me to risk rather more capital in the business than I happen to possess."

"Don't you worry about capital, Mr. Meldrum," said Miss Jennings. "It's your brains they're after. Bob Br—a gentleman I know told me that he had heard from some one behind the scenes that they don't mean to let you go at any price. They can't afford to have your inventions taken up by other people. It was just a try-on, telling you you must put a lot of money into the business. Next time they mention the matter, you name your terms and *stick* to them!" [pg 35

Philip thanked her.

"Of course I've no call," admitted Miss Jennings, "to be giving you advice. But I wasn't born with my mouth sewn up, and you never were one to put yourself forward, were you?"

Philip admitted that possibly this was true, and the conversation passed to the inevitable topic of old times and old friends.

"How is Brand, by the way?" asked Philip. "He was an admirer of yours, I believe?"

"Brand?" said Miss Jennings carelessly. "Oh—the mechanic? I believe he is getting on very well. First foreman, then manager of the garage; and now that you are gone he and Mr. Rendle pretty well own the earth between them, so I gather. Brand is quite the gentleman now. I hear he has given up making a spectacle of himself in the Park of a Sunday. Mr. Rendle is the same as ever. He misses you at the flat, though."

"You seem to know all about our domestic arrangements," said Philip, much amused.

"Nobody that wasn't born deaf-and-dumb," said Miss Jennings with decision, "could see Mr. Rendle six hours a day for six days a week without knowing every blessed thing about him, and a jolly sight more, from his own lips. His young ladies, and everything! He brought one to Oxford Street, the other day. He told me afterwards—"

"What was she like?" asked Philip instantly.

"I didn't notice her particularly. She was in the show-room looking at motors most of the time, [pg 35 and only stepped into the office for a minute. She was quite simply dressed, it being the morning, but her clothes were good all through. I picked up two or three ideas for myself straight off. Shoes, for one thing. Hers were the neatest I ever saw—brown *suède* with silver buckles. No cheap American ready-mades, or anything of that kind. As for her coat and skirt, you could see they'd been cut by a tailor, and her hat was one of these simple little things that fit close to the head and look as if they could be put together for half-nothing; but I know better. It came out of—"

"What was she like?" repeated a patient voice.

"I'm trying to tell you," replied Miss Jennings, a little offended.

"Yes, but her appearance? Not her clothes."

Miss Jennings pondered.

"I didn't really have time to notice her appearance," she said at length; "but she was what I should call a middling blonde. She was wearing one of those new blouses, with a V-shaped—"

"I think it must have been Miss Falconer," said Philip, with an air of great detachment.

"Yes, that was the name," replied Miss Jennings. "Mr. Rendle told me he was very sorry for her. He said thousands of gentlemen were in love with her—you know the silly way he talks—"

"Yes," said Philip, with a gulp. "Well?"

"But she could never marry any of them."

"Why, I wonder?"

"Because of her father," explained the everready Miss Jennings. "She won't ever leave him, him being a widower, and very peculiar in his manner, and unable to look after himself. A bit silly-like, from all accounts. Seems to me to be asking a good lot of a girl, to stay at home to look after an old image like that. That's only supposing, of course, that she *wants* to marry one of these thousands of hers. She's welcome to the lot, so far as I'm concerned." [pg 35

"Yes, rather!" agreed Philip absently.

So *that* was the reason! And he had never guessed. Well, it made his own chances no brighter, but it took a load from his mind. Peggy was back on a higher pedestal than ever, and her silent knight could now worship her without reservation. She was acquitted for all time of the charge of being hard, or callous, or unfeminine.

The Bosphorus was rolling heavily when Philip rose next morning, but his sea-legs were good, and he proceeded to his toilet with no particular pangs save those of hunger. After shaving he put on a dressing-gown and staggered along an alleyway in search of a bath. Presently an illuminated sign informed him that he had reached his destination. He turned into the first empty bathroom, where a man in a white jacket was tidying up after the last occupant.

"Bath, please," said Philip. "Chill just off."

The man turned his back and set going a spouting cataract, and the bath was half-full of salt water in less than a minute. There are no corporation restrictions or half-inch pipes in oceanic bathrooms: you simply open a sluice and let in as much of the Atlantic as you require. The man next lowered a long hinged pipe into the bottom of the bath, and gave a twist to a little valve-wheel on the wall. Straightway a violent subaqueous crackling announced that live steam from the boilers was performing its allotted task of taking the chill off. [pg 35

"That will do, thank you," said Philip presently.

The bath-steward turned off the valve, and the crackling ceased. Philip sat down upon the edge of the bath.

"Well, Brand," he said, "how does the Bosphorus compare with Oxford Street?"

He held out his hand, and Mr. Brand, having overcome his surprise, shook it resentfully.

"I suppose you are surprised to come across me here," he remarked defiantly.

"Not altogether," replied Philip, thinking of the second class; "but I did not expect to find you swabbing bathrooms."

"I wasn't going to waste good money travelling as a passenger," said Brand sullenly. "I tried to get taken on in the engine-room, but they wouldn't look at me without marine engineering experience; so I had to be content with this. It's only for a week."

"You aren't coming back, then?"

"It depends," said Brand shortly. "Not at present."

"Have you given up the Britannia Company?"

"Yes: handed in me resignation Friday afternoon."

"What on earth for? You were climbing to the top of the tree there." [pg 35

"I preferred to be on the ground," said Brand oracularly.

Philip decided not to press for information.

"Still, I'm sorry," he said.

"Why? I wasn't fired, if that's what you mean," said Brand swiftly.

At this moment another passenger came tacking down the alleyway, and Brand departed in the further execution of his official duties.

There are no facilities upon ocean liners for promoting social intercourse between bath-stewards and cabin passengers, so Philip did not see Brand again until the same hour the following morning.

"By the way, Brand," he said, as he waited for the proper adjustment of the bath's temperature, "there is a mutual friend of ours on board, travelling second class. Did you know?"

"Yes," said Brand thickly, "I did."

He swung the steam-pipe savagely back into its clip, flung two hot towels down on a seat, and departed, banging the door behind him. That was the beginning and end of the second day's conversation.

Philip saw nothing of Miss Jennings during the next few days, for the weather continued to be boisterous, and that lady—unlike other and less considerate members of the ship's company—preferred to endure the pangs of *mal-de-mer* in the seclusion of her own cabin. It was not until the fourth day out that he saw her again. She was reclining languidly in a chair, convalescent, but [pg 35
obviously disinclined for conversation. Philip passed her by.

The fifth day broke bright and sunny, and the Bosphorus, clear of the Newfoundland Banks, with their accompanying fogs and ground-swell, became a centre of social activity. Vigorous couples tramped up and down, snuffing the breeze. Unpleasant children ran shrieking round the deck, galloping over the same sets of toes at regular intervals. Elderly gentlemen played interminable games of deck-quoits and bull-board. In the smoking-room enthusiastic alcoholists gathered, to splice the main brace and bid in the auction sweep-stake on the day's run. New York was only twenty-four hours away.

Philip, descending to his cabin for a book, passed Citizen Brand, polishing cabin doorhandles with fierce energy. He paused.

"Brand," he said, "I want to have a palaver with you. Can you come and see me in my cabin this evening?"

Brand considered.

"I shall get a telling-off from the second steward if I do," he said. "Regular Cossack, he is. This ship's full of rotten rules and red-tape. Still, after all, he can only sack me, which will save me the trouble of deserting. All right: I'll come."

He appeared in Philip's cabin at ten o'clock that night, and consented to drink whiskey-and-water out of a tooth-glass.

"Well," enquired Philip, lighting his pipe, "what are your prospects in the States. Got a berth?"

"Not yet," said Brand. [pg 35

"I am going on a visit to some of the big establishments out there. If I come across anything that would suit you, shall I put it in your way?"

Brand thanked him gruffly, and said:—

"I don't know. I don't know what to say. The fact is, I don't know where I shall have to live yet."

"Have to live?"

"Yes, have to live. I can't settle anything. I—Oh, damn it, I don't know! Leave me alone!"

He sat staring savagely at the floor, with his head in his hands.

"Brand, my friend," remarked Philip, puffing at his pipe, "you and I have been acquainted for a considerable time now, haven't we?"

Brand nodded, and Philip continued:—

"I'm going to assume the privilege of an old friend, and enquire into your private affairs."

"Fat lot of information you'll get," was the gracious reply.

"Very well, then," said Philip cheerfully. "I won't enquire: I'll assume. Having assumed that everything I meant to ask about is as I think it is, I'll tell you something. It's this: you are a pretty good chap."

Brand's gloomy eyes turned upon Philip suspiciously.

"What do you mean?" he snarled.

"I mean this. You have done a pretty fine thing. If the information interests you, I may tell you that you have taught me a lesson; but that's beside the point. Last Friday you were in a comfortable berth, doing well, and rising rapidly. To-day you are a bath-steward, without any status or prospects. Why?" [pg 36

"Because I'm a blasted fool," replied Brand.

