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By Ian Hay

A SAFETY MATCH. With frontispiece.
A MAN'S MAN. With frontispiece.
THE RIGHT STUFF. With frontispiece.

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A MAN'S MAN

"O, HUGHIE, DID YOU?" (p. 376)

A MAN'S MAN

BY

IAN HAY

AUTHOR OF "THE RIGHT STUFF"

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY
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BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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TO
T. B.

Partner (*after several collisions*). I should think you were more at home in a boat than a ballroom, Mr. Rudderford!

Little Bobbie Rudderford (*the famous Oxbridge coxswain*). Yes; and by Jove, I'd sooner steer eight men than one woman, any day!—*Punch.*

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BOOK ONE

DEALS WITH A STUFF THAT WILL NOT ENDURE

A MAN'S MAN

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CHAPTER I

NAVAL MANŒUVRES

A UNIVERSITY college varies its facial expression about as frequently as The Sphinx and about as violently as a treacle-well.

This remark specially applies between the hours of breakfast and luncheon. The courts, with their monastic cloisters and inviolable grassplots, lie basking in a sunny obliviousness to the world outside. Their stately exclusiveness is accentuated rather than diminished by the glimpse of an occasional flying figure in a cap and gown, or the spectacle of a middle-aged female of a discreet and chastened appearance, who glides respectfully from one archway to another, carrying a broom and a tin pail, or—alas for the goings-on that a cloistered cell may conceal behind its art-muslin curtains!—a tankard containing some gentleman's morning ale.

In one corner, close to the Buttery door, you may behold one of the college cats, which appears to be combining a searching morning toilet with a course of practical calisthenics; and inside the [pg 4] massive arch of the gateway stands a majestic figure in a tall hat, whom appreciative Americans usually mistake for the Master, but who in reality occupies the far more onerous and responsible post of Head Porter.

Perhaps the greatest variation from the normal is to be observed on a Saturday morning. Then the scene is brightened by the vision of an occasional washerwoman, who totters bravely at one end of a heavy basket, what time her lord and master (who has temporarily abandoned his favourite street-corner and donned Sabbath attire for this, his weekly contribution to the work of the world) sulkily supports the other.

Undergraduates, too, are more in evidence than on other days. On most mornings they either stay indoors, to work or sleep, or else go outside the college altogether. "Loitering" in the courts is not encouraged by the authorities. Not that the undergraduate minds that; but it will probably cost him half-a-crown every time he does so, not because he loiters but because he smokes.

The Old Court of St. Benedict's College—it is hardly necessary to say that we are in Cambridge and not in Oxford: otherwise we should have said "Quad"—presents to us on the present occasion a very fair sample of a Saturday morning crowd. The observant eye of the Dean, looking down (like [pg 5] Jezebel) from an upper chamber, can discern—

1. Three washerwomen, with the appurtenances thereof.

2. One small boy delivering *The Granta*.

3. A solitary spectacled gentleman, of the type described by the University Calendar in stately periphrasis as "A Native of Asia, not of European Parentage" (but more tersely classified by the rest of the community as "a nigger"), hurrying in cap and gown to secure a good place at the feet of some out-of-college Gamaliel.

4. A kitchen-man in white jacket and apron, bearing upon his head a tray containing a salmon mayonnaise, cutlets in aspic, and a special Cambridge dainty known as "Grassy Corner Pudding"—a fearsome compound of whipped cream and pistachio nuts.

5. A Buttery boy, walking close behind, with a basket containing bottles. Evidently some young gentleman is about to entertain angels—unawares so far as his bill-paying papa is concerned.

6. Four young men converging to a group in the centre of the court. Of these, two are attired in

the undergraduate mode of the moment—tweed jackets with leather buttons, waistcoats of the Urim and Thummim variety, grey flannel trousers well turned up, clamorous silk socks, and heavy Highland shooting brogues. The third wears what the College Regulations describe rather [pg 6] ingenuously as "Athletic Dress." Pheidippides himself would have found it difficult to perform feats of prowess in a costume composed of split pumps, white duck trousers, and a blazer admirably qualified to serve as a model of the Solar Spectrum.

It may be mentioned in passing that, to the College Regulations, "Athletic Dress" is not in itself a costume in which it is possible to perform athletic feats, but one whose colour-scheme clashes with the *sub-fusc* standard which obtains in all college courts until one P.M.; such, in fact, as would tend to distract the eye and sap the diligence of those who traverse the courts on their way to lectures. In consequence, he who would be matutinally athletic must either keep his warpaint somewhere out of college, or drape himself like a stage conspirator as he flits from his rooms to the river or Fenner's.

The fourth gentleman of the party was dressed, if not gorgeously, sufficiently respectably to warrant the assumption that he was not a member of the University.

All four were smoking.

The Dean, glancing in the direction of the gateway, and observing with sardonic satisfaction that the watchful Cerberus there was taking a note of the delinquency, returned to his work. Regardless of the prospective loss of half-a-crown apiece, the undergraduates exchanged cheerful [pg 7] greetings.

"Hallo, Dishy-Washy!"

"Hallo, Gussie!"

"Hallo, Towzer!"

There ensued an awkward pause, while Messrs. Gussie and Towzer, nervously conscious of the presence of a stranger to whom they were about to be presented, looked intently at their boots and waited for the introduction to take place.

The gentleman previously addressed as Dishy-Washy, a diminutive youth with wizened features,—his name was Dishart-Watson,—cleared his throat.

"Introduce my brother," he said huskily. "Mr. Poltimore—Mr. Angus!"

The gentlemen indicated shook hands with the visitor, and Mr. Angus, after a mental effort, inquired:—

"Come to see us go Head?"

He giggled deprecatingly, to show that he did not really mean this.

"Hope so," said Dishy-Washy's brother politely. "I hear you've got a pretty hot crew," he added.

"First chop," said Mr. Poltimore. "You just arrived?"

"Yes; down from town this morning."

"Oh! live there?"

"Er — yes." [pg 8]

"Oxford man," interpolated Dishy-Washy swiftly. "Sent down," he added in extenuation.

The other two nodded sympathetically, and the conversation proceeded more briskly.

"*Are* you going to catch those chaps to-night, Dishy?" inquired Mr. Angus earnestly.

"Don't know," replied Dishy-Washy, who as coxswain of the St. Benedict's boat enjoyed a position of authority and esteem in inverse ratio to his inches. "Duncombe's a good enough little oar, but you can't expect a man who weighs nine stone ten to stroke the boat and pull it along too. Of course, if we had anything we could call a Six! As for old Puffin—"

"Fourteen stone of tripe!" interpolated Mr. Angus, the gentleman in Athletic Dress. "Lord help

the boat!" he added bitterly.

It may be mentioned in passing that Mr. Angus's athletic achievements were rather overstated by his costume. His blazer was that of a college club of twelve members, admission to which was strictly limited to gentlemen who could absorb a gallon of beer at a draught, and whose first rule stated that any member who committed the *bêtise* of taking a degree, however humble, should pay to the club a fine of five pounds.

"Still," said Towzer hopefully, "there's always Marrable."

Everybody—even the gentleman who had been sent down from Oxford—cheered up at this reflection. [pg 9]

"By gum!" said the coxswain with sudden enthusiasm, "he's a wonder! You should have seen him in the boat yesterday. He was rowing a blade that simply lifted the whole of bow side along by itself; and besides that he was coaching Stroke all the time—telling him when to swing out and when to quicken, and bucking him up generally; and on the top of all that he found time every now and then to turn round and curse old Six. I tell you, he's a wonder. Did you hear about him last night?"

"I did hear some yarn," said Angus. "Went and smashed up The Owls, didn't he?"

"Smashed up?" Dishy's saturnine features expanded into a smile that was almost benevolent. "My lad, *have* you seen Muggeridge's alabaster brow this morning?"

Mr. Muggeridge was the president of "The Owls" Wine Club.

"No."

"Well, last night I was going round about half-past ten to see that all the crew were in their beds. When I came to H, New Court, I found a devil of a row going on in Muggeridge's rooms—directly under Duncombe's, you know."

"Yes. Go on," said all, much interested.

"There was a meeting of The Owls on," continued Dishy, "and they'd had the nerve to hold it on a staircase where there were actually two men of the crew—Duncombe and Eversley—trying to get to sleep." [pg 10

"What did you do?" inquired Poltimore.

"Went in and reminded them. I thought they might have forgotten."

"What did they say?"

"They told me to go to—"

"Good Lord!" said the audience, genuinely horrified at the employment of such language by a non-athletic to an athletic man.

The Owls were a collection of rather dissipated young nobodies, while Dishy wore a Leander tie, which in a rowing college entitles a man to something like reverence.

"I soon found it was a put-up job," continued the coxswain. "They had some grudge against Duncombe, and wanted to score him off. I could hear him hammering on his bedroom floor above to make them dry up."

"What did you do then?"

"I explained to them exactly what I thought of them," replied the coxswain simply.

"What did you say, exactly?"

Dishy told them. They smacked their lips appreciatively, and the next question followed pat.

"And what did *they* do?"

"Well, they were a bit far gone—" [pg 11

"Drunken sweeps!" remarked the virtuous Gussie, who belonged to a rival institution.

"Yes. They were a bit far gone," repeated the coxswain, with the air of one endeavouring to explain an otherwise unaccountable circumstance, "and they—well, they hove me out, in fact. There were nine of them," he added, in the manner of one who is not quite sure if his excuse will be accepted.

"And then?"

"Then I went straight off to old Hughie's rooms"—there was a respectful intaking of breath by the company: most of the College were wont to refer to the gentleman in question as Marrable —"and knocked him up. He had just gone to bed."

"What did he do?" came the question, in lively anticipation of the recital to come.

"Put on a few things over his pyjamas, and came along with me."

The audience sighed ecstatically.

"What happened?" said Poltimore.

"Well, things were getting a bit lively by the time we arrived. Just as we got to the foot of the stair we were greeted by Muggeridge's oak, which some playful fellow had taken off its hinges and thrown over the banisters. However, we dodged that and raced up to the first floor.

"You could have heard a pin drop when we walked into the room. One or two of them looked a [pg 12
bit green, though, when they saw what a towering passion Hughie was in. Still, Muggeridge was sober enough, and tried to talk it off. He stood up, and said, 'Hallo, Marrable! This is splendid! You are just in time to drink to the success of the crew to-morrow. We're all sportsmen here. Come on, you chaps—no heeltaps!'

"He stood waving his glass, but anybody could see that he was in a putrid funk.

"Hughie shut the door behind him and leaned against it, and said:—

"'Muggeridge, I don't know you very intimately, but I know this, that you always were a worm and a bounder. You can't altogether help that, and personally I don't particularly mind, although you give the College away a bit. Still, I think the College can bear that. You are quite at liberty to get full and amuse yourself in any way you please, so long as you and your pals don't interfere with other people. But when it comes to disturbing my crew, who have to fight the battles of the College on behalf of warriors like you and these gentlemen here, whose favourite field-sport is probably billiards—well, that's just what I call a bit *too* thick!'

"All this time Muggeridge was looking pretty averagely uncomfortable. The other chaps were [pg 13
gazing at him, evidently waiting for a lead. But you could see he was pretty well up a stump as to what to do next. However, next time old Hughie paused for breath, he said:—

"'Oh, get out!'

"It was a rotten thing to say. Hughie smiled at him.

"'All right,' he said, 'but I must put you to bed before I go.'

"Before anybody could do anything he was across the room and had a grip of Muggeridge by the back of the neck and one wrist, which he twisted round behind somehow. Then he turned him round, and kicked him all the way across the room into his bedroom. He used Muggeridge's head as a sort of battering-ram to open the door with. Oh, it was the most gorgeous spectacle!"

There was a little sigh of rapture all round the group.

Muggeridge was a prominent member of that class of society which undergraduates and other healthy and outspoken Philistines designate simply and comprehensively as "Tishbites" or "Tishes."

"He shut him in and locked the door," continued the coxswain, "and then he turned on the other eight. They were a pretty average lot of worms—you know them?"

There was a murmur of assent, and Mr. Poltimore, with rather belated presence of mind, [pg 14
hurriedly explained to the Oxford gentleman that the band of heroes under discussion were not in any sense representative of the rank and file of the College.

"—And they just sat round the table looking perfectly paralytic. (As a matter of fact most of them were.) Hughie laid hold of the biggest of them—Skeffington—and said:—

"'This meeting is adjourned, gentlemen. Just to show you that I'm speaking the truth, I'll heave the senior member present downstairs!'"

"Did he?" asked everybody.

"No. He'd have killed him if he had. He picked Skeff up by the collar and the seat of his bags and said to me, 'Watch 'em, Dishy!' Then he carried Skeff downstairs, and slugged him into the middle of the grass plot outside."

"Good egg!" murmured Mr. Angus.

"Didn't the others try to bolt?" inquired Towzer.

"The idea *was* mooted," replied the coxswain loftily, "but I told them to sit still or they'd get their silly heads knocked together."

"Did he cart them all downstairs?"

"No; it would have been too tame a job with such a set of mangy squirts. He simply came back and said:—

"'Now, you miserable little snipes, I give you fifteen seconds to quit these premises. The last [pg 15
man out will be personally assisted downstairs by me. I'm sorry I've only got slippers on.' Still, he landed the Honourable Hopton-Hattersley a very healthy root for all that," concluded Dishy, with a seraphic smile. "After that the porter arrived with the Dean's compliments, and it was past the hour for music, gentlemen; but Hughie slapped him on the back and told him that he had arrived too late for the fair. Then he went home to bed as cool as a cucumber. Oh, he's—Hallo, there he is! I must catch him. So long, you men! See you at lunch, Reggie."

And Mr. Dishart-Watson, swelling with importance, hurried off to overtake a figure which had swung out of a distant staircase in the southwest corner of the court and was striding towards the gateway.

There was no undergraduate slouchiness discernible either in the dress or in the appearance of the Captain of the St. Benedict's boat. He was a strong-limbed, clean-run young man of about twenty-one; perhaps a trifle too muscular to be a quick mover, but, with his broad back and sinewy loins, an ideally built rowing-man. He was a youth of rather grave countenance, with shrewd blue eyes which had a habit of disappearing into his head when he laughed, and a mouth in which, during these same periods of exhilaration, his friends confidently asserted that you could post a [pg 16
letter. He was a born leader of men, and, as the discerning reader will have gathered from Mr. Dishart-Watson's narrative, was still strongly imbued with what may be called public-school principles of justice. He entirely refused to suffer fools gladly or even resignedly, but had a kindly nod for timorous freshmen, a friendly salute for those Dons who regarded undergraduates as an integral part of the scheme of college life and not merely as a necessary evil, and a courtly good-day for fluttered and appreciative bedmakers. He never forgot the faces or names of any of those over him or under him—Dons and college servants, that is; and further, in his own walk of life (a society in which you may recognise the existence of no man, even though he daily passes you the salt or gathers you under his arm in the familiarity of a Rugby scrummage, until you have been formally introduced to him), he never pretended to do so.

While Mr. Dishy-Washy's short legs are endeavouring to bring him alongside the striding Olympian in front, it will perhaps be well to explain why it was so absolutely essential to the welfare of St. Benedict's College that eight young men should enjoy a night's rest untrammelled by revels on the floors below.

For the benefit of those who have never made a study of that refinement of torture known as a [pg 17
"bumping" race, it may be mentioned that at Oxford and Cambridge the various College crews, owing to the narrowness of their rivers, race not abreast but in a long string, each boat being separated from its pursuer and pursued by an equal space. Every crew which succeeds in rowing over the course without being caught (or "bumped") by the boat behind it is said to have "kept its place," and starts in the same position for the next day's racing. But if it contrives to touch the boat in front, it is said to have made a "bump," and both bumper and bumped get under the bank with all speed and allow the rest of the procession to race past. Next day bumper and bumped change places, and the victors of the day before endeavour to repeat their performance at the expense of the next boat in front of them. The crew at "the head of the river" have, of course, nothing to catch, and can accordingly devote their attention to keeping away from Number Two, which is usually in close attendance owing to the pressing attention of Number Three. And so on.

The racing takes place during four successive evenings in the May Week, so called for the

somewhat inadequate reason that it occurs in June. It was now Saturday, the last day of the races, and the men of St. Benedict's knew that an enormous effort must be made that evening. So far [pg 18] they had made two bumps, comparatively easily. Starting from fourth place they were now second on the river, and only the All Saints boat stood between them and the haven where they would be. They had tried last night to bring their foe down, but had failed; they were going to try again to-night, but All Saints were a terribly strong crew. They had been Head for five years, and there were four Blues in the boat. Public opinion admitted that St. Benedict's were about the fastest crew on the river that year, but considered that a seasoned lot like All Saints could keep on spurting away long enough to last out the course.

"Unless, of course," people said, "unless Marrable does something extra special."

It was wonderful what a lot the world in general seemed to expect of Marrable. Character counts for something even among the very young; and there is no more youthful member of society than the undergraduate. The sixth-form boy is a Nestor compared with him.

Meanwhile our diminutive friend Dishy, the coxswain, had succeeded in overtaking his captain, just as that great man stepped into a hansom in Trinity Street.

"Where are you off to, Hughie?" he panted.

"Station."

"People?" [pg 19]

"Yes."

"Well, I'm coming with you. I'll cut away before you meet her."

Dishy was one of the few who dared to address Marrable in this strain.

The two installed themselves in the hansom, and while the experienced animal between the shafts proceeded down Trinity Street, butting its way through sauntering pedestrians, pushing past country-parsonical governess carts, taking dogs in its stride, and shrinking apprehensively from motor-bicycles ridden by hatless youths in bedroom slippers, they discussed affairs of state.

"There's only one way to do it, Dishy," said Marrable. "I'm going stroke."

Dishy nodded approvingly.

"It's the only thing to do," he said. "But who is going to row seven—Stroke?"

"Yes."

"Bow-side will go to pieces," said Dishy with conviction.

"Perhaps. But as things are at present stroke side will."

"That's true," admitted the coxswain. "Let's see now: there'll be you stroke, Duncombe seven, Puffin six—it's worth trying anyhow. We're bound to keep away from the James' people, so we might as well have a shot."

"Clear out now," said Marrable, "and go round and tell the men to be at the boathouse by four, [pg 20] and we'll have a ten minutes' outing in the new order. Then, when you've done that, cut down to the boathouse and tell Jerry to alter my stretcher and Duncombe's."

These commands involved a full hour's excessive activity in a hot sun on the part of Mr. Dishart-Watson; but Marrable was not the man to spare himself or his subordinates when occasion demanded.

The coxswain descended to the step of the hansom and clung to the splash-board as he received his last instructions.

"And tell Jerry," added Marrable, "to get down a new stroke-side oar, with a good six-inch blade. Duncombe's has been shaved down to a tooth-pick."

Dishy nodded cheerfully and dropped off into the traffic.

"The old man means business. We shall go Head now," he murmured to himself with simple

confidence. "All right, sir, my fault entirely. Don't apologise!"

And leaving an inverted motor-cyclist, who had run into him from behind, to congest the traffic and endure laceration from his own still faithfully revolving pedals, the coxswain of the St. Benedict's boat proceeded at a brisk pace back to his College, there to inform a sorely tried troupe [pg 21] of seven that, owing to an eleventh-hour change in the cast, a full-dress rehearsal of their evening's performance had been called for four o'clock sharp.

CHAPTER II [pg 22]

INTRODUCES THE HEROINE OF THIS NARRATIVE

It has been said by those who ought to know that, if the most painful quarter of an hour in a man's life comes when he is screwing himself up to proposing-point, the corresponding period in a woman's is that immediately preceding her first dinner-party in her own house.

Granting the unpleasantness of both these chastening but necessary experiences, a mere male may be excused for inquiring why the second should be ear-marked as the exclusive prerogative of the opposite sex. There is no more morbidly apprehensive creature under the sun than the undergraduate about to give a state luncheon-party which is to be graced by the presence of his beloved.

Hughie Marrable sat back in his hansom with knitted brow, and checked some hieroglyphics on the back of an envelope.

"Let's see," he murmured to himself, "*Dressed crab*. Can't go wrong there. Told the cook to be sure to send it up in the silver scallops with the College crest on. After all, it's the trimmings that really appeal to a woman. Not the food, but the way you serve it up. Rum creatures!" he added [pg 23] parenthetically. "*Prawns in aspic*. That always looks nice, anyway, though not very filling at the price. I remember last year Kitty Devenish said it looked simply—"

Hughie checked his soliloquy rather suddenly, and, if any one else had been present in the hansom, would probably have blushed a little. Miss Kitty Devenish was what cycle-dealers term "a last year's model," and at the present moment Hughie was driving to meet some one else. He continued:—

"*Cutlets à la reform*. Quite the best thing the kitchens turn out, but not so showy as they might be. Still, with old Huish's Crown Derby plates—it was decent of the old man to lend them; I hope to goodness Mrs. Gunn won't do anything rash with them—they ought to do. *Grassy corner pudding*. That always creates excitement, though it tastes rotten. *Fruit salad*; *crême brûlé*. That's safe enough. *Macaroni au gratin*. She won't touch it, but it'll please Uncle Jimmy and Jack Ames. Wish I could have some myself! Never mind; only about six hours more!"

Hughie smacked his lips. It is hard to sit among the flesh-pots and not partake thereof. His fare at this feast would be cold beef and dry toast.

He turned over the envelope.

"H'm—drink. Don't suppose she'll have anything, but I can't take that for granted. There's a [pg 24] bottle of Berncastler Doctor and some Beaune. I wonder if it would be best to have them open before I ask her what she'll drink, or ask her what she'll drink before I open them. I'll have 'em open, I think. She might refuse if she saw the corks weren't drawn. Anyhow Mrs. Ames will probably take some. But, great Scott! I must ask Mrs. Ames first, mustn't I? That's settled anyway. She'll probably take whatever Mrs. Ames takes.

"Then there are the table decorations. I wish to goodness I could remember whether it *was* wall-flower she said. I think it must have been, because I remember making some putrid joke to her once about like attracting unlike. Anyhow, it's too late to change it now. I've plumped for wall-flower, and the room simply stinks of it.

"Then the seats. Me at the head, with Mrs. Ames on one hand and her on the other. Uncle Jimmy at the end, with Ames on his left and Dicky Lunn between Mrs. Ames and Uncle Jimmy. Yes, Ames *must* sit there. Lord knows, Dicky Lunn should be safe enough, but you never know what sort of man a girl won't take a fancy to. And after all, Ames is married," added the infatuated youth.

"Then Mrs. Gunn. I think I've told her everything." He feverishly ticked off his admonitions on his fingers. "Let me see,— [pg 25

"*One*: not to put used plates on the floor.

"*Two*: not to join in the conversation.

"*Three*: not to let that wobbly affair in her bonnet dip into the food.

"*Four*: not to breathe on things or polish them with her apron, except out of sight.

"*Five*: not to attempt on any account to hand round the drink.

"*Six*: to go away directly after lunch and not trot in and out of the gyp-room munching remains.

"The tea-hamper should be all right. Trust the kitchens for that! I must remember to stick in a box of chocolates, though. And I don't think I need bother about dinner, as they are going to send in Richards to wait. Anyhow, I shall have the boat off my chest by that time. That will be something, especially *if*—"

Hughie lapsed into silence, and for a moment a vision of love requited gave place in his imagination to the spectacle of the Benedictine crew going Head of the river.

His reflections were interrupted by the arrival of his equipage at that combined masterpiece of imposing architecture and convenient arrangement, Cambridge railway station. The platform was crowded with young men, most of them in "athletic dress," waiting for the London train. The brows [pg 26
of all were seamed with care, partaking in all probability of the domestic and amorous variety which obsessed poor Hughie.

The train as usual dashed into the station with a haughty can't-stop-at-a-hole-like-this expression, only to clank across some points and grind itself to an ignominious and asthmatic standstill at a distant point beside the solitary and interminable platform which, together with a ticket-office and a bookstall, prevents Cambridge railway station from being mistaken for a rather out-of-date dock-shed.

Presently Hughie, running rapidly, observed his guests descending from a carriage.

First came a pleasant-faced lady of between thirty and forty, followed by a stout and easy-going husband. Next, an oldish gentleman with a white moustache and a choleric blue eye. And finally—pretty, fresh, and disturbing—appeared the *fons et origo* of the entire expedition, on whose account the disposition and incidents of Hughie's luncheon-party had been so cunningly planned and so laboriously rehearsed—Miss Mildred Freshwater.

The party greeted their host characteristically. His uncle, even as he shook hands, let drop a few fervent anticipatory remarks on the subject of lunch; Mr. Ames, who was an old college boat [pg 27
captain, coupled his greeting with an anxious inquiry as to the club's prospects of success that evening; Mrs. Ames' eyes plainly said, "Well, I've *brought* her, my boy; now wire in!" and Miss Freshwater, when it came to her turn, shook hands with an unaffected pleasure and *camaraderie* which would have suited Hughie better if there had been discernible upon her face what Yum-Yum once pithily summed up as "a trace of diffidence or shyness."

Still, Hughie was so enraptured with the vision before him that he failed to observe a small and shrinking figure which had coyly emerged from the train, and was hanging back, as if doubtful about its reception, behind Mrs. Ames' skirts. Presently it detached itself and stood before Hughie in the form of a small girl with coppery brown hair and wide grey-blue eyes.

"Joey!" shouted Hughie.

"She would come!" explained his uncle, in the resigned tones of a strong man who knows his limits.

The lady indicated advanced to Hughie's side, and, taking his hand, rubbed herself ingratiatingly against him in the inarticulate but eloquent manner peculiar to dumb animals and young children.

CHAPTER III

[pg 28

JIMMY MARRABLE

LUNCHEON on the whole was a success, though Mrs. Gunn's behaviour exceeded anything that Hughie had feared.

She began by keeping the ladies adjusting their hair in Hughie's bedroom for something like ten minutes, while she recited to them a detailed and revolting description of her most recent complaint. Later, she initiated an impromptu and unseemly campaign—beginning with a skirmish of whispers in the doorway, swelling uproariously to what sounded like a duet between a cockatoo and a bloodhound on the landing outside, and dying away to an irregular fire of personal innuendoes, which dropped over the banisters one by one, like the gentle dew of heaven, on to the head of the retreating foe beneath—with a kitchen-man over a thumb-mark on a pudding-plate.

But fortunately for Hughie the company tacitly agreed to regard her as a form of comic relief; and when she kept back the salad-dressing for the express purpose—frustrated at the very last moment—of pouring it over the sweets; yea, even when she suddenly plucked a hairpin from her [pg 29
head with which to spear a wasp in the grassy corner pudding, the ladies agreed that she was "an old pet." When Mrs. Ames went so far as to follow her into the gyp-room after lunch and thank her for her trouble in waiting upon them, Mrs. Gunn, divided between extreme gratification and a desire to lose no time, unlimbered her batteries at once; and Hughie's tingling ears, as he handed round the coffee, overheard the portentous and mysterious fragment: "Well, mum, I put 'im straight to bed, and laid a hot flannel on his—," just as the door of the gyp-room swung to with a merciful bang.

It was now after two, and Hughie, in response to a generally expressed desire, laid before his guests a detailed programme for the afternoon. He proposed, first of all, to show them round the College. After that the party would proceed to Ditton Paddock in charge of Mr. Richard Lunn—who, it will be remembered, had been selected by Hughie as cavalier on account of his exceptional qualifications for the post—in company with a substantial tea-basket, the contents of which he hoped would keep them fortified in body and spirit until the races began with the Second Division, about five-thirty.

"How are you going to get us down to Ditton, Hughie?" inquired his uncle.

"Well, there's a fly which will hold five of you, and I thought"—Hughie cleared his throat—"I [pg 30
could take the other one down in a canoe."

There was a brief pause, while the company, glancing at one another with varying expressions of solemnity, worked out mental problems in Permutations and Combinations. Presently the tactless Ames inquired:—

"Which one are you going to take in the canoe?"

"Oh, anybody," said Hughie, in a voice which said as plainly as possible: "Silly old ass!"

However, realising that it is no use to continue skirmishing after your cover has been destroyed, he directed a gaze of invitation upon Miss Freshwater, who was sitting beside him on the seat.

She turned to him before he could speak.

"Hughie," she said softly, "take that child. Just look at her!"

Hughie obediently swallowed something, and turned to the wide-eyed and wistful picture on the sofa.

"Will you come, Joey?" he inquired.

The lady addressed signified, by a shudder of ecstasy, that the answer to the invitation was in the affirmative.

"Meanwhile," said Mr. Marrable, "I am going to smoke a cigar before I stir out of this room. And if you people will spare Hughie for ten minutes, I'll keep him here and have a short talk with him. I must go back to-night."

The accommodating Mr. Lunn suggested that this interval should be bridged by a personally [pg 31

conducted expedition to his rooms downstairs, where he would have great pleasure in exhibiting to the company a "rather decent" collection of door-knockers and bell-handles, the acquisition of which articles of *vertu* (he being a youth of strong wrist and fleet foot) was a special hobby of his.

Hughie was left alone with his uncle—the only relation he possessed in the world, and the man who had been to him both father and mother for nearly eighteen years.

Hughie had been born in India. His recollections of his parents were vague in the extreme, but if he shut both eyes and pressed hard upon them with his hands he could summon up various pictures of a beautiful lady, whose arms were decked with glittering playthings that jingled musically when she carved the chicken for Hughie's nursery dinner. He particularly remembered these arms, for their owner had a pleasant habit of coming up to kiss him good-night after his ayah had put him to bed. On these occasions they were always bare; and Hughie remembered quite distinctly how much more comfortable they were then than next morning at tiffin, when they were enclosed in sleeves which sometimes scratched.

Of his father he remembered less, except that he was a very large person who wore gorgeous [pg 32
raiment of scarlet. Also things on his heels which clicked. He had a big voice, too, this man, and he used to amuse himself by training Hughie to stand stiffly erect whenever he cried, "'Shun!"