"No, I don't think so," continued Philip, "I prefer to look at it differently. You have sacrificed everything, and staked your whole future—on what? On an Idea—a single Idea. I call that a pretty fine thing."

"What Idea?" snapped Brand.

"A very pretty little Idea," said Philip. "She is now sleeping peacefully two decks below this."

Brand sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing.

"And why not?" he demanded. "Do you deny my right to follow her, and look after her, and see she comes to no harm, whatever she may think of me or do to me? I love her! Do you understand what that means? I love her! Gentlemen like you and Rendle, you don't know the meanin' of the word. With you it's just: 'Fine girl, what? Come and have supper at the Savoy to-night!' That's what you call love!" Brand's arms were waving: he was rapidly lapsing into his old Hyde Park manner. "When you've finished with one girl, or the girl's finished with you, what do you do? Kiss your 'and and get another! Bah!"

"And what do you do, Brand," enquired Philip imperturbably, "when a lady gives you up?"

"I give up my job: I give up everything, so as to be free; and I follow her. That's what I do. She's a child: she's not able to look after herself."

"Now, my impression of Miss Jennings's character," said Philip, "is exactly the opposite. I have rarely met a woman who seemed to me so well-balanced and self-possessed." [pg 36

"Up to a point, and in a manner of speaking," agreed Brand, conversing more rationally now, "you are right. But that's a woman all over. She may keep her head for months at a time, and snap her fingers at man after man; and then one fine day a fellow comes along that's no better than fifty others she's turned down—and what does she do? She goes potty! She crumples up! She crawls round him and eats out of his hand! Why is it? In God's name, sir, why is it?"

His head dropped into his hands again.

"When did this happen?" asked Philip gently. He felt strangely awed in the presence of this elemental soul.

"I'll tell you," said Brand. "It'll do me good. She and I had been getting on pretty well of late. We weren't exactly engaged, but she allowed no other man near her but me. I gave up a lot to please her. I gave up speaking in the Park, because she said it wasn't gentlemanly. I joined the Church of England—me that's been a Freethinker ever since I could think! I gave up being a Socialist, because she said it was low. I cut my wings, and clamped myself down, and dressed myself up like a Guy Fawkes—all to please her. I let her order me about, and I liked it! I liked it! That's pretty degrading, ain't it? I felt degraded and in love at the same time, if you know what I mean. That's a rotten state to be in, I don't think!"

Philip was listening intently. Somewhere in the back of his mind he felt that he had heard this [pg 36
story before. Then he remembered Uncle Joseph, and realised that all human experience appears to run upon much the same lines.

"Well, we were happy enough," continued Brand, "for a matter of two years or so. The only trouble was that when I suggested marriage she said she was very comfortable as she was and did not want to lose her independence. (They're all for independence nowadays: I don't know what causes it: Board Schools, perhaps.) In her company I was too pleased with life ever to argue about anything, so I didn't press it. But there was one big risk that I overlooked, and that was the risk of another man butting in. And that's just what happened. A feller came along. He had everything that I hadn't—fine manners and plenty of silly talk, and nasty little love-making ways. He put the come-hither on Lil. As I told you in a fortnight she was eating out of his hand. I'm not the man to take that sort of thing lying down. I asked her straight what she meant by it. She flared up, and asked when I had been appointed her keeper. I said we was engaged. She said we was no such thing. I said if we wasn't it was about time, considering all things, that we was. She asked what I meant by that. I said if she had any sort of notion of fair play she would know. After that she told me she never wanted to see me again. I said she was only anticipating my own wishes; and we parted. We ain't spoke since. That was six weeks ago."

"What became of the other man?" asked Philip.

Brand smiled grimly. [pg 36

"Him? I went to him next day, and told him if ever he spoke to Lil again I'd push his face in."

"What did he say to that?"

"He was most gentlemanly about it. Oh, *most* gentlemanly!" Brand assumed the mincing accent which he reserved for his impersonations of the aristocracy. "Told me he had no desire to come between an honest working-man and his future wife. Said he was not *permanently* interested in the lady! He got no further than that, because that was where I *did* push his face in. He was a nasty sight when I'd finished with him. He never went near Lil again, though,—the rabbit! Since than not a word has passed between her and me, except when business required. Then, last Friday, I saw her going round the office and garage saying good-bye to everybody—except me, of course—and telling them she was going to America. I waited till the dinner-hour; then wrote to headquarters, resigned my job, and went straight to Liverpool, where I managed to get signed on aboard this boat. That's all."

"What are you going to do when you get to New York?" asked Philip.

"I don't know. It depends on what Lil does," replied single-minded Citizen Brand.

"Well, how do you like the prospect of New York to-morrow, Miss Jennings?" asked Philip.

They were leaning over the taffrail in the calm darkness, watching the phosphorescent wake of the great propellers.

"At the present moment," confessed Miss Jennings frankly, "I don't like it at all. It's a way [pg 36
things have when you get right up against them. They don't look so nice as they did at a distance."

"You are not in your usual spirits to-night."

"No," said the girl, "and that's a fact. I'm not. Worst of being a woman is that you can't trust yourself to be sensible all the time. You do a thing, and you know you're doing right, and you go on knowing it was right for weeks on end; and then, just when you want to feel that you were right most especially, you go and feel that you've been wrong all the time. Silly, I call it! Sometimes I want to shake myself."

"You feel you wish you had not left London? Is that the trouble?"

"Ye—es," said Miss Jennings reluctantly.

"I'm surprised," said Philip, cautiously opening fire, "that you were ever allowed to forsake your native land."

"Who by?" enquired Miss Jennings swiftly.

"Well, there are a good many thousand young men there, you know. It doesn't show much enterprise on their part—"

"Mr. Meldrum," remarked Miss Jennings frankly, "if you start making pretty speeches, the end of the world must be coming. A good many thousand young men, indeed!"

"Well," persisted the abashed but pertinacious Philip, "let us say one young man. Surely there was just one?"

Miss Jennings was silent for a moment. Then she replied:—

"Yes, there was one." [pg 36

"More than one?"

"No. At least, there was only one that I really fancied. It was a queer thing that I should have cared for him at all. (It's all over now, so there's no harm in my telling you about it.) We were always having words one way and another. We had nothing in common, really. Very stuck on his opinions he was, and always laying down the law. His ideas weren't very gentlemanly, either. He was a Socialist, and didn't belong to the Church; but I cured him of that. I must say I improved him wonderfully."

"Was he grateful?" asked Philip.

"He was, and he wasn't. He would do anything I asked him; but if it went against the grain with him to do it he would say so before he did it—sometimes all the time he was doing it; and that rather spoils your pleasure, doesn't it?"

"I should have thought it would increase it," said Philip. "It would show your great power over him, that you should be able to compel him to do things against his will."

Miss Jennings deliberated.

"Perhaps you are right," she said at last. "I hadn't thought of it that way. Still, his back-chat used to worry me to death. And his temper! It was so fierce, I was frightened of him. He was fierce, too, in the way he loved me. He would carry on something dreadful at times."

"In what way?"

"Well, supposing I made an appointment with him, and changed my mind and didn't go—"

"Did you do that often?" [pg 36

"Oh, yes, sometimes. It's a good thing to do," explained the experienced Miss Jennings. "If you don't act like that sometimes—promise to meet him somewhere and then forget—a man begins to think he's engaged to you. If a girl doesn't respect herself, who else will? That's what I say. Then his jealousy—my word!"

For a moment Miss Jennings's cheerful little Cockney voice grew quite shrill. Then came an expressive silence, which Philip construed as an aposiopetic allusion to this young gentleman whose face had been pushed in.

"Still," he persisted gently, "you were fond of him?"

Miss Jennings did not answer immediately.

"I suppose I was," she admitted at last. "But I think I was more sorry for him, if you know what I mean. He didn't know how to look after himself: he was like a child: he wanted a nurse. But if ever I did try to do anything for him, he took it up wrong. He thought I was getting soft on him, and before you could turn round he was trying to lord it over me. No, this affair never came to anything. It never could: we were made too different, both of us. Forget it!"

Miss Jennings ceased, and surveyed the long moonlit streak of foam astern rather wistfully. To-night the land she knew and the man she had been sorry for seemed to have receded to infinity: over the bow of the ship the unknown was creeping, hand over hand, inexorably. She sighed, and then shivered. She was realising the truth of her own dictum on the subject of a woman's inability to be sensible all the time. [pg 36

Then the voice of Philip broke the silence, expounding the simple philosophy of his simple life.

"Do you know," he said, "I think that all things are possible to two people who are prepared to make allowances for one another? You and the man you speak of both possess strong natures. You both wanted to be master. You both hated conceding anything. He regarded the acts of worship that a woman expects of the man who loves her as a form of humiliation; he was content to make good by material homage—presents, theatres, and so on. You on your part felt that in accepting these things from him you were weakening your own independence and laying yourself under an obligation to him. So he, when he made actual love to you, did so reluctantly and half-heartedly—didn't he?"

"I should think he did!" affirmed the epicurean Miss Jennings.

"—While you could never accept his gifts and his arrangements for your entertainment without just a little—what shall we say?—a dash of vinegar?"

The girl nodded.

"That's it," she said.

"Now," proceeded Philip, too much immersed in his subject to be surprised at his own fluency, "when two people who love one another reach that stage, they must get over it at once, or there will be friction, and finally disaster. Each must learn at once to consider things from the other's point of view—make allowances, in fact. Brand ought to—" [pg 36

"Who?" enquired a sharp voice at his side.

"—Brand. It was Brand, wasn't it?"

Miss Jennings nodded.

"Yes," she said simply, "it was Brand. Go on."

"Brand," continued Philip, "ought to have remembered that you were a woman, with all a woman's reserve and instinct of self-defence; and that you could not be expected to wear your heart upon your sleeve."

"Yes, he ought to have remembered that," agreed Miss Jennings. "But what about me? What should I have remembered?" She appeared almost anxious to be scolded.

"This," said Philip—"that Brand was a proud, passionate man, of very humble birth, terrified of showing you his heart and being laughed at for his pains—"

The girl nodded again.

"Yes," she said, "you are right. I ought to have remembered that. I forgot his feelings sometimes. Poor Bob!" she added pensively.

"So you see," concluded Philip, thankful to feel that his homily was almost delivered, "if only you two could get accustomed to regarding one another in that light, the barrier would be down for ever. A barrier can never stand for a moment when it is attacked from both sides. Make allowances, Miss Jennings! Make allowances! Get to know one another; study one another; appreciate one another! Then Brand can pour out for you all that shy, inarticulate worship of his, without fear of indifference or ridicule, and you can surrender with all the honours of war. Will you try?" [pg 36

"Will I try?" echoed Miss Jennings wonderingly. "Isn't it a little late in the day?"

"Well—would you try?"

"Would I?" Miss Jennings's voice suddenly broke. "What's the use of my trying?" she demanded tearfully. "Bob's on the other side of the world now—taken up with another girl as likely as not. What's the good of asking me what I would do when I can't do it?"

She was crying in earnest now.

"Supposing—just supposing—" began Philip.

"Oh, stop your supposing!" the girl blazed out passionately. "Don't you see I can't bear it? I want him! I'm frightened of everything, and I want Bob! And it's too late!"

"Stay exactly where you are for about five minutes," commanded Philip. And he disappeared in the darkness.

A few minutes later Bath-Steward Brand was incurring the risk of ignominious expulsion from the service of the merchant marine by trespassing upon a portion of the deck strictly reserved for passengers.

Philip went to bed.

Philip, leaning over the forward rail of the boatdeck and surveying the silhouette of New York, rising like a row of irregular teeth upon the distant horizon, talked to himself in order to keep his spirits up.

"Theophilus, my lad,"—he liked to call himself by that name, because Peggy had sometimes used it,—"so far, your scheme of fresh friends and pastures new has turned out a fizzle. You took this trip in order to see new faces and make new friends, and generally put the past behind you. The net result is that you have not made a single new acquaintance. Instead, you have devoted your entire energies to interfering in the affairs of a second-class lady passenger and a bath-steward, neither of whom can be described under any circumstances as a new friend. You must make a real effort when you land." [pg 37

But Fate was against him. He descended to the saloon, and having there satisfied an Immigration official, sitting behind a pile of papers, that he was neither a pauper, a lunatic, nor an anarchist, could read and write, and was not suffering from any disease of the eyeball, he purchased one of the newspapers which the pilot had brought on board in the early morning, and retired to a sunny corner to occupy himself, after a week's abstention, in getting abreast of the news of the day. He unfolded the crackling sheet.

It was his first introduction to that stupendous organ of private opinion, the American newspaper.... When he had recovered his breath, and the shouting scarelines had focussed themselves into some sort of proportion, he worked methodically through the entire journal, discovering ultimately, to his relief, that nothing very dreadful had happened after all. He had almost finished, when his eye fell upon a small paragraph at the foot of a column, with its headlines set in comparatively modest type. [pg 37

CUPID GETS BUSY IN THE STUDIO

WELL-KNOWN BRITISH PAINTERS WED

LOVE COMES LATE IN LIFE
TO MONTAGU FALCONER

ASSOCIATE OF BRITISH ACADEMY
AND JEAN LESLIE
FAMOUS WOMAN MINIATURIST

We cull the following from the London "Times":

Falconer-Leslie. At St. Peter's, Eaton Square, on the 4th inst., Montagu Falconer, A.R.A., to Jean Leslie, only daughter of the late General Sir Ian Leslie, V.C., of Inverdurie, Invernesshire.

A quarter of a column followed, expatiating upon the fact that the wedding took place very quietly at ten o'clock in the morning, and that reporters had met with a discouraging reception from the bridegroom. Then came a list of Montagu's best-known pictures. But Philip did not read it. He threw the paper down on deck, and started to his feet.

The Bosphorus had come to a standstill at the opening of her berth, waiting for the tugs to turn her in. Protruding from the next opening was the forepart of a monster liner, from whose four funnels smoke was spouting.

Philip enquired of a passing quartermaster:— [pg 37

"What ship is that, please?"

"The Caspian, sir. Our record-breaker!" said the man, with proper pride. "She sails for Liverpool at noon."

Half an hour later Philip found himself and his belongings dumped upon the Continent of America. A minion of the rapacious but efficient ring of buccaneers which controls the entire transport system of the United States confronted him.

"Where shall I express your baggage?" he enquired.

"You can put it on board the Caspian," replied Philip.

"Gee!" remarked the expressman admiringly.

"Some hustler, ain't you?"

"I am," said Philip—"this trip! Get busy!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF THEOPHILUS

"PRETTY hot stuff this port of yours, old son—what?"

"Take some more," grunted Philip.

"Thank you. That *was* the situation I was endeavouring to lead up to," said Timothy, and helped himself.

"It's a blessing to see your honest but homely features once again," he continued, lifting his glass, "especially when you signalise your return by replenishing the wine-cellar. Chin-chin, old thing!"

Philip, sitting on one chair with his feet on another and smoking a briar pipe, grunted again. Timothy rose, and lit a cigarette with a live coal from the fire. (Matches were never a conspicuous feature of a bachelor establishment, however well regulated.) As he did so, his eye was caught by a pair of tall and hideous vases,—of the kind which is usually given away at coöperative stores to customers who have been rash enough to accumulate a certain number of coupons,—standing one at each end of the mantelpiece.

"Oh, my dear old Theophilus," moaned the æsthetic Timothy, "do you mean to say you have resurrected the Bulgarian Atrocities?"

The ornaments in question had been a Christmas present from Mrs. Grice. ("I bought 'em just before closing-time at a Sale of Work what my married sister in the Wandsworth Road was interested in, sir," she had explained. "A Sale of Work in aid of the Bulgarian Atrocities, it was. I said to Grice at the time that they would brighten up your room something wonderful. There they are, sir, with our respectful Christmas wishes—one from Grice and one from me. Oh, thank you sir!") Hence their name. [pg 37

"Yes," said Philip; "Mrs. Grice got them out of the cupboard as soon as I returned, and they were duly washed and put up this morning. I was hoping she had forgotten about them; but they will have to stay there now. We mustn't offend the old lady. You are a tremendous swell to-night, Tim. Going out?"

"Yes," said Tim importantly, "I am." He produced a pair of white gloves and began to try them on, surveying Philip's aged dinner-jacket and black tie with tolerant indulgence.

"I must now pull myself together," he announced, turning to survey an appallingly tight white waistcoat with immense satisfaction in the glass over the mantelpiece, "and pass along quietly."

"You needn't go yet," said Philip, filling another pipe.

"Despite your frenzied entreaties, old son," replied Timothy, "I simply must. There is going to be dirty work at the crossroads to-night," he added mysteriously.

Philip, who gathered that a confidence of some kind was on the way, waited. It was good to see Timothy again. His company was always exhilarating, and at the present juncture it was extra welcome. For Philip found himself at an unexpectedly loose end. He had landed from the Caspian a week before, determined this time to put his whole fate to the touch—only to find that his Lady was not in London. Friends in Hampshire—he knew neither their name nor address, and was much too self-conscious to enquire at Tite Street—had snatched her away directly after her father's wedding, and the date of her return was uncertain. Therefore he leaned at this moment upon Timothy. [pg 37

Presently Tim enquired:—

"I say, Phil, ever been in love, old friend?"

This was a familiar gambit, and Philip gave his usual reply.