Hughie also remembered a voyage on a big ship, where the passengers made much of him, and a fascinating person in a blue jersey (which unfortunately scratched) presented him with numerous string balls, which smelt most gloriously of tar but always fell into the Indian Ocean or some other inaccessible place.

Then he remembered arriving with his parents at a big bungalow in a compound full of grassplots and flower-beds, where a person whom he afterwards learned to call Uncle Jimmy greeted him gravely and asked him to accept his hospitality for a time. After that—quite soon—he remembered saying good-bye to his parents, or rather, his parents saying good-bye to him. The big man shook him long and solemnly by the hand, which hurt a good deal but impressed Hughie deeply, and the beautiful lady's arms—with thick sleeves on, too!—clung round Hughie's neck till he thought he would choke. But he stood stiffly at "'shun" all the time, because his parents seemed thoroughly unhappy about something, and he desired to please them. He had never had a woman's arms round his neck since.

After his parents had gone, he settled down happily enough in the big compound, which he [pg 33
soon learned to call "the garding." The name of the bungalow he gathered from most of the people with whom he came in contact was "The 'All," though there were some who called it "Manors," and Uncle Jimmy, who, too, apparently possessed more than one name, was invariably referred to by Hughie's friends in the village as "Ole Peppery."

Very shortly after his parents' departure Hughie overheard a conversation between his uncle and Mrs. Capper, the lady who managed the household, which puzzled him a good deal.

"Understand, Capper, I won't have it," said his uncle.

"Think what people will say, sir," urged Mrs. Capper respectfully but insistently.

"I don't care a"—Capper coughed discreetly here—"what people say. The boy is not going to be decked out in crape and hearse-plumes to please you or any other old woman."

"Hearse-plumes would not be essential, sir," said the literal Capper. "But I think the child should have a little black suit."

"The child will run about in his usual rags," replied Old Peppery, in a voice of thunder; "and if I catch you or any one else stuffing him up with yarns about canker-worms or hell-fire, or any [pg 34
trimmings of that description, I tell you straight that there will be the father and mother of a row."

"Yes, sir," said Capper meekly. "And I desire, sir," she added in the same even tone, "to give warning."

Thereupon Uncle Jimmy had stamped his way downstairs to the hall, and Hughie was left wondering what the warning could have been which Mrs. Capper desired to utter. It must have been a weighty one, for she continued to deliver it at intervals during the next ten years, long indeed after Hughie's growing intelligence had discovered its meaning. But her utterances received about as much attention from her employer as Cassandra's from hers.

However, the immediate result of the conversation recorded above was that Mrs. Capper made no attempt to deck Hughie in crape or hearse-plumes; and later on, when he was old enough to understand the meaning of death, his uncle told him how his parents had gone to their God together—"the happiest fate, old man, that can fall on husband and wife"—one stormy night in the Bay of Biscay, in company with every other soul on board the troop-ship Helianthus, and that

henceforth Hughie must be prepared to regard the broken-down old buffer before him as his father and mother.

Hughie had gravely accepted this arrangement, and for more than seventeen years he and his uncle had treated one another as father and son. [pg 35

Jimmy Marrable was a little eccentric,—but so are most old bachelors,—and like a good many eccentric men he rather prided himself on his peculiarities. If anything, he rather cultivated them. One of his most startling characteristics was a habit of thinking aloud. He would emerge unexpectedly from a brown study, to comment to himself with stunning suddenness and absolute candour on the appearance and manners of those around him. It was credibly reported that he had once taken a rather intense and voluble lady in to dinner, and after regarding her for some time with a fixity of attention which had deluded the good soul into the belief that he was hanging on her lips, had remarked to himself, with appalling distinctness, during a lull in the conversation: "Guinea set—misfit at the top—gutta-percha fixings—wonder they don't drop into her soup!" and continued his meal without any apparent consciousness of having said anything unusual.

He was eccentric, too, about other matters. Once Hughie, returning from school for his holidays, discovered that there had been an addition to the family in his absence.

Mrs. Capper's very face in the hall told him that something was wrong. Its owner informed Hughie that though one should be prepared to take life as one found it, and live and let live had been her motto from infancy, her equilibrium ever since the thing had happened had lain at the mercy of the first aggressively disposed feather that came along, and what people in the neighbourhood would say she dared not think. [pg 36

She ran on. Hughie waited patiently, and presently unearthed the facts.

A few weeks ago the master had returned from a protracted visit to London, bringing with him two children. He had announced that the pair were henceforth to be regarded as permanent inmates of the establishment. Beyond the fact that one brat was fair and a boy and the other darkish and a girl, and that Mrs. Capper had given warning on sight, Hughie could elicit nothing, and waited composedly for his uncle to come home from shooting.

Jimmy Marrable, when he arrived, was not communicative. He merely stated that the little devils were the children of an old friend of his, called Gaymer, who had died suddenly and left them to be brought up by him as guardian.

"And Hughie, my son," he concluded, "if you don't want your head bitten off you will refrain in this case from indulging in your propensity for asking why and getting to the bottom of things. I'm not best pleased at finding them on my hands, but here they are and there's an end of it. The girl is five—ten years younger than you—and the boy's eight. She is called Joan, and his idiotic name is Lancelot Wellesley. I wonder they didn't christen him Galahad Napoleon! Come upstairs and see them." [pg 37

All this had occurred seven years ago. During that time Lancelot Wellesley Gaymer had grown up sufficiently to go to a public school, and consequently Miss Joan Gaymer had been left very much in the company of the curious old gentleman whom she had soon learned to call Unker Zimmy. Of their relations it will be sufficient at present to mention that a more curiously assorted and more thoroughly devoted couple it would be difficult to find.

Jimmy Marrable reclined on the window seat and smoked his cigar. His nephew, enviously eyeing the blue smoke, sprawled in an arm-chair.

"Hughie," said the elder man suddenly, "how old are you? Twenty-one, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And are you going down for good next week?"

"Yes." Hughie sighed.

"Got a degree?"

"Tell you on Tuesday."

"Tell me now."

"Well—yes, I should think."

"What in?"

"Mechanical Stinks—Engineering. Second Class, if I'm lucky." [pg 38

"Um. Got any vices?"

"Not specially."

"Drink?"

"No."

"Not a teetotaller?" said Jimmy Marrable in some concern.

"No."

"That's good. Ever been drunk?"

"Yes."

"Badly, I mean. I'm not talking about bump-supper exhilaration."

"Only once."

"When?"

"My first term."

"What for?"

"To see what it was like."

"Perfectly sound proceeding," commented Jimmy Marrable. "What were your impressions of the experiment?"

"I haven't got any," said Hughie frankly. "I only woke up next morning in bed with my boots on."

"Who put you there?"

"Seven other devils."

"And you have not repeated the experiment?"

"No. There's no need. I know my capacity to a glass now."

"Then you know something really worth knowing," remarked Jimmy Marrable with sincerity. [pg 39
"Now, what are you going to do with yourself? Why not go and see the world a bit? You have always wanted to. And do it thoroughly while you are about it. Take five years over it; ten if you like. You *will* like, you know. It's in the blood. That's why I think you are wise not to want to enter the Service. You can always scrape in somewhere if there *is* a war, and barrack-life in time of peace would corrode your very heart out. It nearly killed your dad at five-and-twenty. That was why he exchanged and took to the Frontier, and ended his days in command of a Goorkha regiment. Life at first hand; that's what we Marrables thrive on! I never set foot in this country myself between the ages of twenty and thirty-three. I would come with you again if it wasn't for Anno Domini—and the nippers. But you'll find a good many old friends of mine dotted about the world. They're not all folk I could give you letters of introduction to—some of 'em don't speak English and others can't read and write; but they'll show you the ropes better than any courier. You take my advice, and go. England is no place for a young man with money and no particular profession, until he's over thirty and ready to marry. Will you go, Hughie?"

Hughie's expression showed that he was considering the point rather reluctantly. His uncle [pg 40
continued:—

"Money all right, I suppose? You have eight hundred a-year now you are of age. Got any debts, eh? I'll help you."

"None to speak of. Thanks all the same."

"Well; why not go?"

"I should like to go more than anything," said Hughie slowly, "but—"

"Well?"

"I don't know—that is—"

"I *do*," said Jimmy Marrable with characteristic frankness. "You are struggling between an instinct which tells you to do the sensible thing and an overpowering desire to do a dashed silly one."

Hughie grew very red.

His uncle continued:—

"You want to marry that girl."

Hughie blazed up.

"I do," he said, rather defiantly.

The cigar glowed undisturbedly.

"You think that life has no greater happiness to offer you?"

"I am sure of it," said Hughie, with an air of one stating a simple truth.

"And you are twenty-one?"

"Ye—es," with less fire.

Jimmy Marrable smoked reflectively for a few minutes.

"I am an old bachelor," he said at last, "and old bachelors are supposed to know nothing about love-affairs. The truth of course is that they know far more than any one else." [pg 41

Hughie was accustomed to these *obiter dicta*.

"Why?" he asked dutifully.

"Well, for the same reason that a broken swashbuckler knows a deal more about soldiering than a duly enrolled private of the line. He has had a more varied experience. The longer a man remains a bachelor the more he learns about women; and the more he learns about women the better able he will be to make his way in the world. Therefore, if he marries young he reduces his chances of success in life to a minimum. The sad part about it all is that, provided he gets the girl he wants, he doesn't care. That, by the way, is the reason why nearly all the most famous men in history have either been unhappily married or not married at all. Happiness has no history. Happily married men are never ambitious. They don't go toiling and panting after—"

"They have no need to," said Hughie. "A man doesn't go on running after a tram-car after he has caught it."

"That begs the question, Hughie. It presumes that all the available happiness in the world is contained in one particular tram-car. Besides, the tram-cars you mean are intended for men over thirty. The young ought to walk." [pg 42

Hughie realised that the conversation was growing rather too subtle for him, and reverted to plain cut and thrust.

"Then you think no man should marry before thirty?" he said.

"Nothing of the kind! It depends on the man. If he is a steady, decent, average sort of fellow, who regards a ledger as a Bible and an office-stool as a stepping-stone to the summit of the universe, and possesses no particular aptitude for the rough-and-tumble of life, the sooner he marries and settles down as a contented old pram-pusher the better for him and the nation. Do you fancy yourself in that line, Hughie?"

"No-o-o," said Hughie reluctantly. "But I might learn," he added hopefully. "I'm a pretty

adaptable bloke."

Jimmy Marrable threw his cigar-end out of the window, and sat up.

"Listen, Hughie," he said, "and I'll tell you what you *really* are. You are the son of a mother who climbed out of her bedroom window (and let herself down a rain-pipe that I wouldn't have trusted a monkey on) in order to elope with the man she loved. Your father was the commander of as tough a native regiment as I have ever known. Your grandfather was an explorer. I've been a bit of a [pg 43
rolling-stone myself. About one relation of yours in three dies in his bed. You come of a stock which prefers to go and see things for itself rather than read about them in the newspaper, and which has acquired a considerable knowledge of the art of handling men in the process. Those are rather rare assets. If you take a woman in tow at the tender age of twenty-one, there will be a disaster. Either you will sit at home and eat your heart out, or you will go abroad and leave her to eat out hers. Am I talking sense?"

Hughie sighed like a furnace.

"Yes, confound you!" he said.

"Will you promise not to rush into matrimony, then?"

"Perhaps she'll wait for me," mused Hughie.

"How old is she?"

"Twenty-one, like me."

"H'm," remarked Jimmy Marrable drily. "That means that she is for all practical purposes ten years your senior. However, perhaps she will. Pigs might fly. But will you promise me to think the matter over very carefully before deciding not to go abroad?"

"Yes," said Hughie.

"That being the case," continued his uncle briskly, "I want to tell you one or two things. If you do go, I may never see you again."

"I say," said Hughie in alarm, "there's nothing wrong with your health, is there, old man?" [pg 44

"Bless you, no! But once a Marrable takes to the wilds Methuselah himself couldn't reckon on living long enough to see him again. So I am going to talk to you while I've got you. I am taking this opportunity of being near town to see my solicitor and make my will. I am fit enough, but I am fifty this year; and at that age a man ought to make some disposition of his property. I may as well tell you that I have left you nothing. Annoyed?"

"Not in the least."

"And I have left nothing to Master Lance."

Hughie looked a little surprised at this.

"I mean to start him on his own legs before my demise," explained Jimmy Marrable. "Immediately, in fact. That is partly what I am going up to town for. I am investing a sum for him which ought to bring him in about two hundred a year for the rest of his life. He's nearly sixteen now, and he'll have to administer his income himself—pay his own school-bills and everything. Just as I made you do. Nothing like accustoming a boy to handling money when he's young. Then he doesn't go a mucker when he suddenly comes into a lot of it. I shan't give him more, because it would prevent him from working. Two hundred won't. A slug would perhaps live contentedly [pg 45
enough on it, but Lancelot Wellesley Gaymer is a pretentious young sweep, and he'll work in order to gain the means for making a splash. The two hundred will keep him going till he finds his feet."

Jimmy Marrable paused, and surveyed his nephew rather irritably.

"Well," he inquired at length, "haven't you any contribution to make to this conversation?"

"Can't say I have had much chance so far," replied the disrespectful Hughie.

"Don't you want to know what I'm going to do with the rest of my money? That's a question that a good many people are worrying themselves about. Don't you want to join in the inquisition?"

"Can't say I do. No business of mine."

His uncle surveyed him curiously.

"You're infernally like your father, Hughie," he said. "Well, I'm going to leave it to Joey."

"Good scheme," said Hughie.

"You think so?"

"Rather!"

"There's a lot of it," continued his uncle reflectively. "Some of it is tied up rather queerly, too. My executors will have a bit of a job."

He surveyed the impassive Hughie again.

"Don't you want to know who my executors are?" he inquired quite angrily.

"No," said Hughie, who was deep in other thoughts at the moment. "Not my business," he repeated. [pg 46

"Hughie," said Jimmy Marrable, "you are poor Arthur over again. He was a cursedly irritating chap at times," he added explosively.

A babble of cheerful voices on the staircase announced the return of the safe-looking Mr. Lunn and party. They flowed in, entranced with that gentleman's door-knockers (the countenances of which, by the way, were usually compared by undergraduate critics, not at all unfavourably, with that of their owner), and declared themselves quite ready now to be properly impressed by whatever features of the College Hughie should be pleased to exhibit to them.

One tour round a College is very like another; and we need not therefore follow our friends up and down winding staircases, or in and out of chapels and libraries, while they gaze down on the resting-places of the illustrious dead or gape up at the ephemeral abodes of the undistinguished living.

The expedition was chiefly remarkable (to the observant eye of Mrs. Ames) for the efforts made by its conductor to get lost in suitable company—an enterprise which was invariably frustrated by the resolute conduct of that small but determined hero-worshipper, Miss Joan Gaymer. On one occasion, however, Hughie and Miss Freshwater were left together for a moment. The party had finished surveying the prospect from the roof of the College Chapel, and were painfully groping their way in single file down a spiral staircase. Only Hughie, Miss Freshwater, and the ubiquitous Miss Gaymer were left at the top. [pg 47

"You go next, Joey," said Hughie; "then Miss Freshwater, then me."

The lady addressed plunged obediently into the gloomy chasm at her feet. She observed with frank jealousy that the other two did not immediately follow her, and accordingly waited for them in the belfry half-way down.

Presently she heard their footsteps descending; and Miss Freshwater's voice said:—

"I wanted to tell you about it first of anybody, Hughie, because you and I have always been such friends. Nobody else knows yet."

There was a silence, broken only by Hughie's footsteps, evidently negotiating a difficult turn. Then Miss Freshwater's voice continued, a little wistfully:—

"Aren't you going to congratulate me?"

And Hughie's voice, sounding strangely sepulchral in the echoing darkness, replied:—

"Rather! I—I—hope you'll be very happy. Mind that step."

Miss Gaymer wondered what it was all about.

Hughie found an opportunity before the day was over of holding another brief conversation with his uncle, in the course of which he expressed an opinion on the advantages of immediate and extensive foreign travel which sent that opponent of early marriages back to town in a thoroughly satisfied frame of mind. [pg 48

"There ought to be a statue," said Jimmy Marrable to his cigar, as he leaned back reflectively in his railway carriage, "set up in the capital of every British Colony, representing a female figure in an attitude of aloofness, and inscribed: *Erected by a grateful Colony to its Principal Emigration Agent—The Girl at Home Who Married Somebody Else*."

Then he sighed to himself—rather forlornly, a woman would have said.

CHAPTER IV

[pg 49

AN UNDERSTUDY

"*The indulgence of the audience is asked on behalf of Miss Joan Gaymer, who, owing to the sudden indisposition of Miss Mildred Freshwater, has taken up that lady's part at very short notice.*"

A COUPLE of hours later Hughie, roaring very gently for so great a lion, was engaged in paddling a Canadian canoe down to Ditton Corner.

The canoe contained one passenger, who, with feminine indifference to the inflexible laws of science, was endeavouring to assist its progress by paddling in the wrong direction. Her small person, propped by convenient cushions, was wedged into the bow of the vessel, and her white frock and attenuated black legs were protected from the results of her own efforts at navigation by a spare blazer of Hughie's. Her hat lay on the floor of the canoe, half-full of cherries, and her long hair rippled and glimmered in the afternoon sun. Miss Joan Gaymer would be a beauty some day, but for the present all knowledge of that fact was being tactfully withheld from her. To do her justice, the prospect would have interested her but little. Like most small girls of eleven, she desired nothing so much at present as to resemble a small boy as closely as possible. She would [pg 50
rather have captured one bird's-nest than twenty hearts, and appearances she counted as dross provided she could hold her own in a catherine-wheel competition.

They were rather a silent couple. Joan was filled with that contentment which is beyond words. She was wearing a new frock; she had escaped under an escort almost exclusively male—if we except the benevolent despotism of Mrs. Ames—from home, nurse, and governess, to attend a series of purely grown-up functions; and to crown all, she was alone in the canoe, a light-blue blazer spread over her knees, with one who represented to her small experience the head and summit of all that a man should—nay, could—be.

"I expect," she remarked, in a sudden burst of exultation, as the canoe slid past two gorgeously arrayed young persons who were seated by the water's edge, "that those two are pretty sorry they're not in this canoe with us."

The ladies referred to arose and walked inland with some deliberation. Hughie did not answer. His brow was knitted and his manner somewhat absent.

"Hughie," announced Miss Gaymer reproachfully, "you are looking very cross at me."

She had a curiously gruff and hoarse little voice, and suffered in addition from inability to [pg 51
pronounce those elusive consonants *r* and *l*. So she did not say "very cross," but "ve'y c'oss," in a deep bass.

Hughie roused himself.

"Sorry, Joey!" he said; "I was thinking."

"Sec'ets?" inquired Miss Gaymer, all agog with femininity at once.

"No."

"Oh,"—rather disappointedly. "About your old boat, then?"

"Yes," said Hughie untruthfully. "Do you quite understand how we race?"

"I *think* so," said the child. "Your boat is second, and it wants to bump into the boat in f'ont—is

that it?"

"Yes."

"Well, do it just when you pass us, will you?"

"I'll try," said Hughie, beginning to brighten up. "But it may take longer than that. About the Railway Bridge, I should think."

"And after the race will *you* take me home again?" inquired the lady anxiously.

"Can't be done, I'm afraid. The race finishes miles from Ditton, where you will be; and I shouldn't be able to get back in time. You had better drive home with the others."

"When shall I see you again, then?" demanded Miss Gaymer, who was not of an age to be reticent about the trend of her virgin affections. [pg 52

"About seven. You are all coming to dine in my rooms."

"Ooh!" exclaimed his companion in a flutter of excitement. "How long can I sit up?"

"Ask Mrs. Ames," replied the diplomatic Hughie.

"Till *ten*?" hazarded Joey, with the air of one initiating a Dutch auction.

"Don't ask *me*, old lady."

"Supposing," suggested Miss Gaymer craftily, "that you was to say you wanted me to sit up and keep you company?"

Hughie laughed. "Afraid that wouldn't work. I have to go out about nine to a Bump Supper."

"What's that?"

"A College supper, in honour of the men who have been rowing."

"I like suppers," said Miss Gaymer tentatively.

Hughie smiled. "I don't think you'd like this one, Joey," he said.

"Why? Don't they have any sixpences or thimbles in the t'ifle?" said Miss Gaymer, in whose infant mind the word supper merely conjured up a vision of sticky children, wearing paper caps out of crackers, distending themselves under adult supervision.

"I don't think they *have* any trifle."

"Perfectly p'eposte'ous!" commented Miss Gaymer with heat. (I think it has already been mentioned that she spent a good deal of her time in the company of Jimmy Marrable.) "Ices?" [pg 53

"Let me see. Yes—sometimes."

"Ah!" crooned Joey, with a happy little sigh. "*Can't* I come?"

"Afraid not, madam. Bump Suppers are for gentlemen only."

"I should like that," said madam frankly.

"And they are rather noisy. You might get frightened."

"Not if I was sitting alongside of you," was the tender reply.

Joey's anxiety for his company renewed Hughie's depression of spirits. Admiration and confidence are very desirable tributes to receive; but when they come from every quarter save the right one the desirability of that quarter is only intensified. Poor human nature! Hughie sighed again in a manner which caused the entire canoe to vibrate. Miss Gaymer suddenly turned the conversation.

"What was that person talking to you about, Hughie?" she inquired.

"Who?"

"That person that came with us in the t'ain. Miss—" Joey's mouth twisted itself into a hopeless tangle.

"Freshwater?" said Hughie, reddening. [pg 54

"Yes. When you were taking us round the Co'ege after lunch you and her stayed behind on the top of the Chapel, while the rest of us were coming down. When I was waiting for you, I heard her say: 'You're the first to hear of it, Hughie.' To hear of what?"

Hughie looked genuinely disturbed.

"I don't know whether she wants it known yet, Joey," he said.

Miss Gaymer assumed an expression before which she knew that most gentlemen of her acquaintance, from Uncle Jimmy down to the coachman at home, were powerless.

"Hughie dear, you'll tell *me*, won't you?" she said.

Hughie, making a virtue of necessity, agreed.

"Well, promise you won't tell anybody," he said.

"All right," agreed Miss Gaymer, pleasantly intrigued.

"She's going to be married," said Hughie, in a voice which he endeavoured to make as matter-of-fact as possible. It was not a very successful effort. At twenty-one these things hurt quite as much, if not so lastingly, as in later life.

"I'm ve'y g'ad to hear it," remarked Miss Gaymer with composure.

Hughie looked at the small flushed face before him rather curiously.

"Why, Joey?" he asked. [pg 55

"Never mind!" replied Miss Gaymer primly.

After that the conversation languished, for they were approaching the race-course, and boats of every size and rig were thronging round them. There was the stately family gig, with an academic and myopic paterfamilias at the helm and his numerous progeny at the oars, sweeping the deep of surrounding craft like Van Tromp's broom. There was the typical May Week argosy, consisting of a rowing-man's mother and sisters, left in the care of two or three amorous but unnautical cricketers, what time their relative performed prodigies of valour in the Second Division. There was also a particularly noisome home-made motor-boat,—known up and down the river from Grantchester to Ely as "The Stinkpot,"—about the size of a coffin, at present occupied (in the fullest sense of the word) by its designer, builder, and owner; who, packed securely into his craft, with his feet in a pile of small coal, the end of the boiler in the pit of his stomach, and the engines working at fever heat between his legs, was combining the duties of stoker, engineer, helmsman, and finally (with conspicuous success) director of ramming operations.

Through these various obstacles Hughie, despite the assistance of his passenger, directed his canoe with unerring precision, and finally brought up with all standing beside the piles at Ditton. [pg 56
He experienced no difficulty in making arrangements for the return journey of the canoe, for a gentleman of his acquaintance begged to be allowed the privilege of navigating it home, pleading internal pressure in his own craft as the reason. Hughie granted the boon with alacrity, merely wondering in his heart which of the three languishing damsels planted round his friend's tea-urn he had to thank for the deliverance.

They found the fly in a good position close to the water, with the rest of the party drinking tea, and meekly wondering when the heroes who dotted the landscape in various attitudes of nervousness would disencumber themselves of their gorgeous trappings and get to business. Hughie deposited Joan beside a mountain of buns and a fountain of tea, and, after expressing a hope that every one was getting on all right, announced that the Second Division might be expected to paddle down at any moment now.

This statement involved a chorus of questions regarding the technicalities of rowing, which that model of utility, Mr. Lunn, had confessed himself unable to answer, and which had accordingly been held over till Hughie's arrival.

Hughie's rather diffident impersonation of Sir Oracle, and his intricate explanation of the exact difference between bucketing and tubbing (listened to with respectful interest by surrounding tea-parties), was suddenly interrupted by a small but insistent voice, which besought him to turn the tap off and look pretty for a moment. [pg 57

There was a shout of laughter, and Hughie turned round, to find that one of those privileged and all too inveterate attendants upon the modern athlete, a photographer, was (with the assistance of a megaphone) maintaining a reputation for humorous offensiveness, at his expense, on the towpath opposite.

After this the Second Division paddled down to the start, arrayed in colours which would have relegated such competitors as King Solomon and the lilies of the field to that euphemistic but humiliating category indicated by the formula "Highly Commended." Presently they returned, unclothed to an alarming and increasing extent, and rowing forty to the minute. One crew brought off a "gallery" bump right at Ditton Corner, to the joy of the galaxy of beauty and fashion thereon assembled. The bumped crew made the best of an inglorious situation by running into the piles and doubling up the nose of the boat, which suddenly buckled and assumed a sentry-box attitude over the head of the apoplectic gentleman who was rowing bow. The good ship herself incontinently sank, all hands going down with her like an octette of Casabiancas. Whereupon applause for the victors was turned into cries of compassion for the vanquished. However, as all concerned shook themselves clear of the wreck without difficulty and paddled contentedly to the bank, the panic subsided, and the rest of the procession raced past without further incident. [pg 58

As the last boat, remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow, accompanied by a coloured gentleman ringing a dinner-bell and a spectacled don who trotted alongside chanting, "Well rowed, Non-Collegiate Students!" creaked dismally past, Hughie arose and shook himself.

"Our turn now," he said. "So long, everybody!"

"Good luck, Hughie!" said Mrs. Ames. "Your health!"

She waved her cup and then took a sip of tea.

There was a chorus of good wishes from the party, and one or two neighbouring enthusiasts raised a cry of "Benedict's!" which swelled to a roar as Hughie, flushing red, elbowed his way out of the paddock and steered a course for a ferry-boat a hundred yards down the Long Reach. Popular feeling, which likes a peg upon which to hang its predilections, was running high in favour of Hughie and his practically single-handed endeavour to humble the pride of the All Saints men, with their four Blues and five years' Headship. [pg 59

Still, though many a man's—especially a young man's—heart would have swelled excusably enough at such homage, Hughie cared very little for these things. The notoriety of the sporting paper and the picture-postcard attracted him not at all. He was doggedly determined to take his boat to the Head of the river, not for the glory the achievement would bring him, but for the very simple and sufficient reason that he had made up his mind, four Blues notwithstanding, to leave it there before he went down. A Cambridge man's pride in his College is a very real thing. An Oxford man will tell you that he is an Oxford man. A Cambridge man will say: "I was at such-and-such a College, Cambridge." Which sentiment is the nobler need not be decided here, but the fact remains.

However, there was a fly in the ointment. Amid the expressions of goodwill that emanated from Hughie's own party one voice had been silent. The omission was quite unintentional, for Miss Mildred Freshwater's head had been buried in a hamper in search of spoons at the moment of Hughie's departure. But to poor Hughie, who for all his strength was no more reasonable where his affections were concerned than other and weaker brethren, the circumstance bereft the ovation of the one mitigating feature it might otherwise have possessed for him. [pg 60

As he strode along the bank to where the ferry-boat was waiting, he heard a pattering of feet behind. A small, hot, and rather grubby hand was thrust into his, and Miss Gaymer remarked:—

"I'm coming as far as that boat with you, Hughie. Can I?"

"All right, Joey," he replied.

They had only a few yards farther to go. Miss Gaymer looked up into her idol's troubled countenance.

"What's the matter, Hughie!" she inquired.

"Joey, I've got the hump."

Miss Gaymer squeezed his arm affectionately.

"Never mind, I'll marry you when I'm grown up," she announced rather breathlessly.

Hughie felt a little awed, as a man must always when he realises that a woman, however old or young, loves him. He smiled down on the slim figure beside him.

"You're a good sort, Joey," he said. "One of the best!"

Miss Gaymer returned contentedly to her tea, utterly and absolutely rewarded for the effort involved by the sacrifice of this, her maidenly reserve.

CHAPTER V

[pg 61

THE JOY OF BATTLE

HUGHIE stepped out of the ferry-boat on to the towpath, which was crowded with young men hastening to the places where the boats were moored and young women who would have been much better employed on the opposite bank.

The punctilious Hughie was looking about for a friendly hedge or other protection behind which he might decorously slip off the white flannel trousers which during the afternoon had been veiling the extreme brevity of his rowing-shorts, when he was tapped on the shoulder. He turned and found himself faced by a stout clean-shaven man, with eyes that twinkled cheerfully behind round spectacles. He looked like what he was, a country parson of the best type, burly, humorous, and shrewd, with unmistakable traces of the schoolmaster about him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, with a rather old-fashioned bow, "but are you Mr. Marrable?"

Hughie admitted the fact.

"Well, I just want to say that I hope you are going Head to-night. You are to row stroke yourself, I hear."

"Yes." [pg 62

"Quite right, quite right! It's a desperate thing to change your crew about between races, but it's our only chance. You could never have caught them with the man you had last night. He's plucky, but he can't pick a crew up and take them with him. Have you been out in the new order?"

"Yes. We had a short spin a couple of hours ago."

"Satisfactory?"

"Yes, very fair."

"That's excellent. Now we shall see a race!"

The speaker turned and walked beside Hughie in the direction of the Railway Bridge. Hughie wondered who he could be.

"I suppose you are an old member of the College, sir," he said.

"Yes. Haven't been able to come up for fifteen years, though."

"In the crew, perhaps?" continued Hughie, observing his companion's mighty chest—it had slipped down a little in fifteen years—and shoulders.

"Yes,"—rather diffidently.

"I thought so. About what year?"

The stranger told him.

Hughie grew interested.

"You must have been in D'Arcy's crew," he said,—"the great D'Arcy. My father knew him well. [pg 63
Were you?"

"Er—yes."

"My word!" Hughie's eyes blazed at the mention of the name, which, uttered anywhere along the waterside between Putney Bridge and Henley, still rouses young oarsmen to respectful dreams of distant emulation and middle-aged coaches to floods of unreliable reminiscence. "He must have been a wonder in his time. Did you know him well? What sort of chap was he?"

"Well—you see—I *am* D'Arcy," replied the stranger apologetically.

After that he gave Hughie advice about the coming race.

"I have watched the All Saints crew for three nights now," he said. "They are a fine lot, and beautifully together; but it is my opinion that they can't last."

"They're a bit too sure of themselves," said Hughie. "Too many Blues in the boat."

"How many?"

"Four. Seven, Six, Five, and Bow."

"Good! They are probably labouring under the delusion that a boat with four Blues in it is four times as good as a boat with one Blue in it. Consequently they haven't trained very hard, especially those two fat men in the middle of the boat. What about their Stroke?"

"Pretty enough, but a rotter when it comes to the pinch." [pg 64

"Good again! Well, these fellows have not once been extended during the races, for you gave them no sort of a run last night. You went to bits at the start and never quite recovered. However, that will give All Saints some false confidence, which is just what we want. Now what do you propose to do to-night? Jump on to their tails at the start?"

"No good," said Hughie. "They are too old birds for that game. Besides, my crew want very carefully working up to a fast stroke. I can't trust Six at anything above thirty-four. He'll go on rowing that all day; but if I quicken up to thirty-six or seven he gets flustered, and forty sends him clean off his nut after about a minute. No, we must just wear them down."

"Quite right," said D'Arcy. "If you are within a length at the Railway Bridge you ought just to do it."

"The difficulty is," said Hughie ruefully, "that the crew are only good for about one spurt. It's a good spurt, I must say, but if it fails we are done. They can never slow down to a steady stroke again—especially Six. So it simply has to be made at the right moment. The difficulty is to know when."

"Have you got a reliable cox?"

"First-class." [pg 65

"Can't he tell you?"

"Too much row going on," said Hughie. "The whole College will be on the towpath to-night."

The Reverend Montague D'Arcy plunged his hand into the tail-pocket of his clerical frock-coat, and produced therefrom a large-pattern service revolver.

"Look here," he said. "You would be able to hear this lethal weapon on the Day of Judgment itself. Will you consent to take your time from me?"

"Rather! Thank you, sir." There was no doubting the sincerity of Hughie's gratitude.

"Well," continued the clergyman briskly, "I shall wait by the Railway Bridge, on the Barnwell side, away from the towpath. If you have made your bump before that you won't want me. Well and

good. But I don't think you *will* have made it, and I don't advise you to try. For the first half of the course those All Saints men will match you stroke for stroke, and if you hustle your heavy man at Six he will probably lose his head. As you pass under the Railway Bridge quicken slightly—not more than two strokes a minute, though. I have six shots in this revolver. When you hear two of them, that will mean that you are getting within jumping distance and must be ready for the spurt. When you hear the remaining four in quick succession you must simply swing out and put the very last ounce of your blood and bones and bodies and souls into it. And if you catch 'em," concluded the reverend gentleman, "by gad! I'll dance the Cachuca on the bank!" [pg 66]

By this time they had reached the spot where their racing-shell—sixty-two feet of flimsy cedar wood—was lying waiting for them. The rest of the crew, already assembled, were standing about in the attitudes of profound dejection or forced hilarity which appear to be the only alternatives of deportment open to men who are suffering from what is expressively termed "the needle." Some were whistling, others were yawning, and all were wondering why on earth men took up rowing as a pastime.

Hughie gathered his Argonauts into a knot, and at his request the Reverend Montague D'Arcy outlined to them the plan of campaign. Then the crew embarked, and the stout clergyman assisted the grizzled College boatman—the only person present whose nerves appeared unaffected by the prevailing tension—to push their craft clear of the bank, and set them going on a half-minute dash as a preliminary to their long paddle down the course to the starting point of the race.

In accordance with a picturesque but peculiar custom they wore in their straw hats bunches of marigolds and corn-flowers—the College colours—as an intimation that they had achieved bumps during the preceding nights; and so bedecked they paddled majestically down the Long Reach, feeling extremely valorous and looking slightly ridiculous, to challenge a comparison (in which they were hopelessly outclassed from the start) with the headgear of the assembled fair in Ditton Paddock. [pg 67]

The method of sending off a bumping race is the refinement of cruelty.

As each boat reaches its starting-post the crews disembark and stand dismally about, listening to the last exhortations of coaches or nervously eyeing the crew behind them. Presently an objectionably loud piece of artillery, situated half-way down the long line of boats, goes off with a roar. This is called "first gun," and means chiefly that there will be another in three minutes. The crew mournfully denude themselves of a few more articles of their already scanty wardrobe, which they pile upon the shoulders of the perspiring menial whose duty it is to convey the same to the finishing-post, and crawl one by one into their places in the boat. Finally, the coxswain coils himself into his seat and takes both rudder-lines in his left hand, leaving the right free to grasp the end of the boat's last link with *terra firma*, her starting-chain. Then the second gun goes, and the crew shudder and know that in sixty seconds precisely they must start. [pg 68]

The ritual observed during the final minute is complicated in the extreme, and varies directly with the nervous system of the coach, who dances upon the bank with a stop-watch in his hand, to time the ministrations of the College boatman, who stands by with a long boat-hook ready to prod the vessel into midstream.

"Fifteen seconds gone," says the coach. "Push her out, Ben."

Ben complies, with a maddening but wise deliberation. If the boat is pushed out too promptly the starting-chain will grow taut and tug the stern of the boat inwards towards the bank, just when her nose should be pointing straight upstream. But this elementary truth does not occur to the frenzied octette in the boat. The gun will go, and bow-side will find their oar-blades still resting on the towpath. They *know* it.

"Thirty seconds gone," says the coach. "Paddle on gently, Bow and Two."

His object is to get the full advantage of the length of the chain, but Bow and Two know better. They are convinced that he merely desires that they shall be caught at a disadvantage when the gun fires. However, they paddle on as requested, with a palsied stealthiness that suggests musical chairs.

"Fifteen seconds left," says the coach. "Are you straight, Cox? Ten more sec—" [pg 69]

Ah! As usual the chain has drawn tight, and the stern of the boat is being dragged inwards again.

"Paddle on, Two!" yells the coxswain.

Two gives a couple of frenzied digs; the Dervish with the watch, accompanied by a ragged and inaccurate chorus all down the bank, chants "Five, four, three, two—"; there is a terrific roar from the gun; the coxswain drops the chain; the boatman slips the point of his boat-hook (which,

between ourselves, has been doing the lion's share in keeping the ship's head straight) from Five's rigger; and they are off.

The Benedictine crew got under way very unostentatiously. Their coach was actually rowing in the All Saints boat,—and it would be difficult to select a more glowing testimonial to the sterling sportsmanship of English rowing,—so the starting operations were wisely left to the College boatman, who had performed the office for something like half a century. The flight of time was recorded by Hughie himself, from the watch which hung on his stretcher beside his right foot. The experienced Mr. Dishart-Watson kept those too-often fatally intimate acquaintances, the rudder-lines and starting-chain, tactfully apart, and the St. Benedict's boat got off the mark with a start [pg 70
that brought her within a length of All Saints during the first half-minute.

After that their opponents drew away. As D'Arcy had said, they were a seasoned crew, and nothing short of sheer superiority would wear them down. The two boats swung round Grassy Corner and entered the Plough Reach about their distance apart. All Saints were rowing the faster stroke.

Hughie, who was keeping to a steady thirty-two, felt with satisfaction that the men behind him were well together. Number Seven, small but plucky, was setting bow-side a beautiful example in steady swing and smart finish. Six—Mr. Puffin—was rowing a great blade. To look at him now, you would ask why he had not been included in the University Crew. If you saw him trying to row forty to the minute, you would marvel that he should be included in any crew at all.

Five was not looking happy. He was lying back too far and tugging at the finish. To him the boat seemed heavier than usual, for he was just beginning to realise the difference between seconding the efforts of Hughie Marrable and those of Mr. Duncombe. Still, he was plugging gamely. Four, a painstaking person, was encouraging himself in a fashion entirely his own. After every stroke, as he sat up and swung forward, he gasped out some little *sotto voce* remark to [pg 71
himself, such as, "Oh, well *rowed*, Four!—Stick to it, Four!—Use your *legs*, old man!—That's better!—That's a *beauty*!—Oh, well *rowed*, Four!" And so on. Where he got the necessary breath for these exercises nobody knew; but some folk possess these little peculiarities, and row none the worse for them. Bow was another instance. He was a chirpy but eccentric individual, and used to sing to himself some little ditty of the moment—or possibly a hymn—all through a race, beginning with the first stroke and ending exactly, if possible, with the last. He had been known, when stroking a boat, to quicken up to a perfectly incredible rate simply because he feared that the song would end before he completed the course, a contingency which he regarded as unlucky in the extreme. On the other hand, he would become quite depressed if he had to stop in the middle of a verse, and he was quite capable of rowing *rallentando* if he desired to synchronise his two conclusions.

But few people have the time or inclination for these diversions while oscillating upon a sixteen-inch slide, and the rest of the crew were swinging at and plugging in grim silence.

The two boats swept into the roaring medley of Ditton Corner. They flashed past the row of piles and tethered punts amid a hurricane of shouts and waving handkerchiefs. Hughie, wrongfully [pg 72
exercising his privilege as Stroke, allowed his eyes to slide to the right for a moment. He had a fleeting glimpse of the crimson and excited countenance of Miss Gaymer, as some man held her aloft in the crowd. Then the boat gave a slight lurch, and Joey was swallowed up again. Hughie felt guiltily responsible for the lurch, and recalling his gaze into the proper channel—straight over the coxswain's right shoulder—swung out again long and steadily.

"Are we straight yet?" he gasped to Dishy.

"Yes—just."

"Tell 'em to reach out a bit."

Mr. Watson complied, in tones that rose high above the tumult on the bank and penetrated even into the harmonious soul of Bow, who was grappling with a difficult cadenza at the moment.

"Six good ones!" said Hughie, next time his face swung up towards the coxswain's.

"Now, you men, six good ones!" echoed Dishy. "*One! Two!* Five, you're late! *Three! Four! Five!* Bow, get hold of it! *Six!* Oh, well rowed!"

There was a delighted roar from the bank. The Benedictine crew were together again after the unsteadiness round Ditton.

"How far?" signalled Hughie's lips.

"Length—and—a—half," replied Cox. "Less," he added, peering ahead.

They were half-way up the Long Reach now. In another minute or two they would be at the Railway Bridge, beyond which hard-pressed boats are popularly supposed to be safe. [pg 73

"Tell 'em—going—quicken," gurgled Hughie, "if can."

Cox nodded, rather doubtfully, and Hughie ground his teeth. If only this accursed noise on the bank would cease, even for five seconds, Dishy would get a chance to make the crew hear. As it was, the ever-increasing crowd, rolling up fresh adherents like a snowball, made that feat almost an impossibility.

But the coxswain was a man of experience and resource. Just as the boat passed under the Railway Bridge itself there was a momentary silence, for the crew were shut off from their supporters by some intervening balks of timber. Dishy seized the opportunity.

"Be ready to quicken," he yelled. "Now! Oh, well done!"

The crew had heard him, and what was more, they had obeyed him. Stroke in the All Saints boat suddenly realised that the oncoming foe had quickened to thirty-five or six, and that the interval between the two boats had shrunk to something under a length. He spurted in his turn, and his men spurted with him, but their length of stroke grew proportionately shorter, and the [pg 74] pace of the boat did not increase. St. Benedict's were holding their advantage.

"Half a length," said Dishy, in response to an agonised interrogation from Hughie's right eyebrow.

Suddenly above the tumult there rang out two reverberating revolver-shots. A stout clergyman, whooping like a Choctaw, was tearing along the right bank of the river, which was practically clear of spectators, with his weapon smoking in his hand. Dishy's voice rose to a scream.

"Look out—be ready! *Only* six feet!"

And now the musical gentleman who was rowing bow felt the boat lift unsteadily under him. A wave rolled across the canvas decking behind him, and he felt a splash of water on his back.

"Washing us off!" was his comment. "Glory, glory! Another verse'll do it. Now then, all together,—

"*What though the spicy breezes*
Blow soft, o'er Ceylon's—"

Bang! bang! bang! bang!

The great service revolver rang out. The nose of the Benedictine boat, half submerged in a boiling flood, suddenly sprang to within three feet of the All Saints rudder.

"*Now*, you men!" Mr. Dishart-Watson's wizened and saturnine countenance shrank suddenly [pg 75] and alarmingly to a mere rim surrounding his mouth. "Just *ten* more! *One—two*—"

Like St. Francis of Assisi, "Of all his body he made a tongue." He counted the strokes in tones that overtopped all the roars of encouragement and apprehension arising from the now hopelessly mixed-up mob of Benedictine and All Saints men that raged alongside. Hughie Marrable quickened and quickened, and his crew responded sturdily. Faster and faster grew the stroke, and more and more pertinaciously did the nose of the Benedictine boat plough its way through the turbid waves emitted by the twitching rudder in front. Never had they travelled like this. Six was rowing like a man possessed. Four had ceased to encourage himself, and was plugging automatically with his chest open and his eyes shut. Bow may or may not have been singing: he was certainly rowing. There was a world of rolling and splashing, for the All Saints coxswain was manipulating his rudder very skilfully, and ever and again the aggressive nose of the Benedictine boat was sent staggering back by a rolling buffeting wave. But there was no stopping the Benedictines.

Suddenly Dishy gave vent to a final cataclysmic bellow.

"You're overlapping!"

They were almost at Charon's Grind. The coxswain's lank body stiffened in its little seat, and [pg 76] Hughie saw him lean hard over and haul on to the right-hand rudder-line.

"Last three strokes! Now, you devils! *Plug! plug! pl*—Aa—a—ee—ooh—ee—easy all! Oh, well rowed, well rowed, well rowed!"

There was a lurch and a bump.

"Done it!—'*Bows down to wood and stone*,'" gasped Bow.

The eight men let go their oars and tumbled forward on to their stretchers, and listened, with their heads and hearts bursting, to the din that raged on the bank.

It was a fine confused moment.

In the boat itself Cox was vainly endeavouring to shake hands with Stroke, who lay doubled up over his oar, with his head right down on the bottom of the boat, oblivious to everything save the blessed fact that he need not row any more. Consciousness that he had taken his crew to the Head of the River was yet to come. At the other end Bow, with his head clasped between his knees, was croaking half-hysterically to himself, "Two bars too soon, Hughie! Oh, my aunt, we've gone Head! Two bars too soon!"

On the towpath every one was shouting and shaking hands with indiscriminate *bonhomie*,—this was one of those occasions upon which even the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to cheer,— [pg 77
and everybody, with one exception, seemed to be ringing a bell or blowing a trumpet. The exception was supplied by a trio of young gentlemen, two of whom held an enormous Chinese gong suspended between them, while a third smote the same unceasingly with a mallet, and cried aloud the name of Marrable. It must be recorded here, to his honour, that the smiter bore upon his forehead an enormous and highly coloured bruise, suggestive of sudden contact with, say, a bedroom-door.

On the opposite bank of the river, a stout, middle-aged, and apparently demented Clerk in Holy Orders was dancing the Cachuca.

BOOK TWO [pg 79

FORTITER IN RE

CHAPTER VI [pg 81

KNIGHT-ERRANTRY *À LA MODE*

If all good Americans go to Paris when they die, it may safely be predicted that all the bad ones will be booked through to Coney Island.

So much may be inferred from the regularity and zeal with which the Toughs, Hoboes, Bowery Boys, and other fearful wildfowl of the New York proletariat, accompanied by the corresponding females of the species, betake themselves every Sabbath by trolley-car or steamer to this haunt of ancient peace (which, by the way, is not to all appearances an island and harbours no conies).

Take Margate and Douglas and Blackpool, and pile them into an untidy heap; throw in a dozen Fun-Cities from Olympia and half a score of World's Fairs from the Agricultural Hall; add some of the less reputable features of Earl's Court and Neuilly Fair; include a race-course of the baser sort; case the whole in wood, and people it with sallow gentlemen in striped jerseys and ladies answering exclusively to such names as Hattie, Sadie, and Mamie, reared up apparently upon an exclusive diet of peanuts and clam-chowder; keep the whole multitude duly controlled and [pg 82
disciplined by a police force which, if appearances go for anything, has been recruited entirely from the criminal classes; and you will be able faintly to realise what Coney Island can do when it tries on a fine Sunday in summer.

So thought Hughie Marrable. He had been wandering round the world for nine years now; but not even a previous acquaintance with the Devil Dancers of Ceylon, the unhallowed revels of Port

Said, or the refinements of a Central African Witch-Hunt (with full tom-tom accompaniment), had quite prepared him for this. Still, it was part and parcel of Life, and Life was what he had left England to see.

He had arrived in New York from San Francisco two days ago. But let it not be imagined that he had been conveyed thither by any Grand-Trunk-Ocean-to-Ocean-Limited, or other refinement of an effete modernity. His transcontinental journey had occupied just three years. Since the day on which he steamed through the Golden Gate on a tramp-freighter from Yokohama he had been working his way eastward by easy stages, acquiring experience (as Jimmy Marrable had directed) of the manner in which the other half of the world lives. Incidentally he had mixed cocktails behind a Nevada bar; learned to fire a revolver without taking it out of his pocket; accompanied a freight train over the Rockies in the capacity of assistant brakeman—his duties being chiefly confined to [pg 83
standing by with a coupling-pin, to discourage the enterprise of those gentlemen of the road who proposed to travel without tickets; and once, in a Southern State, he had been privileged to be present at that ennobling spectacle to which the brightest nation on earth occasionally treats the representatives of an older civilisation—the lynching of a negro.

In a few days Hughie would sail for England, on board the mighty Apulia. It was not often that he travelled in such ostentatious luxury: the primitive man in him leaned towards something damp and precarious on board a sailing-ship or a collier; but he happened to know that the Apulia intended going for the ocean record this trip; and since the third engineer happened to be a friend of his, Hughie had decided that four-and-a-half days and nights down among the humming turbines and the spirits that controlled them would be cheap at the price of an expensively upholstered state-room many decks above, in which he would leave his baggage and occasionally sleep.

For all that he had cast a regretful eye only that very morning on a battered little tramp-steamer which was loading up with cargo alongside a wharf at Hoboken—due to sail for Europe, so a stevedore told him, in about two days' time.

To-morrow he was to be taken yachting in New York harbour by an old P. and O. acquaintance, [pg 84
whom he had faithfully "looked up," in accordance with a two-year-old promise, at his city office that morning. In the evening, at the invitation of an American actor to whom he had once been of service in Calcutta, he was to dine at the Lambs' Club,—the New York equivalent of the Garrick and Green Room, with a dash of the Eccentric thrown in,—and the next day he was to pay a flying visit to Atlantic City.

Meanwhile he was putting in a few off-hours at Coney Island. He had watched the islanders bathing, had witnessed a display of highly—not to say epileptically—Animated Pictures, had spent half-an-hour in an open *café-chantant*, where a bevy of tired-looking girls in short skirts pranced about with mechanical abandon at the back of the small stage, shouting the chorus of a ditty which a wheezy lady (who looked like the mother of all chorus-girls) was singing at the front; and had declined a pressing invitation from the keeper of an Anatomical Museum to step inside and "have a dollar's worth for a dime."

Finally he drifted into a small theatre, where a melodrama of distinctly British flavour (seasoned to the Coney Island palate by a few distinctly local interpolations) was unfolding itself to a closely packed and hard-breathing audience.

To judge from the state of the atmosphere the entertainment had been in progress for some [pg 85
time. As Hughie took his seat the curtain rose on a moonlit military scene. Figures wrapped in great-coats sat round a camp-fire on the audience's right hand, the only plainly recognisable character being the Heroine, who, attired as a hospital nurse and positively starred with red crosses, was sewing aloofly upon an erection which looked like a sarcophagus, but was marked in plain figures "Ambulence." A sentry, who from his gait Hughie took (rightly) to be the Comic Man, was pacing up and down at the back.

Presently the guard was changed, with much saluting of a pattern unknown at any War Office, and the Comic Man, released from duty, was called upon to sing "that dear ole song you useter sing at 'ome." The cold light of the moon having been temporarily replaced by broad daylight in order to give the singer's facial expression full play, he obliged; though why any one who had heard him sing the song before should have asked him to sing it again passed Hughie's comprehension. Next a drummer-boy (female) was called upon by the company, and after a great exhibition of reluctance,—fully justified by her subsequent performance,—gave vent to a patriotic ditty, in which the only distinguishable rhymes were "Black Watch" and "Scotch."

These revels brought the Hero on to the stage. He was attired in clerical dress and a cavalry [pg 86
helmet; and, sitting down beside the Heroine upon the sarcophagus, he proceeded, oblivious of the presence of the entire guard, who were huddled round the fire not more than five feet away, to make her a proposal of marriage; quoting Scripture to some purpose, and extorting a demure affirmative from the lady just before the Comic Man, who had obviously been lamenting that the success of the piece should be imperilled by such stuff as this, upset the soup-kettle, and so gave a fresh turn to the proceedings.

All this time Hughie had been conscious of an increasing feeling of curiosity as to the identity of the only member of the glee-party round the fire who so far had made no contribution to the entertainment. He darkly suspected him of being the Villain, though what the Villain should be doing unrecognised at such a period of the play—it was about the third act—was hard to understand. However, the mystery was now cleared up by a French *vivandière*—by this time it was plain that the scene was laid in the Crimea—who called upon the mysterious one, in the accents of Stratford-atte-Bowe, for a song and dance. No reply being forthcoming, the entire company (precipitately, but quite correctly, as it happened) rose up and denounced the stranger as a Russian and a spy. They had only themselves to blame for his presence, for apparently he had [pg 87] strolled up and joined the party quite promiscuously; and no one had thought, so far, of asking him who he was or even of addressing him.

The audience now sat up expectantly. But instead of taking the spy prisoner and shooting him on sight, the guard hurried off R.U.E.—possibly to bring up their big guns or find a policeman. These deplorable tactics did not meet with the reward they deserved, for the Villain, instead of bolting off L. as fast as he could, lingered upon the stage to tell the audience that he had come back to have one more go at the Hero. (Goodness knows how many he had had!) The Hero obligingly appeared at that moment, and a section (whose numbers appeared to increase as the play proceeded) of the audience shouted to the Villain to cut in and do it *now*. But portentous trampings "off" announced the return of the glee-party, and the Villain, finding that he could not execute his perfectly justifiable design without considerable danger to his own person, and was in fact in a particularly tight place himself, suddenly appealed (with considerable "nerve," it seemed to Hughie) to the Hero, as a Cleric, to save him. The Hero (who was evidently a fool as well as a bore) immediately complied. "You must take upon you my identity," he remarked. In a twinkling they had exchanged great-coats, and the Villain was now by all the laws of Melodrama completely [pg 88] disguised as the Hero. He dashed off L., just as a perfect avalanche of people, who had been faithfully and increasingly marking time in the wings, poured on to the stage R., and endeavoured almost to poke their rifles into the Hero's breast. But just as a nervous female in the audience, apprehensive about the sudden discharge of firearms, convulsively gripped Hughie's left elbow, the Heroine dashed on from nowhere, and taking her stand before the Hero—apparently she was the only person upon the stage who recognised him—uttered these thrilling but mysterious words: "You kennot far erpon ther Red Kerawss!"

Curtain, amid thunders of applause.

After a commendably short interval the curtain rose upon the next act. The Hero was now discovered asleep (under what must have struck any thoughtful member of the audience as highly compromising circumstances for a clergyman) in the cottage of a stout lady in a very short skirt and fur-topped boots; whom, from the fact that her opening soliloquy commenced with the words, "Har, vell!" the audience rightly adjudged to be a Russian. This lady, it was soon plain, was consumed by a secret passion for the Hero. In fact she proclaimed it in such strident tones that it was surprising that its object did not wake up.

This scene soon resolved itself into a series of determined efforts on the part of the Villain to [pg 89] terminate the existence of the Hero—an enterprise in which he by this time commanded the whole-hearted support of the greater part of the audience. His first attempt was foiled by the Comic Man, who entered singing "Keep the baby warm, Mother!" just as he had crawled within striking distance of the unwakeable Hero. Muttering curses, the unfortunate man announced his intention of retiring "to the woods," pending another opportunity. But he had no luck. Just as the Comic Man performed a humorous exit through the window, the stout lady—most of the other characters, by the way, addressed her as "Tinker": possibly her name was Katinka—came in through the door, filled with the forebodings of what she called "loove." Her subsequent course of action could certainly only have been condoned on the plea of emotional insanity. She unceremoniously bundled the Hero out of bed—fortunately he had gone there in his boots—and sent him off on a transparent wild-goose chase to the "trenches." Then she got into bed herself, and when the Villain came crawling back from "the woods," brandishing his knife in the limelight, the audience were treated to a sort of up-to-date rendering of "Little Red Riding Hood," the part of the Wolf being sustained by Katinka, and that of Red Riding Hood by the now hopelessly demoralised Villain, who was once [pg 90] more chased back to his arboreal lurking-place with the muzzle of a revolver in the small of his back.

In the next and final act the Villain made a supreme effort. He began by slaying the drummer-boy,—presumably to keep his hand in,—but on going through his victim's pockets in search of certain "despatches" which that youthful hero had undertaken to carry through the Russian lines, —where to, heaven knows!—the unfortunate man discovered a locket, which instantly revealed to him the surprising, but none the less distressing, intelligence that he had slain his own son. His anguish was pitiful to behold, and when the Hero came on and began to rub it in by further excerpts from the Scriptures, the audience to a man decided that if the Villain brought it off this time no jury would convict, but that he would be bound over at the most. He certainly set about the business with more gumption than usual. Waiting until the Hero was well launched into "Secondly," with the limelight full in his eyes, he once more produced the glittering knife. Suddenly the ubiquitous Katinka dashed on, and in the most unsportsmanlike manner shot the Villain in the small of the back, at a range of about eighteen inches. He dropped dead across the body of his son [pg 91] (which must have hurt that infant prodigy very much). All the other characters sidled on from the

wings and formed a grand concluding tableau, the Hero, egregious to the last and entwined in a stained-glass attitude with the Hospital Nurse, pronouncing a sort of benediction as the curtain fell.

"Doesn't this remind you of the Drama as it used to be dished up to the undergraduates in the old Barn at Cambridge?" remarked a voice.

Hughie turned to the speaker. He found beside him a man of about thirty, with a fair moustache, which half hid a weak but amiable mouth and a receding chin. He was dressed in the thick blue shore-going garments of the seaman, but he looked too slight for an A.B. and too clean for a fireman.

"Deck-hand," said Hughie to himself. "Gentleman once—no, still!"

"Hallo!" he replied. "You seem to know me. Forgive me if I ought to know you, but I can't fix you at present. Odd thing, too, because I don't often forget a face."

"I was up at Cambridge in your time," said the man.

"Not Benedict's?"

"No—Trinity. I was sent down ultimately. But I knew you well by sight. Often saw you in the boat, and so on. You're Marrable, aren't you?"

"Yes. Were you a rowing man?" [pg 92

"No. I hunted with the Drag and rode at Cottenham—in those days." He glanced philosophically at his present attire.

"Come and have something," said Hughie.

The man interested him. He might, of course, be a mere long-shore shark on the make, or he might be what he looked—a good-hearted, well-born waster—an incorrigible but contented failure. Anyhow, five minutes over a friendly glass would probably settle the question.

"I wonder if it's possible to obtain a decent British drink in this clam-ridden hole," Hughie continued.

"The nearest thing to a product of the British Empire that you'll get here," said the man, "is Canadian whisky; and personally I would rather drink nitric acid. We had better stick to lager. Come along: I know the ropes."

Presently they found themselves in a German beer saloon, where a stertorous Teuton supplied their needs.

"By the way," said the man, "I have the advantage of you. My name is Allerton. Sorry I forgot!"

"Thanks," said Hughie, rather lamely. "Are you—living out here just now?"

"No," said Allerton simply. "I'm a deck-hand on a tramp-steamer." He spoke easily and freely, [pg 93
as one gentleman to another. He had realised at a glance that he was not about to be made the victim of offensive curiosity or misplaced charity. "She's lying at Hoboken, due out on Tuesday, for Bordeaux."

"French boat?"

"No. American owned, under the British flag, by a fairly competent rascal, too. This trip we are carrying a cargo of Californian wine of sorts. We took it last week from a sailing barque that had brought it round the Horn. She wanted to start back at once, so turned it over to us cheap."

"And you're going to Bordeaux? What does your astute owner want to take coals to Newcastle for?"

"Because everything that comes *out* of Newcastle is labelled coal whether it is coal or not. In other words, this poison will be carried by us to Bordeaux, bottled and sealed, and shipped to England as fine vintage Burgundy. John Bull will drink it and feel none the worse. I'm told it's a paying trade."

"I wish I were going in your boat," said Hughie, rather regretfully. "I'm booked by the Apulia."