"Occasionally."

"Anything doing at present? Anything fresh?"

"Nothing to write home about, thanks."

Timothy surveyed his friend critically.

"I wonder," he said musingly, "if Romance could ever really find a lurking-place in that gearless, valveless little heart!"

"Afraid not," said Philip. "Romance gives old fossils like me the go-by."

"Don't talk rot of that kind, Phil," replied the boy quickly. "Any woman would be proud to marry you. Fool if she wasn't!" he added, with real sincerity.

Philip responded by waving his glass in his friend's direction.

"Mr. Rendle, your health and sentiment!" he remarked gravely. He drank; laid down the glass; and sat up. [pg 37

"And now, my son Timothy," he remarked briskly, "get it off your chest! Own up! Who is she? When do the banns go up—eh?"

"Get what off my chest?" enquired Tim, with a great appearance of surprise.

"This great secret. Cough it up! Who is the lady?"

One of Philip's greatest virtues in the eyes of Timothy was that he never, under any

circumstances, ended that particular question with "this time." But he was genuinely surprised at Philip's penetration.

"Great Scott! It must be written all over me if you can spot it, old Bartimæus!" he said, not altogether displeased. "Yes, you are right. It has happened at last."

"What?"

"*It!* I'm in love."

"It comes to us all, sooner or later," remarked Philip tactfully.

"And I am going," announced Tim with great firmness, "to bring it off this very night."

Philip glanced at the clock.

"Quarter to ten," he said. "A bit late to begin a job of that magnitude to-night, isn't it? Are you going to apply personally, or by letter?"

"What's that?" enquired Timothy, emerging from a rapturous reverie.

Philip repeated the question.

"Letter?" exclaimed Tim with infinite scorn—"a letter? Write? Write a letter? My sainted aunt, *write*?" He gazed indignantly upon the automaton before him that called itself a man. "My dear old relic of the Stone Age—" [pg 37

"In the Stone Age," observed the relic, "they couldn't write."

Timothy made reference to the Stone Age which was neither seemly nor relevant, and continued:—

"Do you expect me to sit down and write—write to *her*—upon such a subject as that? Write—with a three-and-nine-penny fountain pen, on Silurian notepaper at a shilling a packet? It's not *done*, dear old soul; it's simply not *done*!"

Timothy, carefully hitching up the knees of his faultlessly creased trousers, lowered himself on to the sofa, the picture of reproachful scorn.

"If it takes you that way," replied the unruffled Philip, "why not use cream-laid vellum and a gold nib?"

Timothy merely made an alarming noise at the back of his neck.

"Or a typewriter, with the loud pedal down and all the stops out?" pursued the facetious Philip.

"Phil," announced Timothy, with a pathetic attempt to look extremely stern and dignified, "let me tell you that I am in no mood for this sort of thing. Dry up, man; dry up! Do you think I could get all I have to say upon this occasion within the limits of an ordinary letter?"

"Under the present postal regulations," explained Philip, "you can send four ounces for a penny. In fact, if you leave the ends open—"

He caught sight of Tim's tragic face, and concluded his entertainment.

"Sorry, old chap!" he remarked, suddenly contrite. "I don't know why one should try to pull a man's leg on these occasions. God knows, the business is serious enough." [pg 37

"Thanks," said Timothy gratefully. "To tell you the truth, I am feeling pretty bad about it. You don't know what it is to be hard hit by a woman, Phil."

"No. I should have remembered that," said Philip apologetically.

"I know you consider me a young blighter who is always in love with some little piece of goods or other," continued the chastened Timothy; "but this time it is serious. This is the end of all things. Never before have I got sufficiently fond of a girl to ask her to marry me; but I am going to do it to-night."

"I wish you luck," said Philip with feeling.

"Thanks, old friend," responded the boy gratefully. "I'm in a terrible twitter."

"Why *not* write?" reiterated the methodically minded Philip. "A letter has its points, you know. I understand that on these occasions it is a little difficult to keep one's head. Metaphors get mixed; telling points are omitted; and the peroration halts, or misses fire."

The feverish Timothy eyed his friend with amazed compassion.

"I should like to remind you," he observed, "that we are discussing love-letters—not election addresses!"

"All right," said Philip pacifically; "have it your own way. All I wanted to bring home to you was the fact that once you get your sentiments safely down on paper, the lady is bound to get the hang of them in the long run. On the other hand, if you stake everything on a single verbal encounter, you may find yourself in the tumbril. The G.P.O. may be unromantic, but it is safe." [pg 37

But Timothy was not listening. He had put on his greatcoat and was now adjusting a white silk muffler.

"I'm going," he announced in trumpet tones, "to let her have it hot and strong. I'm going to carry her off her feet. I'm going—The devil of it all is," he added disconsolately, "that one never knows how to begin—when to chip in, in fact. You know! One can't very well get to work while shaking hands; there has to be a little preliminary chit-chat of some kind. Then, the conversation goes and settles down to some rotten, irrelevant topic; and before you can work it round to suit your plans the next dance strikes up, or some criminal comes and interrupts you, or else it's time to go home. And there you are, outside on the mat once more, kicking yourself to death!"

Timothy cocked his silk hat upon his sleek head with great precision, and concluded:—

"But I am going to do it to-night, or perish. Give me five minutes in the Freeborns' conservatory between waltzes, and she has simply got to have it! Good-night!"

He bounced out of the room, and was gone.

"I wonder who the charmer is this time," mused Philip, getting up and knocking out his pipe. "I might have asked him."

He rang the bell, and after a moment Mrs. Grice glided respectfully into the room, after the manner of a cardboard figure in a toy theatre. She was followed by her husband, struggling with his coat. [pg 38

"'Ave you rang the bell, sir?" queried Mrs. Grice.

"Yes," said Philip. "Will you clear away, please. I want that table to-night—to write at."

During the turmoil which now ensued, Philip sat on the padded leather fire-guard and lit another pipe. Presently he said:—

"Mrs. Grice!"

Mrs. Grice, engaged in a bout of what looked like a game of catch-as-catch-can with Mr. Grice and the tablecloth, immediately extricated herself from her damask winding-sheet and came respectfully to attention.

"Sir?"

"Mrs. Grice, when you received your husband's proposal of marriage, was it by letter or word of mouth?"

Mrs. Grice, needless to say, was quite overwhelmed with maidenly confusion. Coming from Timothy, such a question as this would have surprised her not at all; for Timothy was one of those fortunate persons who may say what they like to any one. But as uttered by her grave and reserved patron Mr. Meldrum, it sounded most alarming. She replied, breathlessly:—

"Was you referring to Mr. Grice or to my first 'usband, sir?"

"'Ow should Mr. Meldrum," enquired a husky voice from the sideboard, "know you ever 'ad a fust 'usband?" [pg 38

Mrs. Grice, having now recovered her mental poise, countered with a lightning thrust.

"Knowing you as he does, Grice," she retorted, "is it likely Mr. Meldrum would dream of regardin' you as my first choice?"

Philip broke in pacifically:—

"Let us say your first husband, Mrs. Grice."

"Well, sir," began Mrs. Grice readily, "'e did it by word of mouth. Leastways, not precisely. Partly by deputy, if you take my meaning, sir."

Philip made an apologetic gesture.

"Not absolutely," he said.

"Well, sir," continued Mrs. Grice, beginning to enjoy herself, "we'd bin walkin' out for some time, and it didn't look like ever comin' to anything. So my brother George, 'e said it was time the matter was took up proper. George was a brewer's drayman. There was eleven of us altogether!—"

"Not *quite* so much of it!" advised Mr. Grice, who had left the sideboard to join the symposium. "Get back to your first."

Needless to say, Mrs. Grice took not the slightest notice.

"Well, sir, George told me to tell 'Enery—that bein' his name; Grice's, as you know, bein' Albert —"

"Keep to the point, do!" groaned Mr. Grice.

"—George told me to tell 'Enery—'Enery 'Orbling his full name was—that if him and me wasn't married inside of four weeks, George would come along and knock his 'ead off. I told 'Enery what George had said, sir," continued the old lady in a tone of tender reminiscence, "and I became Mrs. 'Orbling in three weeks and six days exactly. That's what I meant when I said that my courting was done by deputy. 'Orbling died fourteen years ago, in Charing Cross Hospital. His kidneys are still —" [pg 38

"I see," said Philip hurriedly. "Grice, when you asked the future Mrs. Grice to become your wife, how did *you* set about it?"

"Was you referrin', sir," enquired Mr. Grice, with a respectful wheeze, "to this Mrs. Grice or to my first wife?"

"Let us say this Mrs. Grice," said Philip, beginning to feel a little dizzy.