"Well, look out for the Orinoco on your second day out."

"The Orinoco? I remember seeing her at Hoboken to-day, and wishing I could make the trip on her." [pg 94

"I doubt if you'd be of the same opinion after trying conclusions with Mr. James Gates, our first 'greaser,'" replied Allerton. "Still, I don't know," he continued, regarding Hughie's brawny form reflectively. "I don't believe he could put the fear of death into you the way he does into most of us. You've knocked about a bit in your time, I dare say, only with more success than I. Perhaps you weren't born with holes in *all* your pockets."

"I say," said Hughie rather diffidently,—it is difficult to confer a favour upon a man who is down without offending him,—"will you dine with me? Or sup, as it's getting late?"

"I shall be charmed," said the deck-hand. "Shall I show you a place? I know quite a comfortable establishment close by here."

Hughie said "Righto!" and presently they found themselves in the place of entertainment selected by Allerton. Most of the room was occupied by small tables, at which various couples were eating and drinking. At one end was a platform, upon which an intermittent sort of variety entertainment was in progress.

On the floor at the foot of the platform was a piano. At the piano sat a girl, who accompanied the performers and bridged over the gaps in the programme by selections from the less restrained works of American Masters of Music. Not far from the stage an unhealthy-looking youth was presiding over a bar. The atmosphere was something between that of a smoking-concert, and Baker Street Station in the days of the old Underground. [pg 95

Allerton's lazy nonchalance lasted until the first course was set before him by a smiling blackamoor, and then, with a half-apologetic aside to his host on the subject of his last meal, he fell upon the fare in a manner which brought very vividly home to Hughie's intelligence the difference between an amateur casual like himself, with money enough in his pocket to make it possible to knock off when he tired of the game, and the genuine article. He was not hungry, having in fact dined a couple of hours before; but he did his best by tactful pecking to conceal the fact from his guest. Still, even after he had ordered some wine and duly inspected the cork, he had a good deal of time to look about him.

Presently his attention began to concentrate itself upon the girl at the piano. She was sitting quite near him, and Hughie, always respectfully appreciative where a pretty face was concerned,—his wanderings, though they had made him more than ever a master of men, had done little to eradicate his innate attitude of quiet, determined, and occasionally quite undeserved reverence towards women,—had time to notice the un-American freshness of her colouring, the regularity of her profile, and the prettiness of her hair. He also observed that the foot which rested upon the pedal of the piano was small and shapely. She was quietly dressed, in a dark-blue serge skirt and a white silk blouse—or "shirtwaist," to employ the mysterious local designation—with short sleeves. She had round arms and good hands. [pg 96

Hughie wondered what she was doing in a place like this, and, young-man-like, felt vaguely unhappy on her behalf; but experienced a truly British feeling of relief (mingled with slight disappointment) on observing that she wore a wedding-ring. He waxed sentimental. Who was her husband? he wondered. He hoped it was not the proprietor of the establishment,—a greasy individual of Semitic appearance, who occasionally found leisure, in the intervals between announcing the "turns" and calling the attention of patrons to the exceptional resources of the bar, to walk across the room and paw the girl affectionately on the shoulder while giving her some direction as to the music,—nor yet the scorbutic young man behind the bar.

His meditations were interrupted by Allerton.

"Marrable, eyes front! And fill up your glass. Hang it, drink fair!"

Hughie turned and regarded his guest. The greater part of a magnum of vitriolic champagne had disappeared down that gentleman's throat. His eye had brightened, and now twinkled facetiously as he surveyed first Hughie and then the girl at the piano. [pg 97

"*Une petite pièce de tout droit*—eh, what?" he remarked.

Hughie, beginning to understand why his companion was now swabbing decks instead of ruling ancestral acres, nodded shortly.

Allerton noticed his host's momentary distance of manner, and leaned across the table with an air of contrition.

"I'm afraid," he said apologetically, "that I'm getting most infernally full. You see how it is with me, don't you? I'm that sort of bloke. Always have been, from a nipper. Thash—That's why I'm here. It's a pity. And the worst of it is," he added, in a sudden burst of candour, "that I'm going to get much fuller. It's a long time since I tasted this." He touched his glass. "It isn't served out on the Orinoco. Do you—er—mind?"

Hughie, with a queer feeling of compassion, smiled reassuringly, and ordered another bottle. If Allerton was about to get drunk, he should get drunk like a gentleman for once in a way.

Then his attention reverted to the piano.

There had been a development. The girl was mechanically playing one of the compositions of [pg 98
that delicate weaver of subtle harmonies, Mr. John Philip Sousa; but she was not reading her music. Her eyelids were resolutely lowered, as if she wished to avoid seeing something. The reason resolved itself into a gentleman who was leaning over the front of the piano, gazing amorously down upon the musician, and endeavouring, with surprising success, to make himself heard above one of the composer's most characteristic efforts.

Hughie looked him up and down. He was a big man, powerfully built, with little pig's eyes set close together, and a ponderous and vicious-looking lower jaw. Was *he* her husband? wondered the deeply interested Hughie. No: he was too obviously endeavouring to make himself agreeable.

"Marrable, my son," suddenly interpolated the convivial but observant Allerton, "you're cut out! No use bidding against that customer. Do you know who he is?"

"No. Who?"

"That," replied the deck-hand with an air of almost proprietary pride, "is Noddy Kinahan."

"Oh! And who may he be?"

"Gee! (Sorry! One picks up these rotten Yankee expressions somehow.) I mean, I am surprised
you haven't heard of him. He's rather a big man here. In fact, to be explish—explicit,"—Mr. [pg 99
Allerton was fast arriving at that stage of intoxication which cannot let well alone, but must tempt Providence by dragging in unnecessarily hard words,—"he is my employer."

"Anything else."

"Political boss of sorts. *Inter alia*—that's good! I'm glad I remembered that. *Inter alia* rhymes with Australia, doesn't it? We'll make up a Limerick on it some time—let me see, where was I? Oh, yesh—yes, I mean—*inter alia*, he owns the Orinoco and about a dozen more mouldy old coffins; and very well he does out of them, too! Buys them cheap, and—but excuse further details at present, ole man. To tell you the truth I'm getting so screwed that I'm afraid of saying something that in my calmer moments I shall subsequently regret. A cigar? I thank you. You're a white man, Marrable. Chin chin!"

After this burst of discretion Mr. Allerton returned to the joint worship of Bacchus and Vesta, the difficulty which he experienced in keeping the lighted end of the cigar out of his mouth increasing as the evening advanced, but leaving his cheerfulness unimpaired. His condition was due not so much to the depths of his potations as to the shallowness of his accommodation for the same; and strong-headed Hughie, as he surveyed the weak chin and receding forehead on the [pg 10
other side of the table, mused not altogether without envy upon the strange inequality of that law of nature which decrees that what is a toothful for one man shall be a skinful for another and an anæsthetic for a third.

He was recalled from these musings by the remembrance of the girl at the piano, and turned to see what was happening now.

Mr. Noddy Kinahan was returning from an expedition to the bar, carrying a bottle of champagne and a long tumbler. These accessories to conviviality he placed on the top of the piano, and departed on a second trip, returning shortly with a wine-glassful of brandy. The girl, though she probably observed more of his movements than her low-drooping lashes would seem to allow, made no sign, but continued to play the ragtime tune with a mechanical precision which caused the tumbler on the top of the piano to tread a lively and self-accompanied measure round its more stolid and heavily weighted companion.

Mr. Kinahan next proceeded to pour himself out a tumblerful of champagne, liberally lacing the foaming liquid with brandy. Then, with an ingratiating gesture toward the shrinking girl, he proceeded to swallow the mixture with every appearance of enjoyment.

"King's peg!" commented Hughie to himself. "Wonder how much of *that* he can stand? I'd back [pg 10

him against friend Allerton, though, if it came—Hallo! The hound! This must stop!"

He half rose to his feet. Mr. Kinahan, having satisfied his present needs, had refilled the tumbler with champagne, added the rest of the brandy, and was now proffering the potion, in the self-same vessel which he had just honoured with his own august lips, to the girl at the piano.

The girl turned crimson and shook her head, but kept on playing.

Noddy Kinahan was not accustomed to bestow favours in vain. He walked round behind the piano, and, taking the girl firmly by the shoulders with his left arm, held the sizzling tumbler to her lips. She uttered a strangled cry, left off playing, and struggled frantically to seize the glass with her hands.

Now Hughie Marrable had a healthy prejudice in favour of minding his own business. He had witnessed scenes of this description before, and he knew that, place and company considered, the girl at the piano was probably not unaccustomed to accept refreshment at the hands of gentlemen, even when the gentleman was half-drunk, the hands dirty, and the refreshment (after allowing a generous discount for spillings) sufficiently potent to deprive any ordinary woman, within ten minutes, of any sort of control over her own actions or behaviour. Moreover, Hughie had a truly [pg 10 British horror of a scene. *But*—

He was surprised to feel himself leap from his chair and bound toward the piano. His surprise, however, was nothing to that experienced a moment later by Mr. Noddy Kinahan, who, having succeeded in pinning the desperately resisting girl's arms to her sides, was now endeavouring to prise her lips open with the edge of the tumbler. But there are slips even after the cup has reached the lip. Just as success appeared to be about to crown Mr. Kinahan's hospitable efforts, a large and sinewy hand shot over his right shoulder and snatched away the glass, which it threw under the piano. Simultaneously an unseen force in the rear shook him till his teeth rattled, and then, depressing his head to the level of the keyboard, began to play a lively if staccato tune thereon with the point of Mr. Kinahan's rubicund and fleshy nose.

These operations were more or less screened from the public view by the body of the piano, which was an "upright" of the cottage variety. But the sudden cessation of "The Washington Post" in favour of what sounded like "The Cat's Polka" played by a baby with its feet, brought the proprietor of the establishment hurrying across the room. He arrived just in time to be present at the conclusion of a florid chromatic scale of about four octaves, executed under the guidance of [pg 10 Hughie Marrable's heavy hand by Mr. Kinahan's somewhat abraded nasal organ.

The instrumental part of the entertainment now terminated in favour of a vocal interlude. Hughie released his grip of Mr. Noddy Kinahan's collar, and stood back a pace waiting for a rush. He was confident that, given a clear floor and no interference, he could offer his burly opponent a lesson in manners which he would never forget.

But Mr. Kinahan, being a mover in high political altitudes, was not in the habit of doing his own dirty work. He reviled his opponent, it is true, in terms which an expert could not but have admitted were masterly, but it was obvious to the unruffled Hughie that he was doing so chiefly to keep his courage up and "save his face." There was a cunning, calculating look in his piggy eyes which did not quite fit in with the unrestrained *abandon* of his utterances, and Hughie began to realise that there are deeper schemes of retaliation than mere assault and battery.

Once or twice Mr. Kinahan, in pausing for breath, turned and looked over his shoulder toward the curious crowd which was gathering behind him. Presently Hughie noticed a couple of "toughs" of the most uncompromisingly villainous appearance advancing in a leisurely fashion from a corner by the door, where they had been supping. They kept their eyes on Kinahan, as if for an order. [pg 10 Evidently that great man never took his walks abroad without his jackals.

Things were beginning to look serious. The Hebraic proprietor, half crazy with fright at the gratuitous advertisement which the fracas was conferring upon his establishment,—an advertisement which was receiving a gratifying response from an influx of curious sightseers,—was frantically begging people to go away. The girl, the source (as ever!) of all the trouble, was still sitting on the music-stool, trembling like a fluttered bird, with Hughie, feeling slightly self-conscious, standing over her. In the middle distance, Mr. Allerton, gloriously oblivious to the ephemeral and irrelevant disturbance around him, sat contentedly before two empty bottles, endeavouring with erratic fingers to adorn the lapel of his blue pea-jacket with a silver-plated fork (the property of the establishment), upon which he had impaled a nodding banana of pantomimic proportions.

Suddenly Hughie heard himself addressed in casual tones by some one standing close behind him.

"Say, Johnny Bull, you'd best get out of here, right now. Skip! Those two toughs of Noddy's won't touch you till they get the word, but when they do you'll be sorry. Get out this way, by the [pg 10

side of the stage. It leads around to the back door."

Having delivered himself of this undoubtedly sound piece of advice, the unhealthy-looking young gentleman from behind the bar picked up the champagne bottle and broken glass, and lounged back to his base of operations.

Hughie, realising the wisdom of his words, and making a hasty note that one should never judge even a mottle-faced bar-tender by his appearance, reluctantly abandoned his half-projected scheme of hurling Noddy Kinahan into the arms of his two sinister supporters and then knocking their collective heads together, and turned to the small door behind him. Suddenly he caught sight of the piano-girl. He paused and surveyed her thoughtfully.

"You'd better come with me," he said.

Without a word, the girl rose and preceded him to the door. Hughie opened it for her, and they both passed through and hurried down a narrow passage, which gave direct into the alley at the back of the establishment.

Once outside, Hughie took the girl's arm and fairly ran, never pausing till they reached the brightly lighted sea-front. He had an idea that a cheerful and crowded thoroughfare would prove more salubrious than deserted and ill-lit byways.

Once clear of their late surroundings the two slackened pace, and Hughie surveyed his charge with comical perplexity. [pg 10

"Now what am I to do with *you*?" he inquired.

"Take me home," said the girl, sobbing.

Her pluck and fortitude, having brought her dry-eyed through the worst of the conflict, had now taken their usual leave of absence, and she was indulging very properly in a few reactionary and comforting tears.

"Where do you live?" asked Hughie.

"Brooklyn."

"That's a matter for a trolley-car. Come along."

He took her arm again, rather diffidently this time,—his old masculine self-consciousness was returning,—and hurried off to what the Coney Islanders call a "deepo." Here they ensconced themselves in the corner of a fairly empty car, and started on their twenty-mile run, *viâ* Sheepshead Bay and other delectable spots, to Brooklyn Bridge.

As soon as the car started, Hughie turned to his companion.

"Look here," he said bluntly. "I know a lady when I meet one. What were you doing in that place at all? You are English, too."

"Yes. I can't blame you for wondering. I'll tell you. I come from London. My father was a small [pg 10
schoolmaster in Sydenham. He—he was unfortunate, and died three years ago, and I was left alone in the world, with hardly two sixpences to rub together. Just as things were looking none too promising for me, I met and married"—she flushed proudly—"one of the best men that ever stepped—Dennis Maclear. He is an electrical engineer. We came out here together to make our fortunes, and settled in New York. We were beginning to do fairly well after a long struggle, when one day Dennis crushed his left arm and leg in a cog-wheel arrangement of some kind, and for three months he has not been able even to get out of bed without help. Bad luck, wasn't it? He is getting better slowly, and some day, the doctor says, he will be able to get about again. But—well, savings don't last for ever, you know; so I—"

"I see," said Hughie; "the upkeep of the establishment has devolved on you in the meanwhile?"

"Yes. Piano-playing is about the only accomplishment I possess. A girl friend of mine told me she was giving up her billet at old Bercotti's, and asked if I would like it. She wouldn't recommend it to most girls, she said, but perhaps it would suit me all right, being married. I took it; but as you saw, my being married wasn't sufficient protection after all."

She shuddered, for she was very young, and badly shaken; but presently she smiled bravely. [pg 10

"What did you get?" asked Hughie.

"Dollar a night."

"It's not much."

"It's better than starvation," said practical little Mrs. Maclear.

"And what are you going to do next?"

"I'm not going back to old Bercotti's again—that's flat."

"Can you get another berth?"

"Well, if there happens to be anybody in this simple and confiding country who is willing to take on as accompanist or teacher a young woman of shabby-genteel appearance, who is unable to mention a single soul as a reference, and has no character to show from her former employer—it ought to be easy!" said the girl.

Hughie regarded her reflectively.

"You take it well. I admire your pluck," he said.

"A married woman with a husband to keep has no time to worry about pluck," replied Mrs. Maclear; "she just *has* to do things. Besides, all the pluck in the world can't save a woman when Noddy Kinahan is about. If it hadn't been for you—by the way, would you mind telling me your name? You know mine."

Hughie told her. Presently they left the trolley-car—*anglicè*, electric-tram—and struck off down [pg 10
a street in Brooklyn. The girl turned in at a doorway, and paused at the foot of a stair.

"Won't you come up and see my husband, Mr. Marrable?" she said. "It's ten flights up, and we don't run to an elevator; but I know Dennis would like to thank you himself."

Hughie had intended to refuse,—he hated being thanked as much as most matter-of-fact people,—but, a flash of unusual insight revealing to him the fact that the true object of the invitation was not to exhibit him to the husband, but to enable this proud little lady to exhibit her husband to him, he felt reassured, and allowed himself to be borne aloft to the Maclear eyrie. Here a gigantic and impulsive son of Kerry, gaunt and hollow-eyed through long bed-keeping, wrung his hand in a manner which made him feel glad he was not a refractory terminal, what time Mrs. Maclear, in a sort of up-to-date version of the song of Miriam, described Hughie's glorious triumph over Noddy Kinahan, laying special stress upon the ecstatic period during which Mr. Kinahan, at the instance of Hughie, had enacted the part of a human pianola.

He left them at last, wondering in his heart, as he tramped home under the stars to his hotel in [pg 11
West Forty-Second Street, what the plucky couple were going to live on during the next two or three months. The man was still practically a cripple,—he must have been badly mangled,—and it is hard work fighting for time in a country whose motto, as regards human as well as other machinery, is: "Never repair! Scrap, and replace!"

Hughie had solved the problem to his satisfaction by the time he crossed Brooklyn Bridge.

For the rest of the way home he thought of other things. A bachelor, however ungregarious, is at heart a sentimental animal, and during his walk Hughie was contemplating with his mind's eye the picture that he had left behind him as he said good-night,—the picture of "a snug little kingdom up ten pair of stairs," tenanted by a little community of two, self-contained and self-sufficient, dauntless in the face of grim want and utter friendlessness,—and, despite his own health and wealth, he experienced a sudden feeling of envy for the crippled and impecunious Dennis Maclear.

"I suppose," he mused to himself, "it doesn't really matter *how* rotten a time you have in this world so long as you have it in the right company." Then he added, apparently as a sort of corollary: "By gad, when I get home next week, I'll *stay* there!"

But, however carefully (or carelessly) we handle the tiller on life's voyage, it is the little casual [pg 11
currents and unexpected side winds that really set our course for us. As Hughie rolled into bed that night he reflected, rather regretfully, that the incident of that evening was closed for ever. He had definitely cut himself off from the Maclears, at any rate, for the very simple reason that he had just posted to them a hundred one-dollar notes, as a temporary loan until their "ship came in," carefully omitting to mention that his own was due to go out in twenty-four hours, and giving no address for purposes of repayment.

But for all that, the incident had definitely altered his course for him, or at any rate was destined to send him round by an alternative route.

CHAPTER VII

[pg 11

THE ALTERNATIVE ROUTE

HER most ardent admirers—and they had never been very numerous—could hardly have described the Orinoco as a rapid or up-to-date vessel. She could average a fair eight knots in ordinary weather (except when the Chief Engineer was not sober; and then she had been known to do as much as eleven), and she had faced with tolerable credit seven strenuous years of North Atlantic weather, winter and summer alike. But she was no flier.

She had not always ploughed the ocean at the behests of Mr. Noddy Kinahan, her present owner. As a matter of fact, she dated back to the early sixties. She had been built on the Clyde, in days when people were not in such a hurry as they are now, for steady and reliable cross-channel service between Scotland and Ireland; and the crinolined young lady who had blushingly performed the christening ceremony as the brand-new steamer slipped down the ways had named her the Gareloch.

After fifteen years of honest buffeting between the Kish and the Cloch the little Gareloch had been pronounced too slow, and sold to the proprietor of a line of coasting steamers which plied between Cardiff and London. In this capacity, with a different-coloured funnel and a slightly decayed interior, she had served for nine years as the Annie S. Holmes. After that an officious gentleman from the Board of Trade happened to notice the state of her boilers, and unhesitatingly declined to renew her certificate until various things were done which her present owner was not in the habit of doing. Consequently she had lain rusting in Southampton Water for six months, until an astute Scot, who ran a sort of Dr. Barnardo's home for steamers which had been abandoned by their original owners, stepped in and bought her, at the rate of about a pound per ton; and having refitted her with some convenient boilers which he had picked up at a sale, and checked her fuel-consumption by reducing her grate-area, set her going again in a humble but remunerative way as a pig-boat between Limerick and Glasgow. During this period of her career she was known as the Blush Rose—and probably smelt as sweet.

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The maritime Dr. Barnardo sold her three years later (at a profit) to a gentleman who required a ship for some shady and mysterious operations amid certain islands in the Southern Pacific. The nature of the poor Blush Rose's occupation may be gathered from the fact that in the space of three months she made those already tropical regions too hot to hold her; and, with her name painted out, a repaired shot-hole in her counter, and a few pearl oyster-shells sticking out here and there in the murky recesses of her hold, was knocked down for a song at Buenos Ayres to a Spanish-American who desired her for the fulfilment of some rather private contracts, into which he had entered with a Central American State, for a consignment of small arms and ammunition delivered immediately—terms, C. O. D. and no questions asked. Her captain on this occasion was a Lowland Scot of disreputable character but inherent piety, who endeavoured to confer a rather spurious sanctity upon a nefarious enterprise by christening his nameless vessel the Jedburgh Abbey. But, alas! the Jedburgh Abbey was confiscated a year later by the United States government, and having disgorged a most uncanonical cargo, was knocked down by Dutch auction, without benefit of clergy, to the highest bidder. Competition for her possession was not keen, and she ultimately became the property of Mr. Noddy Kinahan, who at that time was beginning to pile up a considerable fortune by purchasing old steamers on their way to the scrap-heap and running them as tramp-freighters until they sank. The Jedburgh Abbey, with a new propeller,—she had gone short of a blade for years,—her rusty carcase tinkered into something like sea-worthiness, and her engines secured a little more firmly to their bed-plates, had re-established her social status by creeping once more into Lloyd's list—the Red Book of the Mercantile Marine—and, disguised as the Orinoco, of the "River" Line of freight-carrying steamships, had served Mr. Noddy Kinahan well for seven years. This grey morning, with Sandy Hook well down below the western horizon, she clambered wearily but perseveringly over the Atlantic rollers, like a disillusioned and world-weary old cab-horse which, having begun life between the shafts of a gentleman's brougham, is now concluding a depressing existence by dragging a funereal "growler" up and down the undulations of a London suburb.

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Her redeeming feature was a certain purity of outline and symmetry of form. She boasted a flush deck, unbroken by any unsightly waist amid-ships; and not even her unscraped masts, her scarred sides, and her flaked and salt-whitened funnel could altogether take away from her her pride of race,—the right to boast, in common with many a human derelict of the same sex and a very similar history, that she had "been a lady once."

She had now been at sea for well over twenty-four hours, and her crew, who had to a man been brought on board in what a sympathetic eyewitness on a similar occasion once described as "a state of beastly but enviable intoxication," were once more beginning to sit up and take notice. Their efforts in this direction owed much to the kind assistance of Messrs. Gates and Dingle, the

[pg 11

first and second mates, who with cold douche and unrelenting boot were sparing no pains to rouse to a sense of duty those of their flock who had not yet found or recovered their sea-legs.

The crew consisted of two Englishmen and a Californian, together with a handful of Scandinavians, Portuguese, and Germans, divided by sea-law (which, like its big brother, *non curat de minimis*) into "Dagoes" and "Dutchmen" respectively, representatives of the Romance races being grouped under the former and of the Anglo-Saxon under the latter designations. With one exception none of them had sailed on the ship before, and in all probability would never do so again. They had been purveyed to Captain Kingdom by a Tenderloin boarding-house keeper, and had signed a contract for the voyage to Bordeaux and back, wages for both trips to be paid at the end of the second. If sufficiently knocked about, they would in all probability desert at Bordeaux, preferring to forego their pay rather than stand a second dose of the home comforts of the [pg 11
Orinoco. This was one of the ways in which Captain Kingdom saved his employer money and in which Mr. Noddy Kinahan made the "River" Line a profitable concern. There were also others, which shall be set forth in due course.

Captain Kingdom had just appeared on the bridge. He was a furtive and sinister-looking individual, resembling rather a pawnbroker's assistant than one who occupied his business in great waters. But he was a useful servant to Noddy Kinahan.

"Got all the hands to work, Mr. Gates?" he called down to the mate.

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied Mr. Gates, knocking the heel of his boot on the deck to ease his aching toes.

The captain ran his eye over the crew, who were huddling together forward of the bridge. He cleared his throat.

"Now, you scum," he began genially, "attend to me, while I tell you what you've got to do on board this ship."

The scum, stagnant and unresponsive, listened stolidly to his harangue, the substance of which did not differ materially, *mutatis mutandis*, from one of Mr. Squeers's inaugural addresses to his pupils on the first morning of term at Dotheboys Hall. Captain Kingdom's peroration laid particular [pg 11
stress upon the fact that Messrs. Gates and Dingle had been requested by him as a particular favour to adopt the policy of the thick stick and the big boot in the case of those members of the crew who refrained from looking slick in executing their orders.

The crew received his remarks with sheepish grins or sullen scowls; and the orator concluded:

"Pick watches, Mr. Gates, and then we'll pipe down to dinner. Are all hands on deck?"

"Aye, aye, sir," replied Mr. Gates, looking over his list.

"I saw *somebody* down below a few minutes ago," drawled a voice, proceeding from a figure seated upon a bollard.

It was Mr. Allerton, who, with characteristic contentment with (or indifference to) his lot, had performed the unprecedented feat of signing on for a second voyage in the Orinoco. He wore his usual air of humorous tolerance of the cares of this world, and spoke in the composed and unruffled fashion which stamps the high-caste Englishman all over the globe. His lot on board the Orinoco had been lighter than that of most, for his companions, finding him apparently impervious to ill-usage and philosophically genial under all circumstances, had agreed to regard him as a species of heavily decayed and slightly demented "dude," and had half-affectionately christened [pg 11
him "Percy,"—a term which sums up the typical Englishman for the New Yorker almost as vividly as "Rosbif" and "Godam" perform that office for the Parisian.

The captain descended from the bridge, walked across the deck, and dispassionately kicked Mr. Allerton off the bollard.

"Stand up, you swine, when you speak to me!" he shouted. "Where did you see anybody?"

Mr. Allerton rose slowly and painfully from the scuppers. There are moments when the *rôle* of a Democritus is difficult to sustain.

"I'm sorry you did that, captain," he remarked, "because I know you didn't mean it personally. You had to make some sort of demonstration, of course, to put the fear of death into these new hands, but I regret that you should have singled me out as the *corpus vile*,—you don't know what that means, I daresay: never mind!—because you have shaken up my wits so much, besides nearly breaking my hip-bone, that I shall have to pause and consider a minute before I remember where I *did* see the gentleman."

If the captain had been Mr. Gates he would probably have felled Allerton to the deck a second time. As it was, he shuffled his feet uncomfortably and glared. The broken man before him, when all was said and done, was his superior; and the captain, who was of sufficiently refined clay to be [pg 12
sensitive to social distinctions, was angrily conscious of that sense of sheepish uneasiness which obsesses the cad, however exalted, in the presence of a gentleman, however degraded.

Allerton continued:—

"I remember now, captain. The man was lying in the alley-way leading to the companion. I'll go and see how he is getting on. Keep your seats, gentlemen."

He dived down the fore-hatchway, just in time to escape the itching boot of the unimpressionable Mr. Gates, and proceeded between decks toward the stern. Presently he came to the alley-way in question. The man was still there, but had slightly shifted his position since Allerton had last seen him. He was now reclining across the passage, with his head sunk on his chest. His feet were bare, and he was attired in a blue jumper and a pair of trousers which had once belonged to a suit of orange-and-red pyjamas. His appearance was not impressive.

Allerton stirred him gently with his foot.

"Wake up, old man," he remarked, "or there'll be hell—Well, I'm damned!"

For the man had drowsily lifted his heavy head and displayed the features of Hughie Marrable.

They gazed at each other for a full minute. Then Allerton said feebly:—

"You've preferred the Orinoco to the Apulia after all, then?" [pg 12

Hughie did not reply. He was running his tongue round his cracked and blackened lips, and tentatively sucking his palate.

"I know that taste," he remarked. "It reminds me of a night I once spent in Canton. I have it—opium!"

Then he tenderly fingered the back of his head, and nodded with the interested air of one who is acquiring a new item of experience.

"I've been filled up with opium before," he said, "but this is the first time I've been sand-bagged. I suppose I was sand-bagged first and hocussed afterwards. Yes, that's it."

He looked almost pleased. He was a man who liked to get to the bottom of things. Presently he continued:—

"Could you get me a drink of water? I've got a tongue like a stick of glue."

Allerton departed as bidden, presently to return with a pannikin. Hughie was standing up in the alley-way, swaying unsteadily and regarding his attire.

"I say," he said, after gulping the water, "would you mind telling me—you see, I'm a little bit wuzzy in the head at present—where the devil I am, and whether I came on board in this kit or my own clothes?"

"Steamship Orinoco," replied Allerton precisely, "out of New York, for Bordeaux." [pg 12

"Let me think," said Hughie,—"Orinoco? Ah! now I'm beginning to see daylight. What's the name of the owner, our friend from Coney Island?"

Allerton told him. "But he's more than your friend now," he added; "he's your employer."

Hughie whistled long and low.

"I see," he said. "Shanghaied—eh? Well, I must say he owed me one: I fairly barked his nose for him that night. But now that he has had me knocked on the head and shipped on board this old ark, I think he has overpaid me. I owe him one again; and, with any luck, he shall have it."

"Do you remember being slugged?" said Allerton.

"Can't say I do precisely. Let me see. I recollect coming along Forty-second Street on my way to the Manhattan. I'd been dining at the Lambs, and I stopped a minute on the sidewalk under an L

railway-track to light my pipe, when—yes, it must have happened then."

"I expect you had been shadowed all day," said Allerton. "But I'm forgetting my duties. You are wanted on deck."

"Who wants me? Noddy Kinahan?"

"Not much! He doesn't travel by his own ships. It's the captain. I understand that you are to be presented to the company as a little stowaway, and great surprise and pain will be officially manifested at your appearance on board." [pg 12

"All right. Come along and introduce me."

Captain Kingdom's method of dealing with stowaways—natural and artificial—was simple and unvarying. On presentation, he first of all abused them with all the resources of an almost Esperantic vocabulary, and then handed them over to Mr. Gates to be kicked into shape.

On Hughie Marrable's appearance on deck, the captain proceeded with gusto to Part One of his syllabus. Hard words break no bones, and Hughie, who was breathing in great draughts of sea-air and feeling less dizzy and more collected each minute, set no particular store by the oratorical display to which he was being treated. In fact, he was almost guilty of the discourtesy of allowing his attention to wander. He set the crown upon his offence by interrupting the captain's peroration.

"Look here, skipper," he said, brusquely breaking in upon a period, "you can drop that. My name is Marrable. I am not a stowaway, and I have been dumped on board this ship by order of—"

"Your name," said Captain Kingdom with relish, "is anything I choose to call you; and as you stowed yourself away on board—"

"Look here," said Hughie, "I want a word with you—in your own cabin for choice. All right," he continued with rising voice, as the captain broke out again, "I'll have it here instead. First of all, what is Mr. Noddy Kinahan paying you for this job?" [pg 12

The captain turned to the mate.

"Sock him, Mr. Gates!" he roared.

Mr. Gates, whose curiosity—together with that of the rest of the crew—had been roused, as Hughie meant it to be, by the latter's reference to Mr. Noddy Kinahan's share in the present situation, moved forward to his task with less alacrity than usual, and paused readily enough when Hughie continued:—

"If you'll put back, captain, and land me anywhere within a hundred miles of New York, I'll give you double what Kinahan is paying you for this job."

"You *look* like a man with money, I must say!" replied Kingdom. "Now then, Mr. Gates!"

"It's to be no deal, then?" said Hughie composedly. "Very well. The next question is, if I am coming with you, how am I going to be treated? Cabin or steer—"

"I'll show you," roared the incensed skipper. "Knock him silly, Mr. Gates!"

Mr. Gates came on with a rush. But Hughie, who all this time had been taking his bearings, leapt back lightly in his bare feet and snatched a capstan-bar from the rack behind him. [pg 12

"Keep your distance for a moment, Mr. Gates," he commanded, "if you don't want your head cracked. I haven't finished interviewing this captain of yours yet. Happy to oblige *you* later, for any period you care to specify."

"'Nother Percy!" commented Mr. Dingle dejectedly, expectorating over the side. He was a plain man, was Mr. Dingle, and loved straight hitting and words of one syllable.

Mr. Gates paused, and Hughie, leaning back against the bulwarks and toying with the capstan-bar, continued to address the fulminating mariner on the bridge.

"Now, captain, I'm going to be brief with you—brief and business-like. You've been paid by Kinahan to shanghai me and take me for a long sea-voyage. Very good. I'm not kicking. I wanted to get to Europe anyhow, and I rather like long sea-voyages, especially before the mast. In fact, I'd rather sail before the mast on board this ship than in the cuddy. (Keep still, Mr. Gates!) As I'm

here, I've no particular objection to working my passage, always reserving to myself the right to make things hot for your employer when I get ashore. I'll work as an A.B. or deck-hand if you like, though personally I would rather do something in the engine-room. I'm pretty well qualified in that direction. But I must be decently treated, and there must be no more sand-bagging or knockabout variety business. Is it a deal?" [pg 12

Captain Kingdom surveyed the sinewy stowaway before him thoughtfully. He saw that until Hughie gave up the capstan-bar Mr. Gates would have little chance of enforcing discipline. He must temporise.

"I can give you a job in the engine-room," he said, in what he imagined was a more conciliatory tone. "Second engineer's down with something this morning. You can take his watch. Drop that capstan-bar of yours, and go and see Mr. Angus, the chief."

"That should suit me," replied Hughie. "But as a guarantee of good faith, and to avoid disappointing the assembled company, I'm quite willing to stand up and have a turn with Mr. Gates here, or that gentleman over by the funnel-stay, or any one else you may appoint. But I should *prefer* Mr. Gates," he added, almost affectionately. "I'm not in first-class form at present, as my head has got a dint in it behind; but I'll do my best. Are you game, Mr. Gates?"

"Go on, Mr. Gates, learn him!" commanded the highly gratified skipper.

"Drop that bar," shouted the genial Mr. Gates, "and I'll kill you!"

"Half a minute, please," said Hughie, as unruffled as if he were putting on the gloves for a ten-minute spar in a gymnasium. "I'm not going to fight a man in sea-boots in my bare feet. Can any gentleman oblige me with—Thank you, sir! You are a white man." [pg 12

A pair of oily canvas tennis shoes, with list soles, pattered down on the deck beside him. Their donor, the "white man,"—a coal-black individual attired chiefly in cotton-waste,—was smiling affably from the engine-room hatchway.

"They'll dae ye fine," he observed unexpectedly, and disappeared below.

In a moment Hughie had slipped on the shoes. Then, casting away the bar, he hurled himself straight at the head of Mr. Gates.

In the brief but exhilarating exhibition which followed Mr. Gates realised that a first mate on the defensive is a very different being from a first mate on the rampage. He had become so accustomed to breaking in unresisting dock-rats and bemused foreigners, taking his own time and using his boots where necessary, that a high-pressure combat with a man who seemed to be everywhere except at the end of his fist—to his honour he never once thought of employing his foot—was an entire novelty to him. He fought sullenly but ponderously, wasting his enormous strength on murderous blows which never reached their mark, and stolidly enduring a storm of smacks, bangs, and punches that would have knocked a man of less enduring material into a pulp. But there is one blow which no member of the human family can stand up to, glutton for punishment though he be. Hughie made a sudden feint with his left at his opponent's body, just below the heart. Gates dropped his guard, momentarily throwing forward his head as he did so. Instantaneously a terrific upper-cut from Hughie's right took him squarely under the chin. Mr. Gates described a graceful parabola, and landed heavily on his back on deck, striking his head against a ring-bolt as he fell. The whole fight had lasted less than four minutes. [pg 12

Hughie was about to assist his fallen opponent to rise, when he heard a warning cry from half-a-dozen voices. He swung round, to find the captain making for him, open-mouthed, with the capstan-bar. He sprang lightly aside—a further blessing on those list shoes!—and his opponent charged past him, bringing down the bar with a flail-like sweep upon the drum of a steam windlass. Next moment Hughie, grasping the foremast shrouds, leaped on the bulwarks and pulled himself up to the level of the bridge, which was unoccupied save by the man at the wheel, who had been an enthusiastic spectator of the scene below.

Having climbed upon the bridge, and so secured the upper ground in case of any further attack, Hughie leaned over the rails and parleyed. In his hand he held a pair of heavy binoculars, which he had taken out of a box clamped to the back of the wind-screen. [pg 12

"The first man who attempts to follow me up here," he announced, when he had got his breath back, "will get this pair of glasses in the eye. Captain, I don't think you are a great success as an employer of labour. You haven't got the knack of conciliating your men. Can't we come to terms? Mine are very simple. I want some clothes—my own, for choice. If you haven't got them, anything quiet and unobtrusive will do. But I decline to go about in orange-and-red pyjama trousers in mid-Atlantic to please you or anybody else. For one thing they're not warm, and for another they're not usual. If you will oblige me in this matter, I am quite willing to live at peace with you. I don't see that you can really suppress me except by killing me, and that is a thing which I don't think you

have either the authority or the pluck to do. Why not give me a billet in the engine-room and cry quits?"

Captain Kingdom looked up at the obstreperous mutineer on the bridge, and down at the recumbent Mr. Gates on the deck, and ground his teeth. Then he looked up to the bridge again.

"All right," he growled. "Come down!"

CHAPTER VIII

[pg 13

A BENEFIT PERFORMANCE

HUGHIE, having been relieved to a slight extent from sartorial humiliation, entered upon his engine-room duties forthwith.

The society in which he found himself consisted of Mr. Angus, the chief,—engineers, like gardeners, editors, and Cabinet Ministers, are practically all Scotsmen,—Mr. Goble, the acting-second (*vice* Mr. Walsh, sick), and a motley gang of undersized, half-mutinous, wholly vile sweepings of humanity in the form of firemen. Mr. Walsh was suffering from an intermittent form of malaria contracted years ago in an up-river trip to the pestilential regions round Saigon. Mr. Angus, a hoary-headed and bottle-nosed Dundonian, who could have charmed a scrap-heap into activity, received Hughie with native politeness, and paid him the compliment of working him uncommonly hard. He explained (with perfect truth) that the only reason why he was not at that moment driving a Cunarder was a habit of his, viewed by certain owners with regrettable narrowness of vision, of "takin' a drap, whiles." The concluding adverb Hughie correctly estimated [pg 13
to mean "whenever I can get anything to drink."

"I canna see what for they should be sae partic'lar aboot it," mused Mr. Angus in recounting the circumstance, "for I haundle her jist as weel drunk as sober. However, here I am, and there's an end o't. Aiblins it's jist as weel. I could rin the engines o' ony Cunarder afloat, but I ken fine there's not hauf-a-dozen men in their hale fleet could knock eight knots oot o' the auld Orinoco. There's a kin' o' divinity aboot it, I doot. A man's pit whaur he's maist wantit."

John Alexander Goble, the acting-second, proved to be a man of greater depth and more surprises than his superior. He it was who had thrown the list shoes to Hughie before the battle with Mr. Gates, which showed that he was at heart a Sportsman; he had taken the first opportunity of asking for the return of the same, which showed that he was a Scotsman; but he had found Hughie a better pair of shoes in their stead, together with some garments more suitable than the blue jumper and the orange-and-red pyjama trousers, which showed that he was a good Samaritan: and a man who is a Sportsman and a Scot and a good Samaritan all rolled into one is an addition to the society of any engine-room.

His face wore an expression of chastened gloom; and if washed and set ashore in his native Caledonia, he would probably have received a unanimous invitation to come and glower over the [pg 13
plate in the doorway of the nearest Wee Free conventicle. His speech was slow and unctuous: one could imagine him under happier circumstances conducting family worship, and pausing to elucidate in approved fashion some specially obvious passage in the evening's "portion," thus: "From the expression, 'a michty man o' valour,' we may gather that the subject of this reference was a person of considerable stature and undoubted physical courage."

He was habitually and painfully sober, for reasons which Hughie learned from him at a period when they had more leisure to study each other's characters. He was ignorant of the first principles of mechanics, but could be trusted to keep the Orinoco's propeller-shaft revolving at a steady seventy-two to the minute; and he had a gentle compelling way with refractory firemen which made for sweet reasonableness and general harmony below stairs, what time Mr. Angus was recovering from one of those sudden and regrettable attacks of indisposition which usually coincided with the forgetfulness of the steward to lock up the cabin whisky-bottle.

Hughie berthed in the foc'sle, and was regarded by the Dagoes, Dutchmen, *et hoc genus omne*, with mingled admiration for the manner in which he had settled Mr. Gates, and mystified surprise [pg 13
that a man capable of such a feat should be content to live on his own rations and sleep in his allotted bunk, without desiring to make researches into the respective succulence and comfort of his neighbours'.

On the whole Hughie found his life tolerable enough, as the Orinoco butted and grunted her way across the Newfoundland Banks; and he experienced no pang when the Apulia, spouting smoke from her four funnels and carrying his luggage in one of her state-rooms, swept past them on the rim of the southern horizon on their third day out. He was accustomed to rough quarters, and any new experience of things as they are was of interest to him. Moreover, he possessed the priceless possession of a cast-iron digestion; and a man so blessed can afford to snap his fingers at most of the sundry and manifold changes of this world.

Captain Kingdom and Mr. Gates for the time being held him severely aloof. The taciturn Mr. Dingle conveyed to him, by means of a surprisingly ingenious code of grunts and expectorations, that provided he, Hughie,—or Brown, as he was usually called,—was content to go his way without hunting for trouble, he, Mr. Dingle, was content to go his without endeavouring to supply it. Altogether there seemed to be no reason for doubting that the Orinoco, provided she did not open [pg 13
up and sink like a basket *en route*, would ultimately reach the port of Bordeaux, bringing her sheaves, in the form of Hughie and some unspeakable claret, with her.

But there is more than one way of making money out of the shipping trade.

One night Hughie was leaning over the taffrail behind the wheel-house at the stern. It was two o'clock, and the darkness was intensified by a heavy mist. There was almost no wind, and the Orinoco, like a draught-horse which feels the wheels of its equipage upon a tram-line, slid gratefully up and down the lazy rollers with the nearest approach to comfort that she had experienced that voyage.

Hughie was idly watching the phosphorescent wake of the propeller, wondering whether Captain Kingdom had orders to land him in France in his shirt and trousers or throw him overboard before they got there, when a figure rose up out of the darkness beside him. It was the easy-going Mr. Allerton.

"Hallo, Percy!" said Hughie. He had soon dropped into the nomenclature of the foc'sle.

"Look here," said Allerton, in a more purposeful voice than usual; "come along and look at this boat."

The largest of the three boats carried by the Orinoco lay close by them. She was swung [pg 13
inboard and rested on deck-chocks below the davits. A canvas cover, one end of which fluttered intermittently in the breeze, roofed her over. Allerton lifted this flap and inserted his hand. Presently there was a splutter and a glimmer, and it became plain that he was holding a lighted match under the canvas.

"Look!" he whispered.

Hughie peered under the flap. He saw water-barrels, a spirit-keg, and various bags and boxes. Then the match went out, and Allerton withdrew his hand.

The pair retired once more to their shelter behind the wheel-house.

"You saw that?" said Allerton.

"I did. Do they usually keep the boats provisioned on this ship? If so, I don't blame them."

"Not they. Somebody is going for a water-picnic shortly—that's all."

Hughie mused.

"Am *I* the man, do you think?" he said at length.

"No, I don't think so. There's too much grub for one. Besides the other boats are provisioned too. It looks as if the ship were to be abandoned."

"But why? There's no reason why she should drop to bits for a long time yet. Rust is very [pg 13
binding, you know. Probably they keep her provisioned just in case—"

Allerton wagged his head sagaciously.

"There's more in this than meets the eye," he said. "It is my pleasure and privilege, as you know, to act as steward at present during the regretted retirement of the regular holder of that office, owing to eczema of the hands. (Even Mr. Gates shies at eczema sea-pie!) Now there's some mischief brewing in the cuddy, and they're all in it—Kingdom, Gates, and Angus. I'm not quite sure about Dingle, because he berths forward; but I think he is too. What's more: it's something they

can't afford to have given away. Kingdom, who usually keeps Angus very short of drink at sea, now lets him have it whenever he wants it, and generally speaking is going out of his way to keep him sweet. That shows he can't afford to quarrel with him. And when a captain can't afford to quarrel with a chief engineer whom he hates, it usually means that he and the engineer are in together over some hanky-panky which has its roots in the engine-room. You mark my words, one of these fine nights that hoary-headed old Caledonian will open a sea-cock or two and rush up on deck and say the ship is sinking. It'll be a case of all hands to the boats; the Orinoco will go to her long-overdue and thoroughly deserved rest at the bottom, and the insurance people will pay up and look pleasant." [pg 13

"H'm," said Hughie; "there seems to be something in what you say. I wish I could keep an eye on the old sinner in the engine-room; but since Walsh came back to duty I've no excuse for going there at all now. It might almost be worth while to warn Goble. He's a decent chap."

"Who is on duty in the engine-room now?"

"Walsh, I should think. Angus usually makes way for him about eight bells. But I'm not sure. Hark! Do you notice anything about the beat of the engines?"

"Not being an expert, can't say I do. They sound a trifle more asthmatic than usual, perhaps. What's up?"

"Somebody has got the donkey-pump at work," said Hughie. "It may be Angus, after all, monkeying with the water-ballast. Hallo!" He leaned over the stern-rail and peered down. "Do you notice anything unusual about the propeller?"

"It seems to be kicking up a bit of a dust," said Allerton. "Is it going round faster, or getting nearer the surface?"

"It's half out of the water," said Hughie. "That means that the old man has pumped out the after double-bottom tank. Look, we're all down by the head!"

The two stepped out from behind the wheelhouse and gazed forward. The flush deck of the Orinoco was undoubtedly running downhill towards the bows. [pg 13

"What's the game?" inquired Allerton excitedly.

Hughie was thinking. Presently he said:—

"I'm not sure, but his next move should tell us. Either he is trying to drive her nose under and sink her by manipulating the water-ballast, which seems a hopeless job in a flat calm like this, and suicidal if it comes off; or else he is working up for a scare of some kind, which will frighten the crew into—Hallo? what's that?"

There was a warning cry from Mr. Dingle, who was standing right forward in the bows.

"Something right ahead, sir! Looks like—"

There was an answering shout from the bridge, where the captain was standing by the wheel, followed by a jangling of telegraph-bells. Next moment the Orinoco gave a jar and a stagger, and Hughie and Allerton pitched forward on to their noses.

There were shouts and cries all over the ship, and men came tumbling up the hatchways.

"We've struck something," gasped Allerton.

"Struck your grandmother!" grunted Hughie, who was sitting up rubbing his nose tenderly. "That jar came from directly underneath us. It was caused by Angus reversing his engines without giving the ship time to slow down. I daresay he never even shut off steam. Likely enough he's lifted the engines off their beds. Well, perhaps he had finished with them anyway. Come along forward." [pg 13

By this time a frightened crowd had assembled on the deck of the Orinoco, which, lying motionless on the silent sea, artistically tilted up by the stern,—Hughie began to grasp the inwardness of Mr. Angus's manœuvres with the water-ballast,—presented a sufficiently alarming appearance even on that calm night.

Mr. Dingle and the captain, the one hanging over the bows and the other standing in an attitude of alertness on the bridge, were sustaining between them a conversation which vaguely suggested to Hughie a carefully rehearsed "cross-talk" duologue between two knockabout artistes of the Variety firmament—say the Brothers Bimbo in one of their renowned impromptu "patter

scenes." The resemblance was enhanced by the fact that the "patter" was delivered *fortissimo* by both performers, and each repeated the other's most telling phrases in tones which made it impossible for the audience to avoid hearing them.

"What was it?" shouted Bimbo Senior (as represented by Captain Kingdom).

"Lump of wreckage!" roared Bimbo Junior, from a prolonged scrutiny of the ship's forefoot. [pg 14

"Lump of wreckage?" bellowed Bimbo Senior.

"Lump of wreckage!" corroborated Bimbo Junior.

"Of course it *might* have been ice," suggested Number One, at the top of his voice.

"Might have been ice," replied the conscientious echo.

"Pairsonally I'm inclined tae believe it was jist a wee bit coral island," interpolated a third voice, with painful and stunning distinctness. The Chief Engineer had suddenly made his appearance on the bridge.

The captain was obviously much put out. In the first place, coral islands are not plentiful in the North Atlantic, and there are limits even to the gullibility of an audience composed of foreign deck-hands and half-civilised firemen. Secondly, the axiom that two is company and three none applies even to cross-talk duologues. Thirdly, Mr. Angus was excessively drunk, and consequently the laboriously planned comedietta at present in progress might, owing to his inartistic and uncalled-for intrusion upon the scene, take a totally unrehearsed turn at any moment.

The captain lost no time.

"What report have you from the engine-room, Mr. Angus?" he inquired loudly and pointedly.

Mr. Angus, suddenly recognising his cue, and realising almost with tears that he had been imperilling the success of the entire piece by unseemly "gagging," pulled himself together, returned to his text, and announced that the ship was badly down by the head and the stokehold awash. [pg 14

"There's nothing else for it," yelled the captain resignedly, "but to leave her. Clear away the boats, Mr. Gates!"

Having thus established a good working explanation of the disaster, and incidentally enlisted the entire audience—those members of it, that is, who were not already doing service in the *claque*—as unbiassed witnesses for the defence in case the insurance company turned nasty, the intrepid commander descended from the bridge to his cabin, to collect a few necessaries pending the abandonment of his beloved vessel.

Hughie and Allerton surveyed each other.

"Which boat are you going in?" inquired Allerton.

"None," said Hughie.

"Going to stay on board?"

Hughie nodded.

"But she'll sink under our feet."

"I don't believe she's as badly damaged as all that. There's some game on here."

"I don't suppose she's damaged at all," said Allerton, "but you can be sure they won't be such blamed fools as to leave the ship floating about to be picked up. Old Angus will let water into her before he leaves, if he hasn't started the process already." [pg 14

"Well, I'm not going in any of those boats," said Hughie. "If the Orinoco sinks, I'll float to Europe on a hen-coop."

"May I have half of it?" said Allerton.

"You may," said Hughie.

And so the S. S. Orinoco Salvage Company, Limited, was floated, and the Board of Directors entered upon their new duties at once.

By this time the boats had been swung outboard and their provisioning completed. They were now lowered from the davits, and the men began to take their places. There was no panic, for the night was calm, and the Orinoco showed no signs of settling deeper. Messrs. Gates and Dingle were already at their respective tillers. Captain Kingdom and Mr. Angus were standing by the davits to which the whale-boat was still shackled. Mr. Goble, apparently in no hurry, was leaning over the bulwarks in the darkness not far from Hughie and Allerton, dispassionately regarding the crew's preparations for departure. He approached nearer.

"There's a wheen fowk in thae boats," he observed. "I doot we'd be safer on board."

Hughie turned to him and nodded comprehendingly. [pg 14

"That's my opinion too," he said, "and Percy's. We're thinking of staying here."

Mr. Goble regarded him reflectively.

"Is that a fact?" he said. "Weel, I'll bide too."

And so a third member was co-opted on to the Board of Directors.

"We'd better get out of sight," said Hughie. "They won't like leaving us behind. I think I know a good place to wait. Come along."

The trio slipped round behind the chart-house, passed along a deserted stretch of the deck, and disappeared down the engine-room hatchway.

The engine-room was illuminated by a couple of swinging lanterns. A black and greasy flood of water glistened on the iron floor below, filling the crank-pits and covering the propeller-shaft. The doors leading to the stokehold were standing open, and they could see that the floors there too were flooded, though the water had not reached the level of the fire-bars. Owing to the immobility of the ship, its oily surface was almost unruffled, and the engine-room itself was curiously quiet after the turmoil on deck. The fires were burning low, but occasionally a glowing clinker slipped from between the bars into the blood-red flood beneath, with a sizzling splash. The steam was hissing discontentedly in the gauges.

The Salvage Board stood knee-deep in the water of the engine-room. [pg 14

Hughie picked up a smoky inspection-lamp,—a teapot-like affair with a wick in the spout,—lit it, and peered about.

"Now look here," he said, "I don't quite know where this water came from, and it doesn't much matter, as no more is coming in at present. If the old man means to sink the ship he will have to come down here to do it. He has probably got some dodge arranged by which he can just turn a wheel and open a valve and send her to the bottom. Isn't that the idea, Goble? (I'll explain to you afterwards, Allerton.) My impression is that he'll pop down and turn the valve on just before he leaves. In that case one of us must stand by and turn it off again. You two go through into the stokehold. He's not likely to come in there. If he does, you must use your own discretion. I'll wait here, on the far side of the cylinders, up against the condenser. He's not likely to see me, but I shall be able to watch him and see which valve-wheel he turns on."

The other two obeyed, and Hughie, scrambling across the bed-plates of the engines, ensconced himself behind a convenient cross-head, with his feet in a flooded crank-pit and his body squeezed back as far as possible into the shadow of the condenser.

He had not long to wait. Presently cautious feet were heard descending the iron ladder, and Mr. Angus, comparatively sober, stepped heavily into the flood on the floor. [pg 14

His first proceeding was to wade to the stokehold end of the engine-room,—Hughie thought at first that he was going right through into the arms of Allerton and Goble, and wondered what they would do with him,—where he began to manipulate the great valve-wheel which kept the steam imprisoned in the boilers; and presently Hughie could hear the roar of the escape far above his head. This was a purely precautionary measure, and could do no harm to any one.

Then Mr. Angus splashed his way to the corner by the donkey-pump, where the machinery for controlling the bilge and water-ballast valves was situated, and began to twist over another wheel. Presently there was a gurgling bubbling sound in the bowels of the ship, followed by a slight hissing and whispering on the surface of the water on the engine-room floor. The valve was open.

Mr. Angus turned and lurched heavily through the rising flood to the iron ladder. Thirty seconds later a glistening figure crawled out of the crank-pit and vigorously turned the wheel in the opposite direction. The gurgling and hissing ceased. The valve was closed.

CHAPTER IX

[pg 14

LITERA SCRIPTA MANET

"Mr. Marrable, did ever ye see a drookit craw?"

"No."

"Well, see me!" announced Mr. Goble complacently.

He crawled out of the engine-room companionway and sat down on the deck. Excessive spruceness had never been a foible of his, but now he was an unrecognisable mass of coal-dust, oil, and rust. He was dripping wet, for he had spent the last hour in an exhaustive examination of the Orinoco's waterlogged internal economy. The morning sun was warm, and he steamed comfortably as he detailed the result of his investigations to Hughie, who in some imperceptible but inevitable manner had taken command of the tiny ship's company.

Shorn of technicalities and irrelevant excursions into the regions of pawky philosophy, Mr. Goble's report came to this.

Mr. Angus had pumped out the after ballast-tank during the night, allowing the water, by means of a specially rigged return-pipe, to flow into the bilges of the ship instead of escaping overboard. By this device he had altered the Orinoco's centre of gravity in such a manner as to produce the afore-mentioned down-hill slant of her decks—a corroborative detail, as Pooh-Bah would have observed, which gave a little much-needed artistic verisimilitude to the Bimbo Brothers' bald and unconvincing narrative of disaster. Incidentally he had flooded the forehold and engine-room with sufficient water to give those members of the ship's company who were not in their employer's confidence the impression that she was sinking, and to furnish those who were with a *prima facie* argument for deserting her.

[pg 14

But these thoughtful precautions, though sufficient to procure the abandonment of the Orinoco, were by no means sufficient to send her to the bottom, a consummation to be achieved at any cost; for to leave your ship lying about in mid-ocean, to be picked up by the first chance-comer, while you go hurrying home to extract a cheque from the insurance company, savours of slipshod business methods; and Mr. Noddy Kinahan was nothing if not thorough.

Now every steamer which plies under Lloyds' ægis is fitted, below the water-line, with a set of what are called bilge-valves. Through these it is possible to expel any water which may have found its way into the body of the vessel. As it is even more desirable to prevent the entrance of water into your ship than to assist its exit, these valves are of a strictly "non-return" variety, and no amount of pressure from the outside should ever prevail upon them to play the part of Facing-Both-Ways. The very life of the ship depends upon them; and the enterprising individual who tampers with their mechanism in such a manner as to convert what is meant to be an Emergency Exit into a sort of Early Door for the rolling deep, does so at the risk of coming into immediate and painful collision with the criminal laws of his country.

[pg 14

Mr. Angus, it appeared, had been employing some of his spare time during the voyage in reversing one of these bilge-valves, with such skill and *finesse* that, as we have seen, one had only to give a turn to a worm-and-wheel gear in the engine-room to admit the Atlantic Ocean in large quantities.

"Oh, he has a heid on him, has Angus!" commented Mr. Goble with professional appreciation, "even when he's fou'. He made a rare job o't. But how he managed to contrive that imitation o' a collision, merely through some jookery-packery wi' the reverse-gear and throttle, wi'oot tearin' the guts oot o' her, I div not ken. Man, it was a fair conjurin' trick! By rights the link motion should be twisted intil a watch-chain and the cross-heids jammit in the guides. But they're no. It's jist Providence, I doot," he added rather apologetically, with the air of one who should have thought of this sooner.

[pg 14

Then he uprose from his seat on an inverted bucket.

"Before I gang ben, sir," he concluded, "tae change ma feet and ma breeks, I'll tak' the liberty tae inquire of you what you propose tae dae next. Maircy me! Yon's Walsh."

Two figures had appeared round the corner of the chart-house, their presence on the far side thereof having been advertised for some time by the clanking of the deck-pumps. (Mr. Angus's precaution of blowing off steam before leaving had put mechanical assistance in getting rid of the water out of the question for the time being.)

"Yes, it's me," said Walsh, who, it will be remembered, was the second engineer, to whom Hughie had recently been acting as deputy. "I should have come on duty at eight bells to relieve Angus, but I slept right through everything till Mr. Marrable found me in my bunk an hour or two ago. I expect they put something in my grog last night."

"It's quite a hobby of theirs," said Allerton drily. "Mr. Marrable, I have found something that may be useful to us."

He handed his superior officer a damp but undamaged little packet of papers. [pg 15

"Where did you find them?" asked Hughie. "I thought I had gone through Kingdom's kit pretty thoroughly."

"They were sticking in the falls of the davits belonging to the boat Kingdom went off in," replied Allerton. "I saw him hurrying along the deck from his cabin just before his departure, carrying the log-book and some papers and instruments. I expect he dropped these as he went over the side."

"Sit down, everybody," said the commander, "we'll see this through. It may concern us all."

The packet contained two letters, together with some invoices and bills of lading referring chiefly to the Orinoco's cargo of astringent claret.

Hughie glanced through the letters. Then he re-read them with some deliberation. Then he whistled low and expressively. Then he sat up and sighed, gently and contentedly.

"Mr. Noddy Kinahan," he said, "is shortly going to wish, with all his benevolent and philanthropic little heart, that he had never been born. And we are the people that are going to make him wish. Listen!"