Mr. Grice, who had been assisting his second choice to load glasses and spoons on to a tray, once more desisted from his labours in order not to confuse his brain, and began, fixing his wavering eye upon a point on the wall just above Philip's head:—

"I met 'er at a birthday party at my late first's married sister's, sir. I gave her a motter out of a cracker, which seemed to me to sum up what I wanted to say in very convenient fashion, sir. It said:—

> *"'If you love me as I love you,*
> *Then let's begin to bill and coo,'*

sir. Very 'andy and compact, I thought it."

"And what did you say to that, Mrs. Grice?" asked Philip.

"I told him to give over being a silly old man, sir," replied Mrs. Grice, with extreme gratification. [pg 38

"And did he?"

"No, sir," replied the simpering Mrs. Grice. "'E *would* 'ave me! He got his way." She smiled roguishly at her all-conquering spouse, who gave her a look of stern reproof. "Will there be anything further, sir?"

"No thank you," said Philip. "Good-night!"

His aged retainers having withdrawn, Philip sat on, staring into the fire.

"We all have our own ways of setting about things," he said aloud. Philip had a bad habit of talking to himself, especially at moments of mental concentration. When scolded by Peggy, he had pleaded that it helped him to think. "Tim's is a personal interview in the conservatory. Grice's is a motto out of a cracker. Mrs. Grice's is a big brother. Mine—"

He rose, and crossed the room to a locked bureau. From this he extracted an old leather writing-case, which had once belonged to his father. This he laid open upon the table, beside a green-shaded reading-lamp. After that he turned out all the other lights and made up the fire to a cheerful blaze. Finally, from the pocket of the writing-case he extracted a fat envelope. It was addressed, but not fastened. Philip drew up his chair to the table and pulled out the contents. These comprised many sheets, the last of which was not finished.

He read the letter right through, slowly and seriously. Occasionally he made an erasure or a correction, but not often. Then, when he reached the unfinished page, he charged his pen, squared his elbows, uttered a heavy sigh, and addressed himself to the labours of composition. [pg 38

More than once he tore a page up and began again, but finally all was finished.

He leaned back and read the whole epistle right through again. Then he folded its many sheets in their right order and put them into the envelope.

"I think the occasion calls for sealing-wax," he said.

He found an old stump in the writing-case, and sealed up the envelope, impressing it with his father's seal. Presently the deed was done. The Epistle of Theophilus lay on the table before its author, signed, sealed, addressed, and stamped. Philip looked at the clock, and whistled. It was a quarter past twelve.

He drew aside the curtains and inspected the night. The plate-glass window had become mysteriously opaque; so he raised the sash—to lower it again with all speed, coughing. A thick brown fog, of the brand affectionately known among its habitual inhalers as "London particular," was lying in a sulphurous pall over the choking city.

"All the same, my lad," decided Philip, "you had better trot out and post it. It will be delivered at Tite Street to-morrow morning, and perhaps some Christian person there will forward it. Perhaps Jean Leslie will. Wish I could post myself, too," he added wistfully. "Hello, what's that?"

From the little lobby outside came the sharp rat-tat of a knocker—low, clear, and rhythmical. To judge by the sound, the outer door was standing open, and some person unknown was indulging in a playful little tattoo. [pg 38

"Officers' wives get pudding and pies,
Soldiers' wives get skill-y!"

it said.

Philip's heart almost broke from its moorings. Hastily he picked up the shaded lamp from the table and turned its light to illuminate the doorway.

Next moment there came a quick and familiar step outside. The door of the room opened gently; and there appeared, radiant and dazzling against the blackness behind, a Vision.

"*Peggy!*"

"Yes—just me!" replied the Vision demurely.

CHAPTER XXX

THE SILENT KNIGHT

PEGGY walked to the fire and warmed her hands delicately. She was wrapped in a dark-blue velvet opera-cloak trimmed with fur. One corner had fallen back, showing the pink silk lining.

Presently she slipped this garment off, and throwing it across a chair sat down upon the padded top of the fireguard with a contented sigh and smiled seraphically upon her host. The clock struck half-past twelve.

"Peggy," enquired the respectable Philip severely, "what on earth are you doing here?"

"I came to see you, Theophilus," replied Peggy. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Such conduct," observed Philip resolutely, "is most reprehensible."

"Yes, isn't it? But I was at a dance close by, and I thought you would like to see my new frock. Do you think it is pretty?"

Philip merely gaped. He was all at sea. Peggy regarded him covertly for a moment, and spoke again.

"When a lady," she remarked reproachfully, "takes the trouble to climb up four flights of stairs to show a gentleman her new frock, it is usual for the gentleman to say something appreciative."

"I think it is beautiful," said Philip, feasting his eyes upon her. [pg 38

Peggy, noticing this, decided to divert his attention from the wearer to the garment.

"And yet," she said, "if you were asked to describe it to-morrow, you would not be able to remember a single thing about it."

"I should remember every detail," replied Philip, "but I should not be able to describe it. There's a difference, you know."

"Try—now," suggested Peggy.

Philip meekly fell in with her mood. He knew enough of the character of the girl before him to be quite certain that she had not visited his flat at midnight in order to show him her new frock. She wanted him for something: perhaps she was in trouble. Well, she would tell him in due course. For the moment, extenuating irrelevancies were to be the order of the day.

"Miss Peggy Falconer," he began conscientiously, "looked charming in a white silk—"

"Satin," corrected the charming one.

"—satin creation, which was partly obscured from view by a sort of kilt—"

"A tunic."

"—a tunic, of pink gauze."

"Of rose-coloured *chiffon*."

"Thank you. Miss Falconer wore the neatest little white satin shoes, tied up with ribbon, and white silk—"

"They are not usually mentioned."

"Sorry! Miss Falconer wore long white gloves—"

"They are taken for granted."

"Well, anyhow," persisted the harassed Philip, "round her hair Miss Falconer wore a band of some stuff or other—" [pg 38

"Of *tulle*."

"—of tulle, which very cleverly matched the colour of her ki—tunic. Over her shoulders she wore a filmy scarf, of the same stu—material. Her waistband, which she wore rather high up, contained a small bunch of carnations. Finally her appearance caused considerable gratification to one of her oldest friends, who did not know that she was in town."

"I only got back this afternoon," said Peggy, who by this time had risen to her feet and was inspecting Philip's *lares et penates*. "By the way, your front door was ajar, Philip. Your last visitor

must have left it open. Very careless! You might have been robbed."

"I expect it was Friend Grice."

Peggy babbled on. She was speaking vivaciously, and rather more rapidly than was her wont; another woman would have said that she was talking to exclude other topics.

"It is more than a year since I was in these rooms, Philip. They are as snug as ever, but horribly untidy. Why do you always keep books on the floor? And your mantelpiece—tragic!" She ran her finger along the edge, and held it up reproachfully. "Look! Filthy!" The tip of her glove was black. "I shall have to take my gloves off, I see, to keep them clean."

"I apologise. You have dropped in just before our annual dust-up. Most unfortunate!"

"Are these your household gods?" continued Peggy, coming to a halt before the mantelpiece. [pg 38

"Yes."

"Yours or Timothy's?"

"Mine. Tim keeps his in the other room across the passage. We usually feed here and sit there."

Peggy gave a little cry.

"My dear Philip, when did you get those awful vases?"

Philip explained, with more apologies.

"And what is that queer thing there?"

"That is a model of the Meldrum Carburettor."

Peggy nodded her head.

"I remember," she said. "I have met it before. I suppose you say your prayers to it. What is in that cracker jar?"

"Tobacco."

"I thought so. As for these old pipes, you ought either to send them away to be cleaned and revarnished, or else get a new set altogether. No, I don't think much of your taste in mantelpiece ornaments, Philip. Now if *I* were an eligible young bachelor, I should sweep all these hideosities away and substitute a row of photographs of fair ladies."

"I'm afraid I haven't got any," said Philip.

Peggy regarded him coldly.

"Indeed!" she observed. "I have an idea that I once presented you with my portrait."

"Here it is," said Philip.

He pointed to the open bureau. There stood Peggy's photograph, in a large round silver frame.

"H'm!" said the original, with her head on one side. "The darkest corner of an old bureau! I [pg 39
thought as much. I suppose this empty space in the middle of the mantelpiece is reserved?"

"Reserved—what for?" enquired the mystified Philip.

Peggy pointed an accusing finger.

"Whose photograph," she enquired, "does a man eventually plant in the middle of his mantelpiece? Hasn't she come along yet, Theophilus? You must hustle, you know. You are getting on. You must not be left on the shelf!"

She put her head upon one side in the manner which Philip loved, and smiled provocatively up at her sere and yellow devotee.

Then, without a moment's warning, her mood changed.

"Philip, my friend," she said caressingly, "forgive me. You are an angel of patience. I did not come here to-night to show you my new frock, or torment you."

"I had gathered that," replied Philip gravely. "Won't you sit down?"