He read the two letters aloud. They were brief, but explicit. One contained Kinahan's orders to Kingdom as to the disposal of the Orinoco. The other was a sort of invoice, or consignment note, [pg 15 relating to the person of one Marrable, who had apparently been shipped on board the night before the ship sailed. Each of these documents, it may be added, contained sufficient matter to ensure penal servitude for their author.

Hughie stopped reading, and there was a long and appreciative silence. Then Allerton said:—

"What beats me is to understand how Kinahan could have been such a mug as to commit these schemes to paper, and how Kingdom should have been such a fool as to want to keep them. *I'd* have let them go down in the Orinoco."

"I expect one explanation covers both cases," said Hughie. "Kingdom probably demanded his orders in black and white, as a guarantee that he would get his money when he had done his job. Otherwise he had no claim on Kinahan for a penny, beyond his ordinary wage as skipper. Kinahan probably agreed, stipulating that the letters should be handed back to him when they squared accounts. It was a risky thing to do, but when two thieves can't trust each other, and go dropping about documentary evidence to that effect—well, that's where poor but deserving people like ourselves come in. No, I shouldn't think Kingdom *would* want to leave these behind; and I opine that he's a pretty sick man by this time if he has missed them."

He folded the letters up, and put them away carefully. [pg 15

"Now, gentlemen," he said briskly, "I propose that we go below and see if there is sufficient steam on the Orinoco to pump the rest of the water out of her and get the propeller revolving again. We'll have to damp down most of the fires, because we can't run too many firemen, but I think we ought to knock four or five knots out of her in ordinary weather. Luckily, seventy-five *per cent* of the ship's company are competent engineers. After that we'll have some breakfast, and after that we'll make tracks for home. We'll work"—he smacked his lips cheerily, like an energetic pedagogue on the first morning of term—"in shifts of three. Two men will run the engine-room and stokehold, and the third will take the wheel. The fourth can sleep. That will give us each eighteen hours on and six hours off. I don't know where we are, and I have no means of finding out, as Captain Kingdom has walked off with the chart and most of the proper instruments. But we must

be near land, or they would not have taken to the boats yet. If we keep steaming steadily east (with a little north in it), at about a hundred miles a day,—which I fancy is about our limit,—we should knock up against something sooner or later. And when we do, we'll get hold of the proper authorities, and I venture to think that with the help of these two letters and that doctored bilge- [pg 15
valve down below we shall be able to prepare a welcome for those three boat-loads of shipwrecked mariners, when they arrive, that will surprise them. Also, I fancy there will be pickings for you in the way of salvage. What a game!" Hughie stood up, and inhaled a great breath. This was real life! "Are you *on*, boys?" he cried suddenly. "Is the old Orinoco going to the bottom this journey?"

The crew rose at him and gave three cheers.

Later that afternoon, as the Orinoco pounded along at a strictly processional pace through the ruffling waters,—the glass was falling and a breeze getting up,—Deputy-Quartermaster Lionel Hinchcliffe Welford-Welford Allerton, late scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge, sometime Assistant Deck-Hand in the mercantile marine, descried from his post on the bridge a small moving object upon the starboard bow.

It was the Orinoco's whale-boat, which was proceeding under two lugsails on a course parallel with the steamer's.

Allerton, who in the excitement of salving the Orinoco had almost forgotten the existence of the gang of buccaneers who had scuttled her, excitedly rang the telegraph bell and summoned the rest of the ship's company to his side.

The emotions, however, aroused in the Orinoco by the sight of the whale-boat were mild in [pg 15
comparison with those excited in the undutiful whale-boat by the spectacle of her resuscitated parent. Mr. Angus, on beholding the steamer, kept discreetly silent. He had given himself away by seeing things which were not there once or twice in his life before. But Captain Kingdom turned a delicate apple-green.

"Look there!" he gasped, pointing.

"Yon bit cloud, ye mean?" said the cautious Angus.

"No, no, man—the Orinoco!" cried the frantic skipper.

"Oh—the shup! Aye, aye!" replied Mr. Angus, rather pleased than otherwise.

"There's a crew on board her," continued Kingdom shakily. "And she's got steam on her, too!"

"Aye," said Mr. Angus. "I doot somebody will have closed yon sea-cock again."

"Who can it be?" demanded the captain feverishly. "Surely we left no one on board. I told Dingle to take that fellow Marrable in his boat."

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Angus, "yin of the other boats cam' back."

Kingdom pointed impatiently to two small specks upon the horizon.

"They're there," he said.

"Maybe some liner has come across her and left a bit crew on board her," continued the fertile [pg 15
Mr. Angus.

"If so, we'd have seen the liner," replied Kingdom irritably.

He took up his binoculars and began to scrutinise the Orinoco, which had altered her course a few points in their direction.

Mr. Angus had a fresh inspiration.

"Did ye mind tae wauken Walsh?" he whispered. "If not, ye ken he micht weel—"

The captain lowered his glasses, and nodded.

"He might be one," he agreed; "but there are four men on deck." He raised his binoculars again. "Yes, there they are. Well, whoever they are and whatever the game is, we must get on board again and do the job properly this time.—Hallo, one of them is running below!—Here he is again!—He's carrying something—flags, I reckon. They're going to signal us."

He was right. Up to the topmost summit of the Orinoco's grimy foremast travelled a signal—a banner with a strange device indeed, but conveying a perfectly intelligible message for all that. It consisted of the nether or unmentionable portion of a ragged suit of orange-and-red striped pyjamas.

Having reached its destination, it inflated itself in the freshening breeze and streamed out, defiant and derisive, in the rays of the setting sun; flinging to the fermenting couple in the whale-boat the simple but comprehensive intimation—"Sold!" [pg 15

Then, with one single joyous toot from her siren, the Orinoco altered her course a couple of points and wallowed off in a north-easterly direction, leaving the crew of the whale-boat to listen in admiring silence to a sulphurous antistrophe in two dialects proceeding from the stern-sheets.

CHAPTER X [pg 15

THE END OF AN ODYSSEY

HUGHIE reckoned that they might have to steam eastward for quite three or four days before they sighted land.

This was an underestimate.

The history of the Orinoco's last voyage will never be written. In the first place, those who took part in it were none of them men who were addicted to the composition of travellers' tales; and in the second, their recollections of the course of events when all was over, were hopelessly and rather mercifully blurred. Not that they minded. One derives no pleasure or profit from reconstructing a nightmare—especially when it has lasted for sixteen days and nights.

Some events, of course, were focussed more sharply in their memories than others. There was that eternity of thirty-six hours during which the Orinoco, with every vulnerable orifice sealed up or battened down, her asthmatic engines pulsing just vigorously enough to keep her head before the wind, rode out a north-easterly gale which blew her many miles out of her reckoning. ("Not that that matters much," said her philosophic commander. "We don't know where we are now, it's true; but then we didn't know where we were before, so what's the odds? We'll keep on steering away about north-east, and as we are aiming at a target eight hundred miles wide we ought to hit it somewhere.") Then there was a palpitating night when the faithful engines, having wheezily but unceasingly performed their allotted task for a period long enough to lull all who depended upon them into an optimistic frame of mind, broke down utterly and absolutely; and the fires had to be banked and the Orinoco allowed to wallow unrestrainedly in the trough of the sea while the entire ship's company, with cracking muscles and heart-breaking gasps, released a jammed crosshead from the guides and took down a leaky cylinder. [pg 15

They were evidently out of the ordinary sea-lanes, for they sighted only one steamer in ten days, and her they allowed to go by.

"None of us understand proper signalling," said Hughie, "so we can't attract her attention without doing something absurdly theatrical, like running up the ensign upside down; and I'm hanged if we'll do that—yet. After all, we only want to know where we *are*. We may be just off the coast of Ireland for all I can say, and it does seem feeble to bring a liner out of her course to ask her footling questions. It would be like stopping the Flying Scotsman to get a light for one's pipe." [pg 15

"Or asking a policeman in Piccadilly Circus the nearest way to the Criterion bar," added Allerton. "I'm with you all the time, captain."

And so these four mendicants allowed a potential Good Samaritan to pass by and sink behind the horizon. It was an action typical of their race: they had no particular objection to death, but they drew the line at being smiled at. Still, there were moments during the next ten days when they rather regretted their diffidence.

But events like these were mere excrescences in a plane of dead monotony. The day's work was made up of endless hours in a Gehenna-like stokehold, where with aching backs and bleeding hands they laboured to feed the insatiable fires, or crawled along tunnel-like bunkers in search of the gradually receding coal; spells at the wheel—sometimes lashed to it—in biting wind or blinding fog; the whole sustained on a diet of ship's biscuit, salt pork, and lukewarm coffee, tempered by brief but merciful intervals of the slumber of utter exhaustion.

Still, one can get used to anything. They even enjoyed themselves after a fashion. High endeavour counts for something, whether you have a wife and family dependent upon you, like Walsh, or can extract *la joie de vivre* out of an eighteen-hour day and a workhouse diet, like Hughie. [pg 16

And they got to know each other, thoroughly,—a privilege denied to most in these days of restless activity and multifarious acquaintance.

It was a lasting wonder to Hughie how Allerton could ever have fallen to his present estate; for he displayed an amount of energy, endurance, and initiative during this manhood-testing voyage that was amazing. He himself ascribed his virtue to want of opportunity to practise anything else, but this was obviously too modest an explanation. Perhaps blood always tells. At any rate, Allerton took unquestioned rank as second in command over the heads of two men whose technical knowledge and physical strength far exceeded his own. But in his hours of ease—few enough now —he was as easy-going and flippant and casual as ever.

Walsh in a sense was the weakest of the quartet. He was a capable engineer and an honest man, but he lacked the devil-may-care nonchalance of the other three; for he had a wife and eight children waiting for him in distant Limehouse, and a fact like that gives a man a distaste for adventure. He was a disappointed man, too. He had held a chief engineer's "ticket" for seven years, but he had never held a chief engineer's billet. He could never afford to knock off work and wait until the right berth should come his way: he must always take the first that offered, for fear that the tale of boots and bread in Limehouse should diminish. As a crowning stroke of ill-luck, he had been paid off from his last job because his ship had collided with a New York lighter and been compelled to go into dry dock for three months; and by shipping in the Orinoco he was barely doing more than work his passage home. His ten-year-old dream of delivering Mrs. Walsh from her wash-tub for all time, and exalting her from the *res angustæ* of Teak Street, Limehouse, to a social environment reserved exclusively for the wives of chief engineers, seemed as far from fulfilment as ever. Still, he maintained a stiff upper lip and kept his watch like a man, which is more than most of us would have done under the circumstances. [pg 16

But it was Goble who interested Hughie most. In the long night-watches, as they swung the heavy fire-shovels in the stokehold, or heaved the ever-accumulating clinkers over the side, or took turn and turn about to gulp tepid water out of a sooty bucket, or met over a collation of coffee and ship's biscuit—the supper of one and the breakfast of the other—in the galley, Goble would let fall dry pawky reflections on life in general, with autobiographical illustrations, which enabled Hughie to piece together a fairly comprehensive idea of his companion's previous existence. [pg 16

John Alexander Goble had played many parts in his time, like most vagrants. He had been born a gamekeeper's son in Renfrewshire, and had lost his father early, that devoted upholder of proprietary rights having been shot through the head in a poaching affray. After this catastrophe the widow, who had openly pined for her native Glasgow during the whole of her husband's lifetime, had returned to that municipal paradise; and the ripening youth of John Alexander Goble had been passed in a delectable locality, known as "The Coocaddens," to which he could never refer without a gleam of tender reminiscence in his eyes.

Why John Alexander had ever deserted this Eden Hughie could never rightly ascertain. His references to that particular epoch in his career were invariably obscure; but since he darkly observed on one occasion that "weemen can mak' a gowk o' the best man leevin'," Hughie gathered that Mr. Goble's present course of life owed its origin to a tender but unsatisfactory episode in the dim and distant days of his hot youth.

"After that," John would continue elliptically, "I went tae Motherwell. D'ye ken Motherwell? A grand place! Miles and miles of blast-furnaces, and the sky lit up day and nicht, like the Last Judgment. I did a wheen odd jobs there. Whiles I would hurl a trolley wi' coke, whiles I would sort coal wi' some lassies, and at last I got a job as a moulder." [pg 16

"What's that?" inquired the ever-receptive Hughie.

"What else but a body that makes moulds?"

"Yes, but how does he do it?"

"Weel, there's a sort o' sandy place at the fit o' each smelting-furnace—like a bit sea-shore, ye'll understand—and every four-and-twenty hours they cast the furnace. They let oot the melted

ore, that is, and it rins doon intil moulds that hae been made in the sand. (Ye dae it by just buryin' baulks o' timber in rows and then pickin' them oot again, and the stuff rins intil the hollows that have been left. When it's cauld they ca' it pig-iron.) Well, I stuck tae that job for a matter o' sax months. But it was drouthy work, besides bein' haird on the feet,—you go scratch-scratching in the sand wi' your bare soles makin' the moulds,—and presently I gave it up and took tae daen' odd jobs among the trucks and engines in the yairds. I liked that fine, for machinery is the yin thing that really excites me. First I was a coupler, then I was a fireman, then I got tae drivin' a wee shunting engine, dunting trucks about the yaird. And at last I was set in charge o' a winding-engine at a pit-heid. That was a grand job; but it didna last long. I was drinkin' haird by this time—I'd stairtit after I left the Coocaddens—and yin' day I was that fou' I let the cage gang doon wi' a run tae the bottom o' the shaft." [pg 16

"Was there anybody in the cage?" inquired Hughie, as Goble paused, as if to contemplate some mental picture.

"There was not, thank God! But there *was* a bit laddie doon ablow in the pit, that was sittin' on his hutch—his truck, that is—at the fit o' the shaft, waitin' on the cage. He wasna expectin' the thing tae fall doon like a daud o' putty, so he was no' sittin' quite clear; and the cage cam' doon and took off baith his feet. Man, I hae never forgotten his mither's face when they brought him up. I lost ma job, and I hae never touched a drop since. For seven-and-twenty years have I been on the teetotal—seven-and-twenty years! It'll shorten ma life, I doot," he added gloomily; "but I'll bide by it!"

"What became of the boy?" inquired Hughie.

"He's gotten twa wooden feet the noo," replied Goble more cheerfully, "and he's been minding the lamp-room this twenty year. I've heard frae him noo and again, and we've always been freens; but his auld mither has never forgiven me. She's ower seventy the day, but Jeems tells me she aye lets a curse every time he mentions ma name."

A further instalment of Mr. Goble's adventures explained how he took to the sea. [pg 16

"After I cleared oot o' Motherwell I went to the Clydeside. I was a fair enough mechanic by this time, but I had tak'n a sort o' skunner at machinery—no wi'oot some reason—and I tried for to get taken on as a dock-hand. I had no luck there, and I was fair starvin' when yin day I met a freend o' min' on the Dumbarton Road, and he asked me would I like tae wash dishes and peel potaties on a passenger steamer. I would hae been pleased tae soop the lums o' muckle Hell by that time, gin it was for a wage, I was that thrawn wi' hunger; so I jist said, ''Deed ay!'

"For a hale summer I sat peelin' potaties and washin' dishes on board the Electra, her that has done a trip doon the watter, roond about Arran and Bute, and hame by Skelmorlie ilka day o' the summer season for twenty-twa years. When the winter cam' on I dooted I would be oot o' a job again; but bein' nowadays permanently on the teetotal, and varra dependable, I was shifted tae the auld Stornoway, o' the same line, carryin' goods, cattle, and passengers tae the West Highlands—Coll, Tiree, Barra, Uist, Ullapool, and a wheen places in and oot o' sea-lochs up and doon that coast. She loused frae the Broomielaw every Thursday at three o'clock in the afternoon, and she was back there, week in week out, summer and winter, by eleven in the forenoon o' the following Wednesday. The folk along by Largs, where her cap'n lived, used tae set their watches by her. She was a fine auld boat, the Stornoway: she piled herself up on the rocks below the Scuir of Eig, where she had no call tae be, in a snowstorm seven winters syne. I was a cabin steward nowadays, ye'll unnerstand; and once we were roond the Mull and the passengers had thrawn up what they'd had tae their tea off Gourock and tak'n a dander ashore at Oban, appetites was big and I was busy. It was the first time I had seen the gentry at their meals, and it improved my mainners considerable. Never since then have I skailed ma tea intil ma saucer: I jist gie a bit blow on it noo. Yon's Mr. Allerton roarin' for to be relieved at the wheel." [pg 16

On another occasion Goble explained how he came to forsake the fleshpots of the Stornoway and take to the high seas.

"I was aye hankerin', hankerin' after the machinery," he explained. "A body canna serve tables all his life. So after twa years on the Stornoway I shippit as a fireman on a passenger steamer outward bound frae Glasgow tae Bilbao. There I left her, tae be second engineer on a wee tramp carrying iron-ore tae the Mediterranean. That was nigh twenty years ago, and I've never set fit in Scotland since. Weel, weel! Aha! Mphm!" (*Ad lib.* and *da capo*.)

So he would discourse, in a manner which passed many a weary hour for both, and added considerably to Hughie's stock of human knowledge. [pg 16

The days wore on. The work and long hours were beginning to tell their tale, but the entire crew kept grimly to it. Their nerves were in good order too. Even when, on the morning of the sixteenth day, as they groped their way through a streaming wet fog, a great ghostly monster of a liner suddenly loomed out of the wrack, and, as she shouldered her way past them, actually scraped the starboard counter with her stern, while the look-out on her forward deck yelled

frantically, and a frightened man up aloft on the bridge flung his wheel over with great rattling of steam steering-gear to avoid a collision, the sole occupant of the Orinoco's deck—it was Goble: he was steering while Hughie and Walsh took their turn in the stokehold and Allerton slept—did not deem the occasion sufficiently important to merit a report until he was relieved from duty two hours later.

But this encounter provided that pawky philosopher with a valuable clue as to their whereabouts.

"She was a Ben liner," he intimated to Hughie in describing the event. "I saw the twa bit stripes roond her funnel, and her name, Ben Cruachan, on her stern. They're Glasgow boats, and sail every other Thursday tae Buenos Ayres, calling at Moville on Lough Foyle tae tak' up Irish passengers. It's no' near Cape Clear we are, anyway. We're somewhere off the north coast o' Ireland, sir. I kenned fine we were near land: this is a ground swell that's throwin' us aboot noo. Aiblins we'll be gettin' a dunt against the Giant's Causeway if we're no' canny." [pg 16

There was something in Goble's conclusions, for after they had steamed dead slow all night the rising sun licked up the fog; and there, ten miles to the south of them, lay a long green seacoast; and straight before them uprose what looked like a rocky island, with a homely-looking white lighthouse perched half-way up its rugged face.

"If that land to the right is Ireland," said Hughie, "we can't be very far from Scotland. I wonder what that great rock ahead of us can be. Lucky we didn't reach it a couple of hours ago!"

"Don't you think," suggested Allerton, putting his head out of the engine-room hatchway, "that as we have a *pukka* Scot on board, we had better rouse him up and see if he can identify his native land?"

It was Goble's turn for sleep, but Allerton's suggestion was adopted, and he was haled on deck.

"Do you happen to recognise that island straight ahead, Mr. Goble?" inquired Hughie.

Goble surveyed the rock and the lighthouse, and though his countenance remained unmoved, his eye lit up with proprietary pride. [pg 16

"Island? Yon's no' an island," he replied. "'Tis Scotland hersel'. Sir, 'tis the Mull o' Kintyre! It rins straight awa' back tae Argyllshire. We're at the varra mouth o' the Clyde. We micht hae been drawed there across the Atlantic by a bit string! God presairve us, it's a miracle!"

"The Clyde?" shouted Hughie. It seemed too utterly good to be true. "Are you sure, Goble? Is that really the Mull?"

"Sure?" Goble's expression was a mixture of pity and resentment. "Man, I'm tellin' ye I sailed roond it twice a week for the best pairt o' twa years. I was awfu' sick the first time. The second—"

All this time the Mull of Kintyre was growing nearer.

"What's the course?" queried Walsh, leaning over the bridge. "Do I turn up New Cut, Mr. Goble, or keep straight along the Blackfr'ars Road?"

Everybody's spirits were soaring marvellously at the sight of the blessed green land. Walsh's wife was within twenty-four hours of him.

"Keep yon heap o' stanes on your left hand, ma mannie," replied the greatly inflated Goble, facetiously indicating the towering headland before them, "and then straight on Ailsa Craig. You're daen' fine. Mr. Marrable, will you rin her up tae the Tail o' the Bank, off Greenock, or gi'e a cry in at Campbeltown Bay? It's jist roond the corner." [pg 17

"Hang it! we'll take her all the way, now we have got so far," said Hughie. "We're *home*! I *was* reckoning on bringing up in Plymouth Sound; but that's a detail. Come on, Allerton, let's go below and fire up for the last time. We'll bring her in in style!"

And so it came about that not many hours later the Orinoco, a rotting hulk, clogged with weed, corroded with rust, caked with salt, feebly churning up the water with her debilitated propeller, steamed painfully but grandly past the Cloch Light and into the mouth of the Clyde. A sorry object she may have seemed to the butterfly host of natty paddle-steamers which was pouring down the river under the forced draught of triple competition, carrying the Glasgow man, released from office, to Dunoon and Rothesay and other summer repositories for wife and family. But to those who *knew*, she was no uncleanly tramp, but a battle-scarred veteran,—a ship that had deserved well of the Republic of the high seas,—another little Golden Hind, though laden with nothing nearer to Spanish ingots than bottles of imitation French claret. Every scar on her sides was an [pg 17

honourable wound; every groan and creak that rose from her starting timbers a pæan; every cough and wheeze that proceeded from her leaky cylinders a prayer of joyful thanks. The Orinoco had graduated high in the nameless but glorious band of those who have illustrated, not altogether without profit and pride, the homely truth that

> Life ain't holdin' good cards;
> It's playin' a poor hand *well*!

And so she turned the last corner of her long and painful Odyssey, and came home to lay up her bones by the Clyde, which had given them birth. And by a happy chance the unconscious Hughie, instead of navigating her to the Tail of the Bank as he had intended, changed his mind, put over his helm, and conned her up to the head of that beautiful Gareloch which, many many years ago, had given the little ship her maiden name.

There, swinging at her rusty cable, with the clear green water laving her weary forefoot, and the hills above Roseneath and Shandon smiling reassuringly down upon her in the glow of the evening sun, we will leave her. *Molliter ossa cubent!*

The law's delays are proverbial, and the task of getting even with Mr. Noddy Kinahan involved [pg 17
Hughie in endless encounters with those in high places, several appearances (with suite) in the abodes of the Law, and another trip to New York—by Cunarder this time.

However, grim determination will accomplish most things; and when some months later Hughie finally sailed from New York for his native land, the labour of love had been completed, and Mr. Noddy Kinahan was duly regretting, for a term of years, the fact that he had ever been born.

This consummation was followed by another, depressing but inevitable. The Orinoco Salvage Company, having served its purpose, paid Nature's debt and ceased to exist. The circumstances connected with its demise, together with the respective fates of Hughie's little band of Argonauts, will best be gathered from the following epistolary excerpts:—

No. I (N. B. *Spelling corrected*)

% Mistress Howieson,

17 Candlish Street, Greenock.

To H. Marrable, Esq.:—

Sir,—I thank you for cheque, and have disposed of same. I also thank you for offer to find a job for me. But I would prefer to bide by you, as I feel I will not get a better job than that. I would like fine to be your servant. You will be needing some one to redd up your quarters and keep your clothes sorted, now you are ashore. (Women is no' to be [pg 17
trusted.) Of course I would not want a big wage: the siller from the Orinoco will do grandly for a long time. I ken fine the way to wait at table and clean silver, having been steward, as I once telled you, on the old Stornoway, where they had a cuddy full of gentry every trip.—Your servant (I am hoping),

Jno. Alex. Goble.

No. II

(*Extracts. No date or address, but obviously written in a public-house*)

... So you must take the money back. It is no use to me: all I should get out of it would be a d—d bad headache. Also, it might give me ideas above my station, which is bad for the lower orders at any time. Give it to Walsh; but don't let on, of course, that it comes from me: let him believe that it is part of his natural share of the salvage. I have kept back enough to pay for a new suit (which I am now wearing) and one big bust before I sail next week as deck steward on an Aberdeen liner.

... Well, it was a great trip. We have all got something out of it. You have got an adventure and incidentally done a big thing, and I have spent a month of absolute happiness in the society of men who regarded me neither as an object of pity nor as a [pg 17
monster of depravity, but were content to let me go my own way as a man who prefers to live his own life and be asked no questions.... Your offer to set me on my legs again and

make me a respectable member of society is friendly and, I suppose, natural; but it threatens a happy episode with a sad ending. I'm not cut out for conventionality, and (*pace* your kind references to my "sterling merit and latent force of character") I am not of the stuff that successful men are made of. I have only done two big things in my life. One was getting elected to Pop at Eton, the other was helping you to bring the old Orinoco home. I think I'll rest on my laurels now. I suppose I was born a rotter, and if you were to endeavour to raise me to your giddy heights I should only fall down again, and the bump at the bottom might hurt. I am safer where I am: the beauty of lying on the floor is that you can't fall off.

... Well, chin, chin! If I may be permitted to gush for a moment, I should like to tell you that you are a good sort.—Yours ever,

LIONEL ALLERTON.

No. III

No. 4 TEAK ST., LIMEHOUSE.

DEAR SIR,—I beg to acknowledge with thanks your cheque for share of salvage. It was far more than I expected, and the Adm'ty C'ts have certainly done well by us. At the best, [pg 17
I had hoped for suffic'nt to rig out the nippers with boots and duds for the winter and give the missis a week or two off the laundry work. We have all been fair barmy the last few days. Square meals and a big fire, and you can't hear yours'lf talk for the squeaking of the new boots. We are settling down a bit now, and I have put the rest of the money in the bank and told the old woman she is to burn her wash-tubs. Catch her: I d'n't think! With my new clothes I have obt'd a berth as Chief on board s.s. Batavia, of the Imperial Line, and sail on 21st inst. Her engines are (*several lines of hopeless technicalities omitted*). It was a lucky day for me when I struck the Orinoco, and luckier when Angus doctored my grog.

On returning from voyage will take the lib'ty of calling on you in London at the address you gave.—Yrs. respect'fly,

JAS. WALSH
(Chief Engineer s.s. Batavia).

POSTSCRIPT (*In a larger and less educated hand*)

MR. MARRABLE, DEAR SIR,—The children and me begs to thank you for all your kindness to father. Father he is very greatful himself, but would rather leave it to me to tell you, as he don't like. Mr. Marrable, sir, if you could only see the diff'nce in the children, espec'y [pg 17
little Albert, what was always sickly, since they got good boots and food inside them you would feel well paid for your kindness. I know the money did not come from you, but it was through you we got it. God bless you, sir.—Yours resp'fly,

MRS. MARTHA WALSH.

P. S.—Our ninth, which has just come, we are taking the liberty to call by your name.

BOOK THREE [pg 17

SUAVITER IN MODO

CHAPTER XI [pg 17

SEALED ORDERS

On a bright morning in April Hughie emerged from the offices of Messrs. Slocum, Spink, and Slocum, Solicitors, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and made for the Strand.

Like most men who have been abroad for a long time, he trod the streets of London with an oddly mingled sensation of familiarity and strangeness. At one moment he felt that he had been living in London for years, at another he felt that he was exploring a new city. The Strand itself, save for the old congested stretch in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross, was almost unrecognisable. Gone for ever were the various landmarks of his youth, such as the Old Gaiety and the Lowther Arcade. Holywell Street and Wych Street, with their delectable environs, had vanished like a bad but interesting dream, leaving room for a broad and stately thoroughfare, in the midst of which the churches of St. Mary and St. Clement Danes split the traffic like boulders in a Highland spate, and the Law Courts acquired an unfamiliar prominence. A new fairway of uncanny width and straightness clove its course to Holborn, blocked at its mouth by a dismal patch of excavated territory resembling nothing so much as what Scotsmen term a "free toom," and proclaiming to all and sundry, by means of a gigantic notice-board, that This Site was To Let as a Whole. [pg 18

The traffic had developed too. There were countless motor-buses, which shook the earth and smelt to heaven; and taxicabs, which skipped like rams and quacked like ducks.

But after all, though landmarks change their bearings and banks be washed away, the stream flows on unchanged. The people were the same, and Hughie felt comforted. The smell of asphalt was the same, and he felt uplifted. And when he beheld the torrents of traffic that converge on the Wellington Street crossing arrest their courses *seriatim* and pile themselves up in a manner that would have done credit to the waters of Jordan, all at the bidding of an imperturbable figure in a blue uniform, he felt that he was indeed home once more.

Presently he hailed a taxicab, and whizzed along, exulting like a child with a new toy, to a railway station, where John Alexander Goble, having previously superintended the placing of his master's luggage in the train (with a maximum of precaution on his part and a minimum of profit on the porter's), was waiting to see him off.

Hughie dismissed his retainer to take charge of his newly acquired flat until his return, and having secured his seat, followed his invariable custom and went forward to view the engine. He noted with interest that compound locomotives seemed to have made little or no progress in the country's favour, but that the prejudice against high-pitched boilers and six-coupled wheels had disappeared. [pg 18

He then made his way to the refreshment room,—where alone, he noted, Time's devastating hand appeared to have stood still,—and having lunched frugally off something from under a glass dome which the divinity behind the counter, in response to a respectful inquiry, brusquely described as "fourpence," together with as much bitter beer as remained after the same damosel had slapped its containing vessel playfully down on the fingers of a pimply but humorous youth who was endeavouring to tempt the appetites of two wizened sardines, exposed for sale on a piece of toast, with a hard-boiled egg from a neighbouring plate, returned to his seat in the train; where he was duly locked in by a porter, who displayed an amount of cheerful gratitude for sixpence that an American baggage-man would have considered excessive at a dollar. Here, with a rug, a pipe, and a quantity of illustrated papers, most of which had come to birth since he had left England, and all of which appeared to depend for their livelihood on the exploitation of the lighter lyric drama, Hughie settled himself for a comfortable run along the Thames Valley. [pg 18

This done, he took two letters from his pocket. One had been opened already. It was an obviously feminine production, and said:—

"Manors, *Monday*.

"Dear Hughie,—We are all thrilled to hear that you are home at last. You must come down here *at once* and be our guest until you have looked round, and then you can renew all our acquaintances at one go. There are lots of nice people with us just now, so come! You will be feeling lonely, poor thing, landing in this country after so many years, and of course you will miss poor Mr. Marrable sadly. I suppose you have heard all about his death from the lawyers by this time, or perhaps you saw it in the papers two years ago.

"Mr. D'Arcy is here; also Joan, of course. My husband, too, wants to have the pleasure of entertaining you—that is, if you are prepared not to shoot him on sight! I don't *think*, though, that I shall be able to command your regretful affections any more. One look at me will be sufficient for you. Alas, I have two chins and three babies! [pg 18

"However, come down on Saturday, and you can size us all up. I suppose you know that Mr. Marrable asked us to take Manors and look after Joan until you or he came home again; so you won't play the heavy landlord and evict us on the spot, will you?—Yours ever,

"Mildred Leroy."

Hughie put this epistle away with a slightly sentimental sigh. It did not seem so very long since he had been organising May Week festivities in Miss Mildred Freshwater's honour. Now—two chins and three babies! *Eheu, fugaces!*

The other letter had not yet been opened, and Hughie broke the seal. The envelope looked blue and legal, and its contents consisted of several pages of Jimmy Marrable's stiff upright handwriting. The date was nearly three years old.

"I am leaving England again"—it began—"next week, and I doubt very much if I shall ever come back. It is not in the breed to die in bed of something stuffy. The only tie that keeps me here is Joey, and she is too much occupied at present in collecting scalps to pay much attention to the old ruin who brought her up. In about four years' time she may be fit to live with again: at present she is not; and I refuse point-blank for the time being to play second fiddle to any young cub who ever wore magenta socks and a pleated shirt. I [pg 18
think it quite time that you came home and took her in hand. Indeed, if you don't appear on the scene within two years, I have given instructions that you are to be ferreted out and asked to do so. When you do return you will receive this letter, in which I am going to set down the manner in which I wish my estate to be administered on Joey's behalf if I don't come back.

"In the first place, I must tell you that Manors goes to you by entail, but that all the rest is Joey's, and you will be her sole trustee and guardian. Lance is of age, and independent, and I have disposed of things in such a way that he can't possibly interfere with the management of Joey's affairs. Secondly, I want to tell you something about the children themselves.

"I am not their father, though I very nearly was, and though every old shrew in the neighbourhood thinks I am. Their mother was the most beautiful and lovable girl I have ever known, and the only woman in the world I ever cared a rap for. Ours was a boy-and-girl idyll, though I was ten years her senior. I had known her ever since I could carry her on my back, and it was always a sort of understood thing between us that we were to marry each other when the time came.

"Till she was nineteen and I twenty-nine, I suppose we were the happiest couple under the broad heaven. Then she let down her skirt and put up her hair and made her [pg 18
début. (I should say that she lived alone with her old father, a retired East Indian of the time of John Company.) To her own surprise and my great pride—at first—she caused quite a sensation, for besides her face she had the prettiest manners possible. If you want to know what she was like you will find a miniature of her among my papers. Or perhaps it would be simpler to look at Joey.

"But now the trouble began. Irene—that was her name—soon discovered an immense appetite for admiration, which was quite natural and excusable. (One can't blame a girl for making all the runs she can while her innings lasts; God knows, it is short enough!) But presently she could not do without it. She was always 'asking for it,' as they say nowadays. Sometimes she made herself rather conspicuous, and people began to smile at her. I ground my teeth, and, finally, at the least suitable moment, I put my oar in. I expostulated. No, I *didn't* expostulate: I simply *ordered* her to mend her ways, and generally acted the Grand Turk and proud proprietor rolled into one. My word, Hughie, she was furious! There had never been any definite engagement between us, and she opened her defence by saying so, pat. It happened at a ball, where she had been making herself rather noticeable with a seedy ruffian—half actor, half poet—called Gaymer, [pg 18
against whom I had been fool enough to warn her. She informed me that she was her own mistress, and that I was an officious busybody. If I had had the sense to tell her there and then that I loved her more than all the world, and that I was jealous of the very ground she walked on,—let alone the people she spoke to,—she would have melted at once, I swear; for she was as impulsive and generous as a child, and she loved me, too, I *know*. If I had even lost my temper and called her a brazen hussy, she would have forgiven me in time: a woman regards a remark like that as a sort of compliment. *But*—I smiled indulgently, shrugged my shoulders, and said that she would look at these things differently when she was older.

"That did it. Apparently there is only one crime in this world more heinous than telling an old woman that she is old, and that is to tell a young woman that she is young. Irene got straight up and left me sitting, and went home without ever looking in my direction again that night.

"Next day I called at her father's house to make my peace. I was prepared to admit that I had been an irritating young cub, and eat humble pie generally. But I was too late. She was gone! She had bolted, in some wild fit of pique or sentimentalism, with that long-haired exponent of Byronism-and-water, Lance Gaymer, and had married him at a [pg 18
Registry Office that very morning. Probably she had fallen in with his proposals at the ball—after her interview with me.

"Well, Hughie, I would rather pass over the next few years. I cut her out of my scheme of things as completely as I could, and went on my way. Fortunately you began to engage my attention about that time, and I rubbed along somehow, and finally developed into the fine old crusted fogey that you know me to be.

"Ten years later I heard from her. She sent for me. I had never known where she was, nor tried to find out. But I did not expect to find her where I did. She was in a miserable dingy house in Bloomsbury—dying, Hughie! Her ruffianly husband had left her after her second baby was born,—our Joey, that is,—and her old father had been dead eight years. She had not a friend in the world, and yet she would not turn to me till it was too late. Pride, pride, pride! For some years she had been struggling on with a little money her father had left her, and which her husband had not been able to get hold of, and she had also taken in lodgers. *Lodgers*, Hughie! It was only when she realised that she was going out for good that the thought of the kiddies' future began to frighten her, and she sent for me—at last! [pg 18

"I was with her during most of the remaining three months of her life, to the scandalisation of virtuous Bloomsbury. I wanted to bring her to Manors, which she had often visited in her childhood, but she said she preferred to die in London; and as she was obviously going to die somewhere pretty soon, I did not press the point. During that time we lived a life of almost perfect happiness; and when she finally slipped away, quite peacefully,—poor child! she was barely thirty-two,—and I took the youngsters home with me, the long waste of years behind us seemed almost as though it never had been, so completely had the recollection of it been wiped out by the intervening three months. Love can work marvels, Hughie, even though it come to a man at the very last.

"I may add that during the closing weeks of her life I had the supreme satisfaction of marrying her, as we received undeniable proof that her accursed husband had died in South America. This gives me a sort of additional hold over Joey, though I have never mentioned it to her; nor do I think it necessary, for I had rather that her attachment to me remained a purely sentimental one, for the present at any rate.

"And now, as regards the future. As I said at the beginning of this letter, I don't know whether I shall ever come back from this trip. If I don't, well and good: Joey can take my money. If I do, I am afraid I must request the use of it for myself for a little while longer. However, you will naturally want me to fix some sort of time-limit, and the question has been occupying my attention a good deal. My original idea was to make a kind of provisional will, leaving all my property to Joey, and entitling her to come into possession automatically in the event of my not returning within five years; but the lawyers tell me this arrangement won't work, as I have to be *pukka* dead before they can shell out. So I have fixed it this way. For the present Joey will want nothing but her daily bread and her fallals and a roof to sleep under, as her so-called education is now completed. I have therefore let Manors to the Leroys, on the understanding that the child is to live there with them for the present. (Not that they required much persuasion.) She is eighteen at the time of writing this letter. [pg 18

"Further, I have realised practically all my personal estate, and placed the cash to your credit (on Joey's behalf) at the Law Courts Branch of the Home Counties Bank. When you come home, which I hope will be soon, I want you to take this money and administer it for her benefit. The rest of my property—nothing to speak of in comparison—is set down and duly disposed of in my will (which I have left in the hands of Slocum, Spink, and Slocum, Lincoln's Inn Fields), and cannot be touched until my death is authenticated. I have made you Joey's sole trustee and guardian, and you will enter upon your duties as soon as you get home. She is not to come of age, financially speaking, until she is twenty-four. [pg 19

"That's all, I think.

"Good luck to you in life, Hughie! I can't, I fear, take my stand on the pinnacle of a successful career and shout down advice to you on your way up; neither will I presume to counsel you as to your future. My only piece of advice to you is not to expect much in this world, and then you won't be disappointed. Roughly speaking, there are only three things in life that matter—health, money, and friends. A woman once told me that the recipe for perfect happiness is a million pounds and a good digestion. The last, I admit, is indispensable. Well, you have it: the Marrable interior is dyspepsia-proof. The million pounds you have not got, and don't want. Wealth, after all, is a purely relative affair. You can measure it either by the greatness of what you have or the smallness of what you want. All that a man needs is enough of the first to ensure his getting the second, and I am inclined to think that in your case this should not be a matter of much difficulty. [pg 19

"Besides, it is in the *small* needs of life that money really counts. The yacht, the house in town, the grouse moor—who wants 'em? But the cab home in the rain; the occasional bottle of Pommery; the couple of stalls when an old friend looks you up, or the furtive and sympathetic fiver when his widow does,—these are the things that make money really worth having. Besides, the greatest joys are those you have to save up for, so a

millionaire can never know them.

"As for friends—well, there are two classes, men and women. Men I need not trouble you about. If you haven't acquired the knack of handling them during the last ten years you never will, and are no Marrable. Women? I give it up! You can't standardise them. Men are fairly normal as a class. If you deal straight with a man he will realise and appreciate the fact, and though he may not respond by dealing straight with you, he will at any rate recognise you for what you are—a white man. But you can't depend on a woman to do that. They are far stronger in their likes and dislikes than we are, and are hopelessly capricious into the bargain. My general experience—and it has been wider than you might think—has been that, once a woman takes a fancy to you, you may run counter to every canon of honesty, sobriety, and common decency, and she will cleave to you—probably, I fancy, because you arouse all the protective maternal instinct in her. On the other hand, once you get into her bad books,—it may be because you deserve it, but as often as not it is because you have hot hands or once trod on her skirt in a waltz,—nothing that you can do will prevent her shuddering at the very mention of your name. Perhaps, from the point of view of the greatest good of the greatest number, a woman's method of sizing up the male sex is the best possible, but it comes hard on well-meaning but heavy-handed men like us. [pg 19

"We Marrables have always been men's men, although we have the profoundest reverence for women. (Perhaps that is the reason: a woman never wants you to reverence women; she wants you to reverence *her*.) What sticks in our throats is the enormous amount of make-believe and shilly-shallying that has to go on between the sexes before any definite business can be accomplished. Whenever I see a Marrable in a drawing-room, sitting on the edge of a chair and balancing a teacup, I always know exactly what he is there for, and I also know that he is dumbly resisting man's primitive instinct to pick up the right girl and *run*. When that feat, or its equivalent, has been accomplished, all is well: I have never known a Marrable who was not a complete success as a husband. But they are bad starters. [pg 19

"Your father was an exception. He had the good luck to meet a girl who knew a man when she saw one, and was willing to accept the will for the deed when she found him unable to express articulately what she would have loved to hear. By a further stroke of good luck her parents objected to him, so he had a comparative walk-over.

"And therefore, Hughie, I counsel you to escape all future unhappiness by marrying Joey as soon as you get home—a consummation to which, as you will probably have gathered by this time, the whole of these laboured and transparent testamentary dispositions of mine are directed. I have left the child entirely in your hands. Marry her as quickly as you can, and then I shall know for certain, whatever my state of existence at the time, that the two people whom I care for most on earth are both booked for a life of perfect happiness. I could not wish a man a sweeter wife or a woman a better husband.

"Forgive my clumsy methods, but you know I mean well.—Yours,

"JAMES MARRABLE."

Hughie folded up this characteristic document and put it carefully back in his pocket. Then he lit his pipe and reflected.

He did not altogether agree with the tone of his uncle's letter, but he knew in his heart that it contained a good deal of truth. He was ready to marry and settle down, but like most of his race he contemplated the preliminary reconnoitring, the manœuvring for position, and the elaborate enveloping movements which seem inseparable from a modern matrimonial engagement, with something akin to terror. At the same time, it seemed a tame thing to come home and marry a bread-and-butter miss out of the schoolroom to gratify the shade of a departed relative. [pg 19

The train slowed down. They were approaching Midfield Junction, where he must change. Hughie took his feet down from the opposite cushions and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"We'll see," he said. "I must have a look at Joey first. Pretty children so often grow up plain. Perhaps it would be simplest to marry her, but there's no hurry. I'm home for a rest, and I'm not going to bother myself. I have roughed it for nine years. Now I'm going to settle down and have an easy time of it."

He was never more mistaken in his life.

CHAPTER XII

[pg 19

A CHANGE OF ATMOSPHERE

Miss Joan Gaymer sat in a Windsor chair on the landing outside the bathroom door at Manors. It was half-past eight in the morning—an hour when traffic outside bathroom doors is apt to be congested.

Miss Gaymer was wrapped in a bluish-grey kimono, which, whether by accident or design,—I fear there is very little doubt about it, really,—exactly matched the colour of her eyes. At the same time it failed to conceal the fact—*horresco referens*—that she was still attired in what American haberdashers call "slumber-wear." Her slim bare feet were encased in red slippers, one of which dangled precariously from her right big toe, and her hair hung down her back in two tightly screwed but not unbecoming pigtails. At present she was engaged in a heated altercation with two gentlemen for right of entry into the bathroom.

The only excuse that I can offer for her conduct is that, although she was nearly twenty-one, in her present setting she looked about fourteen.

The gentlemen, who wore large hairy dressing-gowns, with towels swathed round their necks and mighty sponges in their hands, did not, it must be confessed, show to such advantage as their opponent. They were distinctly tousled and gummy in appearance, and their wits, as is usual with the male sex early in the morning, were in no condition for rapier work. They had both been patiently awaiting their turn for the bath when Joan arrived, and they were now listening in helpless indignation to a peremptory order to return to their rooms and stay there till sent for, and not to molest an unprotected female on her way to her ablutions.

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"But look here, Joey," said one,—he was a pleasant-faced youth of about nineteen,—"we were *both* here before you; and you know we arranged last night that you were to come at twenty past —"

"Binks," commanded the offender in the Windsor chair, "go straight back to your bedroom and don't argue with me. If you are good I'll give your door a tap on my way back."

But Binks was in no mood for compromise, and furthermore wanted his breakfast.

"It's not playing the game," he grumbled; "I was here first, Cherub was second—"

"*Who* isn't playing the game?" flashed out Miss Gaymer. "Have you *shaved*, Binks?"

Binks, taken in flank, admitted the impeachment,—which, it may be mentioned, was self-evident. "You haven't, either," was the best retort he could make.

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"No, but I've brushed my teeth," said the ever-ready Miss Gaymer.

"Well," pursued Binks desperately, "you haven't done your hair."

"My lad," replied his opponent frankly, "if you were a woman and had to put things on over your head, you wouldn't have done your hair either."

Binks, utterly demoralised, fell out of the fighting line.

"Joey, *I've* shaved," murmured the second gentleman in a deprecating voice.

Miss Gaymer turned a surprised eye upon him.

"*Why*, Cherub, dear?" she inquired.

"Cherub," who was still of an age to be exceedingly sensitive on the subject of his manly growth, blushed deeply and subsided. But his companion was made of sterner stuff.

"Come along, Cherub!" he said. "Let's run her into her bedroom and lock her in until we've bathed. Hang it! It's the third time she's done it this week."

"Lay one finger on me, children," proclaimed Miss Gaymer, "and I'll never speak to either of you again!"

She made ready for battle by twining her feet in and out of the legs of the Windsor chair, and sat brandishing a loofah, the picture of outraged propriety. [pg 19

Her heartless opponents advanced to the attack, and seizing the arms of the chair bore it swiftly, occupant and all, down the passage. Joan, utterly unprepared for these tactics, was at first too taken aback to do anything but shriek and wield the loofah; but shortly recovering her presence of mind, she slipped off the seat, and, doubling round her bearers, who were hampered by the chair, scampered back towards the bathroom—only to run heavily into the arms of an unyielding, sunburned, and highly embarrassed gentleman, who had been standing nervously on the other side of the door of that apartment for the last five minutes, awaiting an opportunity to escape, and had suddenly emerged therefrom on a dash to his bedroom, under the perfectly correct impression that it was a case of now or never.

"Oh, I *beg* your—Why, it's Hughie!" cried Joan. "Yes, it *really* is!"

They recoiled, and stood surveying each other. It was their first meeting. Hughie, owing to a breakdown on the branch line, had arrived late the night before, after the ladies had gone to bed. Joan and he had not set eyes on each other for nine years.

Miss Gaymer recovered her equanimity first.

"You're not a bit changed, Hughie," she observed with a disarming smile. "A little browner—that's all. Am I?" [pg 19

Hughie did not answer for a moment. He was genuinely astonished at what he had just seen, and not a little shocked. Where young girls are concerned, there is no greater stickler for propriety than your man of the world; and this sudden instance of the latter-day *camaraderie* of young men and maidens had rather taken Hughie's breath away. He felt almost as fluttered as an early Victorian matron. Suddenly he realised that he had been asked a question.

"Changed?" he said haltingly. "Well, it's rather hard to say, until—until—"

"Until I've got my hair up and more clothes on?" suggested Miss Gaymer. "Perhaps you're right. Still, I look rather nice, don't you think?" she added modestly, preening herself in the kimono. "However, you'll see me at breakfast. Meanwhile I want you to hold those two boys back while I get into the bathroom. Ta-ta, dears!"

And with an airy wave of her hand to the unwashed and discomfited firm of Dicky and Cherub, who stood grinning sheepishly in the background, Hughie's ward slipped under her guardian's arm and disappeared into the bathroom, with a swish of cærulean drapery and a triumphant banging of the door.

Half an hour later Hughie descended to breakfast, there to be greeted by his host, Jack Leroy, a retired warrior of thirty-eight, of comfortable exterior and incurable laziness, and his wife, the one-time render of Hughie's heart-strings in the person of Miss Mildred Freshwater. Another old friend was the Reverend Montague D'Arcy, whom we last saw dancing the Cachuca by the waters of the Cam. Here he was, a trifle more rotund and wearing Archidiaconal gaiters, but still the twinkling-eyed D'Arcy of old. One or two other guests were seated at the table, but as yet there was no sign of Joey. When she did appear, it was in a riding-habit; and after a hearty meal, in no way accelerated by urgent and outspoken messages from the front door, where her swains were smoking the pipe of patience, she dashed off in a manner which caused most of those who were over-eating themselves round the table to refer enviously to the digestive equipment of the young, and left Hughie to be entertained by his host and hostess. [pg 20

"You'll find her a queer handful, Hughie," said Mrs. Leroy, as she sat placidly embroidering an infantine garment in the morning sun on the verandah,—in the corner of which the current issues of the "Spectator" and "Sporting Life," fully unfurled, together with two pairs of perpendicular boot-soles and a cloud of cigar-smoke, proclaimed the fact that the Army and the Church were taking their ease together,—"but I want you to remember all the time that she is *sound*. You'll be tempted to disbelieve that over and over again, but don't! She has been utterly spoiled by everybody, and you must give her time to find her level again. Left to herself, she would be as good as gold. I don't say she wouldn't do something rather *outré* now and then from sheer animal spirits, but that doesn't count. She's young, of course, so she can't—she can't be expected to—you know what I mean?" [pg 20

"Stand corn," remarked a voice from behind the "Sporting Life."

"Thank you, dear: that's just it. You see, Hughie, men egg her on,—they're all alike: Jack and Mr. D'Arcy are as bad as any,—and she gets excited and carried away, and occasionally she does something stupid and conspicuous. Five minutes later she is bitterly ashamed, and comes and cries her heart out to me. People know nothing about *that*, of course: all they do know is that she did the stupid thing, and they call her a forward little cat and a detestable imp. Don't you believe them,

Hughie!

"Then you'll find her absurdly impulsive and generous: you could have the clothes off her back if you wanted them. The other day she came home in floods of tears because of a story which a beggar-woman with a baby had told her. It was the usual sort of story, but it was quite enough for Joey. She had carried the baby herself for about two miles, and given the mother all the money she had, and made her promise faithfully to come and see me next day. Of course the woman never turned up, and Joey's blouse had to be burned,—*oh*, that baby!—but that sort of thing doesn't alter her faith in human nature. And she stands the *great* test, Hughie. She hasn't got one set of manners when men are about and another when they are not. But she's a kittle creature. You must be tender with her, and—" [pg 20

"Run her on the snaffle, old man—what?" corroborated the "Sporting Life."

Hughie blew through his pipe meditatively.

"Seems to me, Mrs. Leroy," he said at length, "that I'm in for a pretty thick time. Do you think she's at all likely to take to my present methods, or must I learn some new tricks? Afraid I'm not much of a lady's man. Still, Joey and I used to be great friends, once. Won't that count for something?"

"I'm not sure," said Mrs. Leroy. "You know how the young loathe being thought young, or reminded of their youth? Joey is just in that frame of mind at present. Because you were a boy of twenty-one when she was a child of twelve, she may darkly suspect you of desiring to continue on the footing of those days. Don't do that, for mercy's sake! For all practical purposes you are much nearer to each other in age than you were—" [pg 20

A chuckle reverberated through the peaceful verandah, and the "Spectator" and "Sporting Life" converged for a moment as if to share a confidence.

"Jack," inquired Mrs. Leroy sternly, "what were you saying to Mr. D'Arcy just now?"

"Nothin', dear," said a meek voice.

"Mr. D'Arcy, what was he saying to you?"

Mr. D'Arcy took in a reef in the "Spectator" and replied suavely,—

"He made use of a sporting expression, dear lady, with regard to your plans for our friend Marrable's future, which I was happily unable to understand."

"Jack," said Mrs. Leroy in warning tones, "people who put their oar in uninvited get taken out for afternoon calls—in the brougham, with both windows up!"

The "Sporting Life" was promptly expanded to its full extent, and silence reigned again. Presently Mrs. Leroy observed cheerfully,—

"By the way, Hughie, you are home just in time for a dance—the Hunt Ball."

Hollow groans burst from behind the newspapers. [pg 20

"Oh, look here!" said Hughie frankly. "I mean—not really?"

"Yes: I promised Nina Fludyer to back her up and bring a 'bus-load of people. Why don't you want to come?"

"Well, for one thing I have only danced twice since I went down from Cambridge. One time was at a Viceregal reception in Calcutta, and the other was in Montmartre—under less formal conditions. I'll tell you what—you and your house-party go to the ball and enjoy yourselves, and your husband and I will keep each other company here—eh?"

Captain Leroy put down his paper and said, "Good scheme!" in the loyal but mournful tones of one who realizes that it is a forlorn hope, but that one might as well have a shot for it. "In fact, dear," he continued desperately, "I was thinkin' of takin' Marrable out that very night to lie out for poachers. Old Gannet was tellin' me that the North Wood—that is—"

He observed his wife's withering eye, and became suddenly interested in the advertisements on the back page of his periodical.

"Jack," said Mrs. Leroy in a tone of finality, "on Tuesday night you put on your best bib and

tucker and come with us—that's flat."

"All right, m' dear," replied her husband in a voice which said to Hughie, "I was afraid it wouldn't work, old man!" [pg 20

"And why don't *you* want to come, Hughie?" continued Mrs. Leroy, suddenly turning on her guest.

"Well, I am not cut out for balls," said Hughie. "Prefer the open air, somehow."

"If open air is all you want," remarked Mrs. Leroy grimly, "the Town Hall at Midfield is the draughtiest building in the county."

"Balls are dull affairs," urged the faithful but misguided Leroy, "compared with the excitement and—er—suspense—"

"If you want excitement and suspense," replied the inexorable Mrs. Leroy, "dance the Lancers with Lady Fludyer—fifteen stone of imperfectly balanced *blanc-mange*!"

"And just a spice of risk—"

"Risk? My dear boy, try the Ball Committee's champagne!"

Captain Leroy, defeated at all points, once more subsided; but D'Arcy took up the argument.

"Joking apart, Mrs. Leroy," he said, "it's an awful thing to be a supernumerary man at a dance in the country. You crawl in at the tail of your party, and shake hands with the governess, under the impression that she is your hostess. You are introduced to a girl, and book a dance. You don't [pg 20] catch her name, so you write down 'Red hair and bird of paradise' on your programme, and leave her. Of course you know nobody; so, after booking a few more wallflowers, you still find a good deal of time at your disposal. You can always tell a male wallflower. Women can usually brazen it out: they put on an air which implies that they have refused countless offers, and are sitting on a hard bench because they like it."

"They can't deceive the other women, though," said Mrs. Leroy.

"Still," agreed Hughie, "they impose on men all right. But, as D'Arcy says, a male wallflower is hopeless. He looks miserable, and either mopes in a corner like a new boy at school, or else reads away at his programme and peers about for a partner who isn't on it."

"Why not try the smoking-room?"

"The smokin'-room," interpolated Leroy, "is all right for the regular Philistine. But if *I* go there, I find it in possession of a bilious octogenarian and a retired major-general. They are sittin' in front of the fire with a cigar apiece. They glare at me when I come in, and then go on buckin' to each other. Presently they stop, and one says: 'I suppose you are not a dancin' man, sir,' in a way which implies that he doesn't know what the devil young men are comin' to nowadays. And by this time [pg 20] I'm so ashamed of myself that I simply bolt out of the room, with some yarn about a brief rest between two dances, and go and sit among the hats and coats in the cloak-room until it is time to go and hunt up the next freak on my programme. Rotten job, I call it!"

Mrs. Leroy surveyed the three orators with an air of serene amusement.

"I *have* roused a storm," she said. "But you are coming on Tuesday—all three! Now, Hughie, I know Jack is dying to take you round the stables and plantations. When you have smacked all the horses' backs and taken the pheasants' temperatures, come in. I want to introduce you to my offspring. You are fond of children, I know."

"I know I shall be fond of yours, Mildred," said Hughie.

"Thank you—that's nicely put. But they really are rather pets, though I say it who shouldn't."

"Rum little beggars," mused the male parent. "Bite your head off if they see you havin' a sherry and bitters before dinner. Got a sort of religious maniac of a nurse," he explained. "Been saved, and all that. Save *you* for tuppence, Marrable!"

"She's a queer old thing," said Mrs. Leroy, "but such a good nurse that her weaknesses don't [pg 20] matter much. The children are never sick or sorry—wait till I tap wood! your head will do, Jack—and simply love her."

"I was pleased to learn from their own lips," remarked D'Arcy, "that they have been enthusiastic teetotalers from birth, and are both ardent supporters of Foreign Missions."

"And the baby?" inquired Hughie.

"Too young," replied Leroy; "but that doesn't excuse the poor little sinner from havin' to wear a blue ribbon."

"How does the nurse regard you, Leroy?" asked D'Arcy.

"Lost sheep—hard case—bad egg generally," replied that gentleman resignedly. "She's given me up, I'm glad to say; but she'll be on Hughie's track in no time. Come along."

In the joy of roaming round the familiar plantations and stables Hughie allowed the existence of Mildred Leroy's offspring to fade from his memory; and it was not until the party gathered for luncheon that he was reminded of the introduction in store for him.

The assembled company consisted of the host and hostess, D'Arcy, Hughie, Joan, and the young gentleman previously referred to as "Cherub." The others had departed on a sailing expedition. Joan had declined to go, alleging that she must stay at home and entertain her "keeper," as she had now christened Hughie; and Cherub had speciously pleaded a tendency to [pg 20
mal de mer, and remained at home to steal a march on his rivals.

The party was completed by two chubby infants of seven and five, in large pinafores and short white socks, who were presented to Brevet-Uncle Hughie as Theodora and Hildegard, though Hughie discovered, after a brief experience of their society, that they answered without resentment and much more spontaneity to the appellations of "Duckles" and "Stodger" respectively.

They were deposited—it seems the right word—in the dining-room by an austere and elderly female, who groaned heavily at the sight of Captain Leroy, and eyed Hughie with unconcealed distrust before withdrawing. The small girls took their places one on each side of their mother, and sat, like two well-bred little owlets, taking stock of their new uncle. Presently their vigilance relaxed. It is a truism that teetotalers are hearty eaters, and the consumption of what was placed before them soon occupied the attention of Mesdames Duckles and Stodger to the exclusion of all else, the latter exhibiting a particularly praiseworthy attention to duty.

Their sole contribution to the conversation was offered when Leroy passed the claret to Hughie.

"Wine," remarked Duckles severely, "is a mocker!" [pg 21

"Stwong dwink," corroborated Stodger, turning up the whites of her eyes, "is raging!"

The two ladies then groaned heavily in concert, and, having thus contributed their mite to the redemption of a sinner, resumed their repast.

At the end of the meal the numbers of the company were augmented by the arrival of John Marrable Leroy, aged two years—an infant whose apoplectic countenance sadly belied the small piece of blue ribbon inserted in his bib. Having taken his seat in his mother's lap, he proceeded, after the manner of babies, to give his celebrated entertainment. For the benefit of the company he obligingly identified various articles upon the table, and then proceeded to give an exposition (assisted by manual contortions) of the exact whereabouts of the Church, the Steeple, the Door, and the People. After this, without warning or apology, he deposited a nude foot in his mother's plate, having in some mysterious manner got rid of his shoe and sock under the table; and was proceeding to enumerate the respective marketing experiences of a family of little pigs, when his mother, deciding that it was high time this *séance* came to an end, called upon him to say grace on behalf of the company.