He drew up an armchair to the fire, and the girl sank into it luxuriously, extending her flimsily shod feet to the blaze. Philip stood with an elbow upon the mantelpiece, looking down upon his love. All his life he never forgot the picture that Peggy presented at that moment—enthroned in his old armchair in the dimly lit, smoke-laden room, in her shimmering ball-dress, the firelight tingeing her bare arms and shoulders, and her brown eyes and honey-coloured hair glinting in its rays.

"Can I help you about anything?" he asked bluntly.

"Yes, Philip, you can. I want to tell you something. I—I have just had a proposal!" [pg 39

"Where? When?" asked Philip involuntarily.

"At the Freeborns' dance, on the top of a flight of stairs, about three quarters of an hour ago," replied Peggy with great precision.

"Not in the conservatory?"

"Conservatory? No. Why?"

"I had a kind of notion," said Philip lamely, "that these events always occurred in a conservatory. You know—Chinese lanterns—distant music—exotic atmosphere—and so on! Was it a good proposal?"

"Fair to middling, so far as my experience goes."

"Did he—carry you off your feet?"

"No," said the girl soberly, "he didn't. I maintained my equilibrium: it's a way I have. But you mustn't think I didn't enjoy it. It was most thrilling."

"Quite good, in fact, for a first attempt?"

"First attempt?" Peggy's eyebrows went up. "How do you know it was a first attempt? Have you guessed who it was?"

Philip nodded.

"Perhaps he told you?"

"No. I have only just guessed."

"How upsetting of you. I wanted it to be a surprise."

"It is. He was dining here to-night, obviously on the war-path, and bound for the Freeborns' dance. But I never guessed you were the objective: I didn't know you were in town, for one thing. So you came here to tell me your news?"

"Yes," said Peggy. "Not altogether," she added slowly. "I—I want to consult you, Philip. It's a big thing for a girl to have to decide on a plunge like this—the biggest thing she ever does. It rather—rather frightens her at times. If she has no mother, and no brothers or sisters, and—and a dad like my dad, it becomes a bigger thing than ever. Her best course, then, is to pick out the whitest man she knows, and ask him to advise her. That is why I am here." [pg 39

There was a long silence. Then Philip said:—

"I am very proud that you should have come to me. But—but I doubt if I am the right person. Why not ask a woman to advise you?"

"Because," replied Peggy with great vigour, "women are such born matchmakers. If you go to a woman and confide to her that you are wobbling on the brink of matrimony, she won't advise you: she will simply step behind you and push you in! That is why I can't consult Jean Leslie,—Jean Falconer, I mean,—although she is my best friend. She is far too romantic to say or do anything

practical. No, I must have a man, Philip; and I have picked you. You are the best sort I know; you have seen a good deal of life; and you are absolutely unbiased. You know me, and you know Tim. Now, shall I marry him?"

Philip sat down rather heavily upon the fireguard, and pondered.

"May I ask you two or three obvious and old-fashioned questions?" he said presently.

Peggy nodded.

"Do you—care for him?"

Peggy wrinkled her brow. [pg 39

"He's rather a lamb, you know," she said, "and I am fond of him. But I don't quite know how much of it is the real thing and how much is gratitude. I think you know"—she hesitated—"that things have not always been too easy at home—"

"Yes, I do know!" said Philip with sudden passion. "Sorry! Go on!"

"—And Tim could take me away from that. He has been very good to me, always, and I have not too many friends. I find friends rather difficult to keep. I fancy Dad may be the reason. You, for instance, have given us up—"

Philip made a sudden movement, but did not speak.

"In fact, you have hardly been inside our house since you left it after your illness."

This time Philip could answer.

"I felt rude and churlish," he said earnestly, "but it seemed the best thing to do. You see, one of the last observations which your esteemed parent made to me was to the effect that he wished to congratulate me upon having got through my illness so inexpensively! After that—"

"I know," said Peggy, smiling, "but I need not apologise. You know what Dad is."

"He furthermore added—" said Philip, flushing.

"Yes, I know what he added," interposed Peggy quickly. "He shouts, rather, when he is making a point. And you, poor thing, being his honoured guest, could not answer back! The fact is, the old [pg 39
gentleman contracted the gravest suspicions of you the first time he found me washing your face! (After all, some one had to do it.) He was always inclined, too, to regard you as a malingerer, though I kept explaining to him that a compound fracture of the tibia could not be simulated. Still, the long and short of it all is, Philip, that you don't come about the house any more. Tim does, though; apparently Dad regards him as harmless. Tim has been very very good to me, and as I say, I am grateful."

"And you are thinking of marrying him?"

"Frankly, I am thinking of it."

"But you have not said Yes?"

"No. Next question, please?"

"You are sure that Tim cares for you?"

"Well," said Peggy cheerfully, "to judge by the way he went on upon the top step, I should call him a pretty severe case."

"But does he love you?" persisted Philip doggedly. "A woman is always supposed to know that."

"Yes, Philip," assented Peggy quietly; "she usually knows."

"Where is Tim all this time, by the way?"

"I left him at the ball. He was particularly anxious to have a farewell waltz with a certain girl. You see, he is by way of burning his boats to-night."

"Who is the lady?"

"Her name is Babs Duncombe. He told me all about her. She is one of the only other girls he ever loved. I gather that she is about the pick of the 'also rans.' I told him he could have half an hour to close his account with her, and then he could come along here and call for me. There's one o'clock striking. Now, Philip, *what* shall I say?" [pg 39

Peggy's eyes met Philip's, and they were full of appeal. But Philip asked one more question. He thought it permissible, under the circumstances.

"I just want to ask this," he said. "Are you—sure there is no one else?"

Peggy shook her head.

"There can be no one else," she said deliberately. "Tim—and you—are the only men I have ever known really well. There can't be any other."

She rose to her feet and stood before Philip—slim, fragrant, and wistful—and laid her hands on his broad shoulders. The hands were trembling.

"Advise me, friend," she said. "I will go by what you say. Be a big brother for a minute. Tell me what to do. Shall I marry him? I—I'm rather lonely, sometimes."

Philip looked up into her face and all hesitation left him. The fight within him ceased. In its place had come the rarest and most wonderful thing in human nature—Love that takes no account of Self. For the moment Philip Meldrum had ceased to be. All he saw was Peggy—Peggy happily married and properly cared for.

Very gently he drew the girl's hands from his shoulders and held them in his own. Then he said:—

"Yes—marry him. And I hope you will be very happy, Peggy dear." [pg 39

"Thank you, Philip," said Peggy quietly: one had almost said listlessly. She was very white. She sank down into the chair again, and Philip released her hands.

"And now," he said with great energy, "I'll go out and look for a cab for you. There's a fearful fog outside, and there is no saying when Tim will turn up. In any case you can't stay here till the milkman calls. I will see if I can find some kind of fiery chariot for you. I suppose I can't offer you a whiskey-and-soda?"—pointing to the tray on the table.

"I'll take a little soda-water, please," replied Peggy faintly.

She lay back gazing silently into the fire until her host supplied her needs. Then she spoke again, in her old steady, clear tones:—

"You are a good sort, Philip. You ought to marry some day: you are wasted at present. And when you pick a wife, show her to me first, and I will see you're not imposed on."

"Taxi?" interposed Philip, almost roughly.

"I'm not particular," said Peggy. "You had better be quick, though, because I am going to explore this room and meddle with all your—"

But Philip had gone.

Presently Peggy rose to her feet and began to wander round the room. She arrived at the bookcase.

"*Engineering*—seven bound volumes. That's not very exciting. Rudyard Kipling"—surveying a long row: "that's better. He loves him, I know. Stevenson, Jacobs, Wells." She took down a green volume. "'The Country of the Blind.' So *that's* where you were brought up, *mon ami*!" [pg 39

Peggy restored the book to its place with a quavering little laugh, and turned to the table. Then

she stopped dead.

Before her, in the circle of light formed by the rays of the lamp, lay a letter—a bulky letter, ready for post. It was addressed to herself.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE ELEVENTH HOUR

"*This Week's Society Problem*," mused Peggy. "*A, an unsophisticated young spinster, finding herself alone in the residence of B, an eligible bachelor acquaintance, notices upon B's dining-room table a letter in B's handwriting, addressed to herself and stamped for post.* Problem: *What should A do?* Answer adjudged correct: *Leave the letter where it is and wait until the postman delivers it.* Answer adjudged incorrect: *Open the letter and read it*."

A minute later the seal was broken and Peggy was composedly extracting the folded sheets.

"I'm afraid I never did have the instincts of a real lady," she said. "But perhaps the postman would never have delivered this letter. I will salve my conscience by picking off the stamp and saving him a penny."

She did so. Then, sitting down to the table and drawing the lamp a little nearer, she smoothed out the crackling pages and began to read.

This is the letter of a man who suffers from an impediment in his speech. I have been able to talk to you on many subjects, but never on this—the thing that matters most in all the world.

Peggy drew her chair a little closer.

I might have told you all about it long ago, the letter continued, for I have been ready to do so ever since you gathered me up from under the car at the foot of Wickmore Hill. [pg 39
But I never did. Twice I have nearly done it, and twice I have drawn back—the first time because it seemed too soon, the second because it seemed no use. If details would interest you, the first time was in the early days of my convalescence at Tite Street. I came hobbling into your drawing-room one afternoon—and you had been crying. I suppose your father had been inconsiderate again. Not that you showed it, but I happened to sit down in the same chair as your handkerchief, which was soaking. If necessary, I can produce the handkerchief as evidence.

Peggy gave a half-hysterical little sob.

The second time was on Chelsea Embankment. I don't suppose you remember.

Then followed Philip's version of what took place on Chelsea Embankment. Peggy smiled indulgently. She could afford to smile now.

But now that the reason which kept you from marrying any one—and I think it was fine of you—has been removed, I want to reopen the subject in earnest. First of all, let me talk about the beginning of things....

Peggy looked up.

"I wonder why men always want to go back to the Year One when they make love," she mused. "Tim did it, too. I suppose it is a man's idea of showing how firmly founded his affection is. 'Established eighteen-seventy-six'—that sort of thing!"

Then she returned to her letter.

It was a lengthy epistle, this Epistle of Theophilus. Primarily it was a love-letter; but when you have never written a love-letter before and never intend to write another, a good deal of secondary [pg 40
matter is apt to creep in. This letter contained the whole of Philip's simple philosophy of life; his confession of faith; the thoughts that a deeply reserved and extremely sensitive man sets down just once, and for one eye only. He felt that Peggy was entitled to a full and complete inventory of his

thoughts about her; so he set them all down, page by page, line by line; not knowing that a woman as often as not chooses a man as she chooses a house, not because of the stability of the foundations or the purity of the water-supply, but because a quaint, old-fashioned sundial in the garden has caught her fancy, or some oddly shaped room in an out-of-the-way turret strikes her as the one and only site for a little private and particular retreat of her own. But Peggy read on.

The letter covered wide ground. It went back to their first wonderful meeting, and recalled childish conversations which Peggy thought she had forgotten. It told of knightly dreams, and of the Lady whom the Knight was one day to meet and marry—not realising that he had met her already. After that came more recent history—the second meeting, and the rapturous convalescence at Tite Street. The black months that followed the tragedy on Chelsea Embankment were sketched very lightly. Finally came the story of the momentous voyage upon the Bosphorus, and the race home.

The letter closed with a passage which need not be set down here. This is in the main a frivolous narrative; and there are certain inner rooms in the human heart, from the threshold of which self-respecting frivolity draws back with decent reverence. [pg 40

The clock struck two. Simultaneously the outer door of the flat opened with the rattle of a latchkey; and next moment Timothy burst into the room. Peggy was curled up in the big armchair before the fire, apparently half asleep.

"That you, Timmy?" she enquired.

"Yes—dearest!" replied Timothy.

Inflated with the enormous pride of possession, he leaned over the back of the chair and gazed fondly down upon his prospective bride.

"Don't bother me just now," said Peggy. "I'm rather sleepy."

"Darling!" responded the infatuated Timothy.

"Stop blowing on the top of my hand, and help yourself to a cigarette, there's a good child," suggested the darling soothingly.

Timothy obeyed, a trifle dashed.

"I don't think, little girl," he remarked, lighting the cigarette, "that that is *quite* the way in which a man expects to be greeted by his *fiancée*."

"His what?" asked Peggy.

"His—well, dash it all, Peggy," exclaimed Timothy impatiently,—he was naturally somewhat tightly strung up to-night,—"don't be a little pig. Here I come hareing along from the dance in search of you, as full of beans as—as—as a—"

"Beanpod?" suggested Peggy helpfully. [pg 40

"No! Yes! All right! Beanpod, if you like!" cried the sorely tried youth. "But give a fellow a chance. As I say, here I come, red-hot on your track, just overflowing with—well, I can't describe it—and you greet me as if I were a Rural Dean."

"I should never dream of addressing a Rural Dean as 'Timmy,' Timmy," Peggy replied.

"Well, you know what I mean," insisted Timothy, not in the least appeased by this soft answer. "Just think. We have both been passing through the greatest crisis of our lives—the most thrilling moment of our joint existence—"

"Have we?" asked Peggy in simple wonder. "I didn't know."

Her incensed swain, grappling heroically with his feelings, began to stride about the room.

"Peggy," he said in a stern voice, "let us understand one another clearly."

For reply, the unfeeling Miss Falconer rose to her feet and struck an attitude.

"'*Tush!' cried the Marquis, pacing the floor of the bijou boudoir liked a caged lion*," she recited.

Timothy uttered an impatient ejaculation, and dropped upon the sofa.

"*Then, with a superb gesture of contempt, he turned upon his heel and flung himself into the depths of an abysmal divan*," continued Peggy. "Careful, Timmy! I heard the sofa crack."

"I suppose you know, Peggy," announced Timothy in a very ill-used voice, "that you are breaking my heart? Also destroying my faith in women? Mere details, of course," he added, in what was meant to be a tone of world-weary cynicism; "but they may interest you!" [pg 40

He rose, and leaning gloomily against the mantelpiece, glowered his disapprobation of his beloved's ill-timed levity.

Once more, just as in her conversation with Philip, Peggy flashed into another mood. She put out an appealing hand, and touched Tim caressingly.

"Timmy, dear," she said, "I'm sorry—there! Will you forgive me, please?"

"Yes, I forgive you," replied Timothy, reassuming his air of possession at once. "But it must not occur again."

"All right," agreed Peggy meekly.

Then she looked at Timothy with a troubled expression.

"Tim," she said, "I want to talk to you like a mother. I have been thinking."

"And have you come to the conclusion that you don't love me!" exclaimed Timothy in a tragic voice. "I know: don't explain! That is a woman all over. A couple of hours—"

"I wasn't going to say anything of the kind, Tim," interposed Peggy quietly; "but I have been thinking." She fingered the buttons of Timothy's immaculate waistcoat. "I have been wondering if a man like you *ought* to marry at present. What lovely buttons!" She played a little tune on them to show her appreciation.

"Don't treat me like a child, please," said Timothy stiffly.

"At this moment," replied Peggy, "that is just the way I am *not* treating you." [pg 40

"You think me too young, I know," insisted Tim.

"I wasn't thinking of you at all," said Peggy calmly.

"I see," said Timothy in a hollow voice. "Yourself? Quite so!" He laughed sardonically.

"No," replied Peggy patiently; "of something bigger. Something bigger than either of us. I was thinking—well, of the nation at large."

"Peggy," enquired Timothy, entirely befogged but considerably intrigued, "what are you talking about?"

"Sit down, and listen," replied Peggy.

Timothy obeyed, and the girl continued:—

"It's this way, Tim. Many a man of promise has ruined his prospects by an early marriage. You are a man of promise, Tim."

"Oh, rot!" protested Timothy, kindling none the less.

"If you were to marry now," continued Peggy, in the same thoughtful voice, "you would settle down into a contented, domesticated husband."

Tim nodded.

"It's about time I did," he said darkly.

"No," countered Peggy; "not yet. You are a man of action, Tim. You ought to be free, at present —free to fight, and climb high, and become famous—"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Timothy, despite himself.

"—and to reach the great place you are entitled to. If I were a man, I would let nothing come between me and my career. A career! Would you sacrifice all that, Tim, just to get married?" [pg 40

"But, Peggy," exclaimed Timothy, "you would help me. At least, you wouldn't be a bit in the way."

"You do say kind things to me, Tim," replied Peggy gratefully. "But it would never do. Even a man of your personality would find it hard to get on without friends and without influence; and very young married men have few friends and less influence. They are back numbers: nobody wants them. It's the rising young bachelors who go everywhere, and can command interest and popularity and fame. A wife would be a dreadful drag. She might make shipwreck of your life."

Tim drew in his breath, and was on the point of making a gallant interjection of protest; but Peggy concluded swiftly:—

"So you *must* establish yourself in the public eye before you settle down. Don't you agree with me?"

She lay back in her chair again, looking interrogatively up into Timothy's perplexed countenance.

"There's a good deal in what you say, Peggy," he admitted. "But I simply could not leave you in the cart, after—"

A sudden inspiration seized him.

"Look here—I have it!" he cried. "Supposing we get married in five years from now—what?"

Peggy was silent, and Tim waited impatiently for her to make up her mind. At last she spoke. [pg 40

"It would be a very difficult five years for you, Tim. Imagine yourself going about this big world, meeting all sorts of famous and influential people, and growing more and more famous and influential yourself. Girls would be falling in love with you—"

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Timothy, much confused.

"Yet all the time," continued Peggy in a tragic voice, "you would be able to give them no encouragement, because you felt bound to come at the end of five years and marry *me*—getting on for thirty! It wouldn't be a very comfortable five years for either of us, would it?"

By this time Timothy was once more striding about the room. But he was not posing now: he was thinking hard. Peggy sat motionless. Her face was serene, but her hands gripped the arms of the chair until her pink finger-nails grew white. Once she wondered where Philip was. She did not know that he was walking up and down Sloane Street in the fog, fighting with all the devils in Hell.

At last Timothy appeared to arrive at some decision. He came and sat down upon the edge of Peggy's chair.

"Peggy," he announced, "you have a sense of proportion quite unusual in your sex. You are the most farsighted woman I have ever known."

"I believe I am," said Peggy.

"And the most unselfish," added the youthful Grand Turk on the arm of her chair. [pg 40

"I'm not so sure of that," said Peggy.

"What you say about my making a career, and all that," continued the newly awakened Timothy —"well, there is something in it, you know! By Gad, there's something in it! I rather see myself in Parliament, letting some of those chaps have it in the neck! Wow-wow!" He bubbled enthusiastically: already, with the simple fervour of the hereditary ruling class, he felt himself at grips with the enemies of the State. "And I am sure you are right, too, about my not tying myself down to an early marriage. I consider it a jolly sporting and unselfish view for you to take. Still, I

must not allow you to suffer." He laid his hand upon Peggy's arm. "Look here, Peggy, if I come to you in five years from now and ask you to marry me—will you?"

"Yes," said Peggy.

"Cheers!"

"On one condition."

"And that is—"

"That neither of us has married any one else in the meanwhile," concluded Peggy sedately.

Timothy laughed loudly at this flight of fancy.

"You can set your mind at rest on that point, Peggy," he said. "I will stick to you." He was a single-minded egoist, was young Timothy. "Then it's a deal?"

Peggy, knowing well what was coming, nodded. Timothy bent over her.

"I think we might signify our assent in the usual manner—eh?" he suggested. [pg 40

"We agreed upon five years—not five seconds!" said Peggy, laughingly releasing her hand. She stepped out of the chair and stood up. "Now, Tim, you trot off to the ball again; it's not much after three. Philip will take me home: he is out getting a cab now. You go and perform a similar service for Babs Duncombe."

"Oh, I say, come!" observed Timothy scornfully. "Babs Duncombe!"

"Why not? She is a very nice, pretty girl, and her father is a very influential man. Remember, Tim, you have got to spend the next five years getting to know influential people. Begin on Babs. If you hurry up, you may be able to catch her for an extra or two."

Already the pliable Timothy was putting on his coat.

"You are right, Peggy," he said. "You are always right. I believe you know what is best for me better than I do myself."

Peggy, surveying him indulgently, mentally allotted to him a maximum of six further months in the single state.

"I shouldn't be surprised," she said. "Good-night, Tim!"

"Good-night, Peggy. You are quite sure about—well, perhaps you're right. Hallo, Theophilus, old son! Got back?"

"Yes," said Philip, putting down his hat. "It's lucky I caught you. I can't find a cab high or low. You had better take Peggy home in yours."

"Tim is going back to the ball, Philip," interposed Peggy. "He has one or two duty dances to work off. I will share his cab as far as the Freeborns' and take it on home. I shall be quite safe." [pg 40

"Well, hurry up, Peggy," said Timothy, now ready for the road. "I should look a bit of a mug if I got there and found the place shut—what, what? Good-night, Philip, my lad. Don't sit up for me. Half a minute, Peggy! I think I had better have a fresh pair of gloves."

He dashed out, across the hall, and disappeared into his own room, where he could be heard opening drawers and banging cupboard doors.

Philip picked up Peggy's velvet cloak and wrapped it round her.

"Shall I come, too?" he asked, "and act as subsequent escort; or should I find myself a member of the ancient French family of De Trop?"

Peggy picked up her gloves, fan, and handkerchief from the table, and said:—

"You would never be *de trop* at any time, Philip. But I am not going to drag you to Chelsea to-night. Look—the fog is lifting!"

She drew back the curtain of the window. Twinkling lights were discernible in the street below.

They shook hands.

"Have you given him his answer?" Philip blurted out. He could not help it.

"Yes."

"Can I—guess it?"

"I don't know. You might. It's an even chance, isn't it?"

Timothy appeared at the door. [pg 41

"Peggy, I am waiting," he mentioned coldly; and disappeared.

"Coming, Tim," replied Peggy. "Good-night, Philip!"

"Tim seems to have rather taken command of things," said Philip, as he escorted Peggy to the top of the stairs.

"He is in a hurry, poor dear,—that's all. He hasn't completed his evening's programme yet. But I must fly."

She turned to go; then paused.

"It's as well you came in when you did, Philip," she said. "Two minutes later and you would have found me gone."

"I am glad I got back in time," replied Philip gravely.

Suddenly the girl looked up squarely into his face.

"Do you know, *mon ami*," she said, with a whimsical smile, "you have a habit of running things rather fine."

"Have I?" replied Philip dully.

"You have. Talk about the eleventh hour! In—"

"Pegg—ee!" The voice of the fermenting Timothy came booming up the staircase. Peggy did not hurry.

"Good-night—Phil!" she said softly.

"Good-night—Pegs!" replied Philip. He touched her hand awkwardly. They had not addressed one another thus since childhood.

He watched her out of sight down the winding stair, and then turned heavily away. As he [pg 41
paused to close the outer door of the flat his ear caught the sound of light feet. He looked out.

Peggy was standing at the top of the staircase.

"Phil," she said, rather breathlessly, "don't forget to post your letter!"

Then she fled.

One second later Philip was standing by the lamplit table. His letter was gone, and another had taken its place. It was addressed to "Most Excellent Theophilus."

He took it up, dizzily, and turned it over. On the back was written:—

I have saved you a stamp by reading your letter before you posted it.

P.S. You will find the stamp on the inkstand.

Finally he opened the letter. His own had occupied many pages; this, the answer, consisted of

three words.

Philip read them through. Then, rocking on his feet, he read them again, and again. Finally he raised his head and gazed dumbly about him. His eyes fell upon a twinkling circular object lying upon the table close beside the place where he had found the letter.

With a swelling heart he snatched it up, and strode to the hearthrug.

There, with one devastating sweep of his arm, he rendered the mantelpiece a solitude. Everything went with one glorious crash—pipes, tobacco-jar, cigarettes, Bulgarian Atrocities—all. Last, but not least, with a heavy thud, went the Meldrum Carburettor. The day of Things was over. [pg 41

Then, very reverently, in the very centre of the desert that he had created for her, he planted a portrait—the portrait of a Lady, in a large, round, shining, silver frame.

THE END

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Transcriber's Notes:

Throughout the dialogues, there were words used to mimic accents of the speakers. Those words were retained as-is.

Errors in punctuations, inconsistent spelling and inconsistent, hyphenation were not corrected unless otherwise noted below.

On page 59, the period after "good things of this world" was replaced with a comma.

On page 69, the word "bulllied" was replaced with "bullied".

On page 125, a quotation mark was added after "never meddled with that handle since."

On page 167, a quotation mark was added after "shall double again".

On page 170, "Allnut" was replaced with "Allnutt".

On page 187, "Mablethrope" was replaced with "Mablethorpe", and the comma after "Go ahead, Philip" was replaced with a period.

On page 198, the comma after "the fruit of honest toil" was replaced with a period.

On page 205, "dimissals" was replaced with "dismissals".

On page 208, a single quotation mark after "Well?" was replaced with a double quotation mark.

On page 214, a quotation mark was added after "walk down to the Embankment,"

On page 235, "byeway" was replaced with "byway".

On page 241, the single quotation mark at the end of "will you?" was replaced with a double quotation mark.

On page 245, a period was added after "gasp of dismay".

On page 252, an exclamation point was added after "That bumpkin".

On page 255, the comma after "the flying car" was replaced with a period.

On page 255, the period after "he shouted" was replaced with a comma.

On page 284, a quotation mark was added before "For a grand-uncle".

On page 290, the comma after "Philip rebelliously" was replaced with a period.

On page 291, the comma after "I don't want to overcharge you" was replaced with a period.

On page 315, the single quotation mark at the end of "another reason?" was replaced with a double quotation mark.

On page 324, the period after "should be happy with him" was replaced with a comma.

On page 333, "unbiassed" was replaced with "unbiased".

On page 368, the single quotation mark before "—Brand." was replaced with a double quotation mark.

On page 378, the quotation mark before "The feverish Timothy" was removed.

On page 388, the quotation mark before "You have dropped in" was removed.

On page 392, "unbiassed" was replaced with "unbiased".

On page 408, the exclamation point after "not five seconds" was moved within the quotation marks.

In the ad for "A MAN'S MAN", "12mo," was replaced with "12mo.".

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