John Marrable Leroy reluctantly ceased fingering his toes, and twisted himself into a state of [pg 21
devotional rigidity. He then closed his eyes, folded his hands, and breathed stertorously. All waited with devoutly bowed heads for his benediction.

"T'ank God—" began Master Leroy at length.

There was another tense pause.

"T'ank God—" repeated the infant despondently.

Another hiatus.

"'*For*'—dearest," prompted his mother.

A smile of intense relief illuminated the supplicant's troubled countenance.

"—Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten!" he gabbled cheerfully; and the meeting broke up in unseemly confusion.

It was a hot afternoon, and Hughie, who as yet was far from getting tired of doing nothing, was well content to sprawl in a basket-chair under a great copper-beech, and watch the others play croquet.

Presently Joan, swinging a mallet, came and sat on the grass beside him.

"Well, Hughie?" she began, regarding her comptroller rather quizzically.

"Well, Joey?"

Then they both laughed, or rather chuckled. The curious part about it was that while Hughie [pg 21
laughed "Ha, ha!" deep down, Joey did the same. Tee-heeing and high-pitched feminine shrieking were beyond her compass. She was the Joey of old, with the same gruff voice, though she had got over her difficulty with the *r*'s and *l*'s.

"It seems rummy," observed Miss Gaymer reflectively, "my being put in your charge like the guard of a train. Do you expect me to obey you?"

"Yes," said Hughie. He felt he was missing an opportunity of saying something bright and striking, but "Yes" was the only word he could think of besides "No."

"Oh!" replied Miss Gaymer enigmatically.

"Don't you intend to?" inquired Hughie.

"Well, it depends on what you tell me to do. If it was anything that didn't matter much I might do it, sometimes, just to save your face. But as a rule I shouldn't."

"Oh!" said Hughie, in his turn.

"I may as well tell you at once," continued the lady, "the things that it's no use scolding me about. First of all, I always choose my own friends, and never take recommendations or warnings from anybody. Then you mustn't interfere with my dancing or sailing or riding, because I love them better than anything in the world. Then, you mustn't try to prevent my reading books and seeing plays that you think are bad for me, because that sort of thing is simply not *done* nowadays. And of [pg 21
course you mustn't call me extravagant if I dress nicely. Also, you mustn't expect me to go in for good works, because I hate curates. And don't give me advice, because I loathe it. On the other hand, it may comfort you to know—it does *most* men, for some reason—that I don't want a vote and I don't smoke cigarettes. Oh, the poor little mite!"

She was on her feet and across the lawn in a flash, to where the obese Stodger, prostrate upon a half-buried tree-root, was proclaiming to the heavens the sorrow of a sudden transition from the perpendicular to the horizontal. She comforted the child with whole-hearted tenderness, and after taking her turn in the game of croquet, returned to Hughie and sat down beside him again.

"Well—what do you think of me?" she inquired suddenly.

Hughie regarded her intently.

"I don't know yet," he said. "I want to see a little more of you."

"Most people," said Miss Gaymer with dignity, "make up their minds about me at once."

"I won't do that," said Hughie. "It wouldn't be quite fair."

Joan pondered this retort and finally flushed like a child.

"That means that you have taken a dislike to me," she said.

"I didn't mean it that way," said Hughie, much distressed,—"really!" [pg 21

"Anyhow, it means that you haven't made up your mind about me," persisted Joan.

"That is true," admitted Hughie, who was no hand at fencing.

"Well, do it soon," said Miss Gaymer. "I'm not accustomed to being put on trial. I may mention to you," she added complacently, "that I am considered a great success. Do you know what Jacky Penn told me?"

"No; what?" inquired Hughie perfunctorily. He was beginning to understand the inwardness of Mildred Leroy's warning that the girl beside him had not yet found her feet.

"He told me," said Joan, with an unaffected sigh of pleasure, "that the men here all call me 'The Toast.' What do you say to that?"

"A Toast," said Hughie rather heavily, "is usually 'an excuse for a glass.' I shouldn't like to think of you merely as that, Joey."

Miss Gaymer eyed her guardian with undisguised exasperation.

"Hughie, you have got fearfully old-maidish in the last nine years," she said. "Where have you been? In any decent society?"

"Sometimes; but not often. Not what *you* would call decent society, Joey."

"Well," remarked Miss Gaymer, turning her opponent's flank with characteristic readiness, [pg 21
"whatever it was, it wasn't very particular about clothes. Hughie, your get-up is perfectly *tragic*. If you are going to be my keeper you will have to begin by dressing decently. I don't know who your tailor is, but—Che-e-erub!"

"What ho!" came from the croquet-lawn.

"Come here, at once."

Cherub obediently put down his mallet and approached. Having arrived, he halted and stood to attention.

"Cherub," commanded Miss Gaymer, "turn round and round till I tell you to stop, and let Mr. Marrable see your clothes."

Much flattered, Cherub rotated serenely on his axis for the benefit of the untutored Marrable, while Miss Gaymer ran over his points.

"Must I have a waist?" inquired Hughie meekly.

"Yes—if you've *got* one," replied Joan, surveying her guardian's amorphous shooting-jacket doubtfully.

"And purple socks?"

"Green will do, old man," remarked the *mannequin* unexpectedly.

"Cherub, keep quiet!" said the *coutumière*. "You have absolutely nothing whatever to recommend you but your clothes, so don't spoil it by babbling. There, Hughie! That is the sort of thing. You must go up to town next week and order some. Run away, Cherub! Now, another thing, [pg 21
Hughie. Look at your hands. They're like a coal-heaver's, except that they're clean. Can't you get them attended to?"

Hughie surveyed his hands in a reminiscent fashion. They were serviceable members, and had pulled their owner through many rough places. At present the palms bore the mark of the Orinoco's coal-shovels, and there was a great scar on one wrist where Hughie had incautiously touched a hot bearing. There was also an incision in the middle knuckle of the right hand, caused by the impact of Mr. Gates's front teeth on an historic occasion. There were other and older marks, and most of them had some interesting story attached to them. But of course Joan did not know this. To her they were large, unsightly, un-manicured hands—only that and nothing more. Hughie sighed. All his old assets seemed to have become liabilities, somehow.

"Aren't they a scandal, Hughie?" Joan repeated.

"I suppose they are, Joey," said Hughie, coming out of his reverie. "Right O! I'll get them seen to. I don't suppose they're ever likely to be much use to me again," he added in a depressed tone, "so they might as well be made ornamental. I'll go and consult Sophy Fullgarney about them when I get back to town."

"Who's she?" said Joey quickly. [pg 21

"Manicurist—before your time," said Hughie briefly, pleased to feel that he could give points to his ward in knowledge of something. "Any more requirements, Joey?"

"Let me see. Oh, yes. Can you dance?"

"Used to waltz," said Hughie cautiously.

"Decently?"

"I can get round a room."

"Can you reverse properly?"

"If a man reversed in my young days," said Hughie, "we used to regard him as a bounder. Do they do it now?"

"Yes, always. Can you do anything else?"

"The usual things—Lancers and polka. Danced a reel once in Scotland."

"Nobody dances the polka now, and I hate the Lancers. Can you two-step?"

"Never even heard of it."

Miss Gaymer sighed.

"Never heard of the Boston, I suppose?" she said resignedly.

"Never in my life," said Hughie. "Look here," he added, inspired by a sudden hope, "perhaps it would be as well if I stayed at home on Tuesday night—eh?"

"*Quite* as well," said Miss Gaymer candidly. "But I don't suppose Mildred will let you off. You'll be wanted by the wallflowers."

"But not by Joey, apparently." [pg 21

"I don't dance with rotters," said Miss Gaymer elegantly. "I am practically booked up already, too. However, if you apply at once I might give you *one*." She thought for a moment. "I'll try you with number eight."

"We had better not settle at present," said Hughie. "I should like to have a look round the ballroom before I tie myself down in any way. But I'll bear your application in mind."

Miss Joan Gaymer turned and regarded her companion with unfeigned astonishment. He was still sprawling, but his indolent pose of lazy contentment was gone, and for a moment challenge peeped out of his steely eyes. She rose deliberately from the grass, and walked with great stateliness back to the croquet-lawn.

Hughie sat on, feeling slightly breathless. He had just realised that he possessed a temper.

Presently Mrs. Leroy completed a sequence of five hoops and retired, followed by the applause of an incompetent partner, to the copper-beech.

She sat down opposite Hughie, and surveyed him expectantly.

"Well, Hughie?" she said.

"Well, Mildred?"

"*Well*, Hughie?"

"I think," said Hughie, answering the unspoken question, "that she wants—*slapping*!"

Mildred Leroy nodded her head sagely. [pg 21

"Ah!" she remarked. "I thought you would say that. Well, I hope you'll do it."

Hughie reviewed the events of the day, *more suo*, at three o'clock next morning, sitting with his feet on the sill of his open bedroom window,—the bedroom of his boyhood, with the old school and 'Varsity groups upon the walls,—as he smoked a final pipe before retiring to rest.

It was almost dawn. The velvety darkness was growing lighter in texture; and occasionally an early-rising and energetic young bird would utter a tentative chirrup—only to subside, on meeting with no encouragement from the other members of the orchestra (probably trades unionists), until a more seasonable hour.

Hughie had sat on with D'Arcy and Leroy in the billiard-room long after the other men—Joey's *clientèle*—had emptied their glasses and gone to bed. There had been a "ladies' night," accompanied by fearsome games (of a character detrimental to the table) between sides captained by Joey and another damsel; and even after Mildred Leroy had swept her charges upstairs there had been bear-fighting and much shrieking in the passages and up the staircase. Then the younger gentlemen had returned, rumpled but victorious, to quench their thirst and listen with respectful [pg 22
deference to any tale that the great Marrable might care to unfold. (The story of the Orinoco had gone round, though it had mercifully escaped the notice of the halfpenny papers.)

But Hughie had not been communicative, though he had proved an eager and appreciative listener to 'Varsity gossip and athletic "shop." So the young men, having talked themselves to a standstill, had gradually faded away, highly gratified to find the great man not only willing but eager to listen to their meticulous chronicles; and Hughie and D'Arcy and Leroy, their symposium reduced to companionable limits, had compared notes and "swapped lies," as the Americans say, far into the night.

Hughie's impressions of the day were slightly blurred and confused—at the which let no man wonder. He was accustomed to fresh faces and new environments, but the plunge from yesterday into to-day had been a trifle sudden. Last night he had driven up to the door of Manors a masterless man, a superior vagabond, an irresponsible free-lance, with hundreds of acquaintances and never a friend. In twenty-four hours this sense of irresponsible detachment had gone for ever, and the spell of English home-life had sunk deep into his being. He felt for the first time that he was more than a mere unit in the Universe. He had turned from something into somebody. He [pg 22
realised that he had a stake in the country—the county—the little estate of Manors itself; and a great desire was upon him to settle down and surround himself with everything that is conveyed to an Englishman here and abroad—especially abroad—by the word Home.

Then there were the people with whom he had come in contact that day. They were nearly all old friends, but they were old friends with new faces. There was Mildred Leroy, for instance. He had half expected his relations with that young matron, the past considered, to be of a slightly tender and sentimental nature. Far from it. Her attitude to him was simply maternal—as, indeed, it had been, had he realised the fact, from the very beginning of their friendship. A woman always feels motherly towards a man of her own age, and rightly, for she is much older than he is. Occasionally she mistakes this motherly feeling for something else, and marries him—but not often. Obviously Mildred Leroy now regarded Hughie as nothing more than an eligible young *débutant*, the chaperon's natural prey, to be rounded up and paired off with all possible despatch.

Then there was Joey. Twenty-four hours ago he had had no particular views on the subject of his ward, beyond—

(1) The reflection that he would probably find her "rather a bore"; [pg 22

(2) An idle speculation as to whether, if expediency should demand it, he would be able to bring himself to marry her.

Well, twenty-four hours is a long time. He saw now quite clearly that whatever Miss Gaymer's shortcomings might be, a tendency to bore her companions was not one of them; and that if ever the other question should arise, the difficulty would lie, not in bringing himself to marry Joey, but in bringing Joey to marry him.

Like a sensible man, he decided to let things work themselves out in their own way, and went to bed. There he dreamed that Joey, attired in a blue kimono and red slippers, was teaching him to dance the two-step to a tune played by the engines of the Orinoco.

CHAPTER XIII

[pg 22

VARIUM ET MUTABILE

HUGHIE continued during the next few weeks to study the character of the female sex as exemplified by his ward Miss Joan Gaymer, and some facts in natural history were brought to his notice which had not hitherto occurred to him.

In her relations with her male belongings a woman does not expect much. Certainly not justice, nor reason, nor common sense. That which she chiefly desires—so those who know inform us—is admiration, and, if possible, kindness, though the latter is not essential. The one thing she cannot brook is neglect. Attention of some kind she must have. Satisfy her soul with this, and she will remain all you desire her to remain,—*toute femme*,—something for lonely mankind to thank God for. Stint her, and there is a danger that she will drift into the ranks of that rather pathetic third sex, born of higher education and feminine superfluity, which to-day stands apart from its fellow-creatures and loudly proclaims its loathing for the masculinity of man and its contempt for the effeminacy of woman, but which seems so far only to have cast away the rapier of the one without being able to lift or handle the bludgeon of the other.

[pg 22

Not that Miss Joan Gaymer ran any such risk. She was indeed *toute femme*, and stood secure from the prospect of being cut off from her natural provender. Her chief danger was that of a surfeit. She possessed a more than usually healthy appetite for admiration, and there was never wanting a supply of persons—chiefly of her own sex, be it said—to proclaim the fact that in her case the line between appetite and gluttony was very finely drawn indeed. There was some truth, it is to be feared, in the accusation, for Joan was undoubtedly exhibiting symptoms at this time of a species of mental indigestion—what the French call *tête montée* and the Americans "swelled head"—induced by an undiluted diet of worship and homage. Appetite for this sort of thing grows with eating, and Joan, like her mother before her, was beginning to think too much of those who supplied her with the meat her soul loved and too little of those who did not. And as those who did not were chiefly those who had her welfare most nearly at heart, she was deprived for the time being of a good deal of the solid sustenance of real friendship.

She was a curious mixture of worldly wisdom and naïveté, and was frankly interested in herself. She was undisguisedly anxious to know what people thought of her, and made no attempt to conceal her pleasure when she found herself "a success." On the other hand, she presumed a great deal too much on the patience and loyalty of her following. She was always captious, frequently inconsiderate, and, like most young persons who have been respectably brought up, was desperately anxious to be considered rather wicked.

[pg 22

These facts the slow-moving brain of Hughie Marrable absorbed one by one, and he felt vaguely unhappy on the girl's account, though he could not find it in his heart to blame her. Joey, he felt, was merely making full use of her opportunities. Within her small kingdom, and for her brief term, she held authority as absolute as that, say, of a secretary of state, nor was she fettered by any pedantic scruples, such as might have hampered the official in question, about exercising the same; and Hughie, who was something of an autocrat himself, could not but admit that his ward was acting very much, *mutatis mutandis*, as he would have done under similar circumstances.

But as time went on and his sense of perspective adjusted itself, he began to discover signs that beneath all her airs and graces and foam and froth, the old Joey endured. She was a creature of impulse, and her vagaries were more frequently due to the influence of the moment than any desire to pose. She would disappoint a young man of a long-promised *tête-à-tête* on the river, to go and play at shop in a plantation with the under-keeper's children. She would shed tears over harrowing but unconvincing narratives of destitution at the back door. She was kind to plain girls,—which attractive girls sometimes are not,—and servants adored her, which is a good sign of anybody.

[pg 22

She was lavishly generous; indeed, it was never safe for her girl friends to express admiration, however discreet, for anything belonging to her, for she had an embarrassing habit of tearing off articles of attire or adornment and saying, "I'll give it to you!" with the eagerness and sincerity of a child.

And her code of honour was as strict as a schoolboy's—than which no more can be said. A secret was safe with her. She had once promptly and permanently renounced the friendship of a particular crony of her own, who boasted to her, giving names and details, of a proposal of marriage which she had recently refused.

In short, Miss Joan Gaymer strongly resembled the young lady who in times long past was a certain poetical gentleman's Only Joy. She was sometimes forward, sometimes coy,—sometimes, be it added, detestable,—but she never failed to please—or rather, to attract, which is better still. [pg 22

Mrs. Jack Leroy spared neither age nor sex on the night of the Hunt Ball. Her husband, Hughie, and the Reverend Montague D'Arcy—all suffering from that peculiar feeling of languid depression which invariably attacks the male sex about 9.30 P.M. when dancing is in prospect—were hounded into pumps and white gloves, and packed into the omnibus, which, after a drive of seven miles, during which the gentlemen slept furtively and the tongues of Joan and her girl friends wagged unceasingly, deposited the entire party of twelve on the steps of the Town Hall at Midfield.

Their numbers had been completed by some overnight arrivals. The first two were Mr. and Mrs. Lance Gaymer. Joan's only brother had taken upon him the responsibility of matrimony at the early age of twenty-two, and the rather appalling young person who preceded him into the drawing-room, and greeted Joan as "Jowey," was the accessory to the fact. Why or where Lance had married her no one knew. He had sprung her one day, half proudly, half defiantly, upon a family circle at Manors which was for the moment too horror-struck to do anything but gape. Fortunately Uncle Jimmy was not present,—he had departed on his voyage by this time,—and it was left to Joan to welcome the latest addition to the house of Gaymer. This she did very sensibly and prettily, though she wept unrestrainedly upon the sympathetic bosom of Mildred Leroy afterwards. [pg 22

For Lance's sake Mrs. Gaymer was accepted without demur. Whatever she was or had been,—whether she had manipulated a beer-engine or gesticulated in musical comedy,—there she was, and had to be assimilated. No questions were asked, but she was religiously invited to Manors at intervals, and Joan and Mrs. Leroy, when they went up to town in the season, paid occasional state calls upon Mrs. Lance at her residence in Maida Vale, where they drank tea in company with the *alumnæ* of the variety stage and the jug-and-bottle department.

Lance himself was understood to be making a living out of journalism. He looked considerably more than twenty-three.

The third arrival was a Mr. Guy Haliburton, proposed for admission by Mr. Lance Gaymer, seconded by Mrs. Lance Gaymer. He was full of deference, and apologised with graceful humility for his presence. He felt himself a horrible intruder, he said, but he had been assured so earnestly by "old Lance" that Mrs. Leroy was in want of another dancing man, that he had ventured to accept his vicarious invitation and come to Manors. He was made welcome.

Mr. Haliburton, on further acquaintance, described himself as an actor, but Hughie, whose judgments of men—as opposed to women—were seldom wrong, put him down unhesitatingly as a gentleman who lived, actor or no, by his wits. He was a striking-looking personage of about thirty. He had curly black hair and dark eyes, with dangerous eyelashes. He was well dressed,—too well dressed for the country,—and one felt instinctively that he was a good card-player, and probably objected to cold baths and early rising. [pg 22

The Manors party were greeted in the vestibule of the Town Hall by Lady Fludyer, self-appointed Mistress of the Revels. At present she more nearly resembled a well-nourished Niobe.

"My dear," she cried, falling limply upon Mrs. Leroy and kissing her feverishly, "what *do* you think has happened?"

"Band not come?" hazarded Mrs. Leroy.

"Worse! Not a man—not a subaltern—not a drummerboy can get away from Ipsleigh to-night!" (Ipsleigh was a neighbouring military *depôt*, and a fountain-head of eligibility in a barren land.) "They have all been called out to some absurd inspection, or route-march, or manœuvres, or something, at twenty-four hours' notice. And they were coming here in *swarms*! There won't be nearly enough men to go round now. Half the girls will be against the wall all night! Oh, my *dear*, when I get hold of the General—" [pg 23

Lady Fludyer's voice rose to a shriek, and she plunged wailing into a dark doorway, like a train entering a tunnel.

Mrs. Leroy turned to her shrinking cavaliers, with satisfaction in her eye.

"It's as well I brought the lot of you," she said. "Now get to work. Jack, the first waltz with you,

if you please."

The ball was soon in full swing, though it was only too plain that men were somewhat scarce. Hughie, much to his alarm, found his programme full in ten minutes, and presently, bitterly regretting the stokehold of the Orinoco, put forth into the fray with Mrs. Lance Gaymer, having decided to do his duty by that lady as soon as possible, and get it over. She addressed him as "dear boy," and waltzed in a manner which reminded him of the Covent Garden balls of his youth, thereby causing the highest and haughtiest of the county to inquire of their partners who she might be. The word soon passed round that she was the wife of young Gaymer. ("You remember, don't you? Rather an unfortunate marriage, and all that. Barmaid, or something. However, the family have decided to make the best of her. They'll have their hands full—eh?") Whereupon fair [pg 23
women elevated their discreetly powdered noses a little higher, while unregenerate men hurried up, like the Four Young Oysters, all eager for the treat, and furtively petitioned Lance Gaymer to introduce them to his wife.

On entering the ballroom Joan Gaymer, serenely conscious of a perfectly-fitting new frock and her very best tinge of colour, took up her stand at her recognised "pitch" beside the end pillar on the left under the musicians' gallery, and proceeded to fill up the vacancies caused in her programme by the defection of the dancing warriors from Ipsleigh. Among the first applicants for the favour of a waltz was Mr. Guy Haliburton.

"All right—number two," said Joan.

Haliburton wrote it down, and asked for another.

"I'll see how you waltz first," said Miss Gaymer frankly. "Then—perhaps! I am rather particular."

The music had risen to her brain like wine, and she was in what her admirers would have called her most regal, and her detractors her most objectionable, mood. Mr. Haliburton, however, merely bowed reverentially, and made way for an avalanche of Binkses and Cherubs, with whom [pg 23
Joan, babbling at the top of her voice and enjoying every moment of her triumph, booked a list of fixtures that stretched away far into to-morrow morning.

The waltz with the fascinating Haliburton proved so satisfactory,—in point of fact, he was easily the best dancer in the room,—that Joan immediately granted him two more. It was characteristic of her that she declined to take the floor again until the unfortunate gentlemen at whose expense Haliburton was being honoured had been found, brought to her, and apprised of their fate. They protested feebly, but Joan swept them aside in a fashion with which they were only too familiar.

"Run way, chicks," she said maternally, "and get fresh partners. There are heaps of nice girls to spare to-night. Look at that little thing over there, with the blue eyes, and forget-me-nots in her hair. Get introduced to her—she's perfectly *lovely*. Worth six of me, any day. Trot!"

But the two young men, refusing to be comforted, growled sulkily and elbowed their way outside, to console each other for the fragility of petticoat promises, and fortify themselves against any further slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune of a similar nature, in the refreshment room.

Still, the girl to whom Joan had directed their attention was well worth notice. She stood near [pg 23
the door, a slim, graceful, and somehow rather appealing little figure. Her hair was the colour of ripe corn, her eyes, wide and wondering, were as blue as the forget-me-nots in her hair, and her lips, to quote King Solomon upon a very different type of female, were like a thread of scarlet. She wore a simple white frock, and carried in her hand the bouquet of the *débutante*.

Joan swung past her in the embrace of the ever-faithful Binks.

"That child is a perfect dream," she said to herself, "but her mouth is trembling at the corners. I wonder if some man has forgotten to ask her to dance. I should think—"

At this point in her reflections she was whirled heavily into the orbit of a reversing couple, and the ensuing collision, together with the enjoyment of exacting a grovelling apology from the hapless Binks (who was in no way responsible for the accident), drove further cogitations on the subject of the girl with the forget-me-nots out of her head.

About midnight Joan slipped upstairs to what her last partner—a mechanically-minded young gentleman from Woolwich—described as the repairing shop, to make good the ravages effected by the Lancers as danced in high society in the present year of grace.

The music for the next waltz was just beginning when she returned to her pillar. No eager partner awaited her, which was unusual; and Joan glanced at her programme. She bit her lip. [pg 23

"Number eight," she said to herself. "Joey, my child, he has scored you off—and you deserve it!"

This cryptic utterance had reference to Mr. Hugh Marrable, to whom it may be remembered this particular dance had been offered, much as a bone is thrown to a dog, on the lawn at Manors three days before.

Hughie's subsequent demeanour had piqued his ward's curiosity. He had made no further reference to number eight, neither had he made any attempt during this evening to come up and confirm the fixture. In fact, he had not asked Joan for a dance at all, with the consequence that Miss Gaymer, who, serenely confident that her guardian would come and eat humble pie at the last moment, had kept number eight free, now found herself occupying the rather unusual *rôle* of wallflower. What was more, she knew she would be unable to pick up a partner, for every available man was being worked to the last ounce, and pretty girls still sat here and there about the room, chatting with chaperons and maintaining a brave appearance of enjoyment and *insouciance*.

"I'm not going to let Hughie see me propping a wall *this* dance," said Joan to herself with decision. "He would think I had been keeping it for him. What shall I do? Go back to the cloakroom? No; it is always full of girls without partners pretending they've just dropped in to get sewn up. I'll go to the Mayor's parlour and sit there. It's never used at these dances." [pg 23

Making a mental entry on the debit side of her missing partner's ledger, Miss Gaymer retired unostentatiously from the ballroom, and turned down an unlighted passage, which was blocked by a heavy screen marked "Private," and encumbered with rolls of carpet and superfluous furniture.

The darkened passage was comfortably cool and peaceful after the blaze and turmoil of the field of action, and apparently had not been discovered by couples in search of seclusion. Joan was approaching the end, where she knew the door of the Mayor's parlour was situated, when she became aware of a certain subdued sound quite near her. It was a sound well calculated to catch the ear of one so tender-hearted as herself. Some one was sobbing, very wretchedly, in the darkness within a few feet of her.

Joan stopped short, a little frightened, and peered about her. Her eyes were growing accustomed to the gloom, and presently she beheld a glimmer of white almost at her knee. The glimmer outlined itself into the form of a filmy ball-dress.

Joan tackled the situation with her usual promptitude. [pg 23

"I say," she said, "what's the matter? Let me help you."

The sobbing ceased, and the white figure sat up with a start.

"If you don't mind," continued Joan, "I'm going to turn up this electric light."

There was a click, and the rays of a single and rather dusty incandescent lamp illuminated the scene, and with it the slender figure, seated forlornly on a roll of red carpet, of the little lady of the forget-me-nots.

Her face was flushed with sudden shame, for her shoulders were still heaving, and her cheeks glistened with tears, the which she dabbed confusedly with a totally inadequate scrap of pocket handkerchief.

Joan, regardless of her new frock, was down upon the dusty roll of carpet in a moment. She put her arm round the girl.

"My dear," she said authoritatively, "what is it? Tell me."

The girl told her. It was a simple story, and not altogether a novel one, but it contained the elements of tragedy for all that.

This was her coming-out ball. She pointed to her discarded bouquet lying on the grimy floor. Her father had put it into her hand, and hung a little enamel pendant round her neck, and given her a kiss,—she told her story with all a child's fidelity to detail,—and had despatched her in her brother's charge, with admonitions not to break too many hearts, on the long fourteen-mile drive to Midfield,—a period occupied in ecstatic anticipations of the event to which she had been looking forward ever since she had put her hair up. [pg 23

Her brother, on their arrival, had booked one dance with her,—subsequently cancelled with many apologies on the ground that he had just met a girl whom he simply *must* dance with,—and introduced her to two young men whose programmes were already full; after which he had plunged into the crowd, comfortably conscious that his duty had been done, leaving his sister to

stand, smiling bravely, with tingling feet and her heart in her throat, from half-past nine until a quarter-past twelve. The music was pulsing in her ears, youth and laughter were swinging easily past her—even brushing her skirt; and she was utterly and absolutely alone. She was just eighteen; she was the prettiest girl (with the possible exception of Joan Gaymer) in the room; it was her first ball—and not a man had asked her to dance. A small matter, perhaps, compared with some, but men have blown out their brains for less.

Long before she had sobbed out all her pitiful little narrative her head was on Joan's shoulder, and that mercurial young person, oblivious of everything save the fact that here was a sister in distress, was handling the situation as if she were twenty years her companion's senior instead of two. [pg 23

"I stood it for nearly three hours," said the girl apologetically, "and then I—I came here."

"Well, my dear," said Joan with decision, "you aren't going to stay here any longer. You are coming straight back to the ballroom with me."

"I can't," replied the girl,—"I couldn't *bear* it!"

"You are coming back to the ballroom with me," repeated Miss Gaymer firmly. "There are sixteen dances to go yet, and you are going to dance the soles of your slippers through, my child!"

"You are awfully kind," said the girl wistfully, "but you won't be able to find me a partner now."

"I can find you sixteen," said Joan.

The child turned wondering eyes on her, and asked a question.

"Me? Oh, I shall have a rest: I want one," replied Miss Gaymer, *splendide mendax*. "In fact, it will be a charity on your part to take them. They're all stupid, and they can't dance."

But the girl shook her head. [pg 23

"You're a dear to suggest it," she said, "but it wouldn't do. Think how angry they would be, having booked a dance with Miss Gaymer, and only getting—"

"Do you know me?" asked Joan in surprise.

"Everybody knows you," said the girl.

Joan flushed rosily. It was a compliment after her own heart.

"I say, what's *your* name?" she asked.

"Sylvia Tarrant."

Joan nodded. "I know now," she said. "You live near Gainford."

The Tarrants were new-comers. Sylvia's father was a retired sailor and a widower, and had but lately settled in the district, which would account for his daughter's want of acquaintance.

"Yes," said Sylvia. "But really, I could not take your partners. They'd be furious at getting me instead of you."

Miss Gaymer turned and scrutinised the face and figure beside her.

"All you want, my child," she said, "is a *start*. After to-night you'll never be left alone for two seconds at any ball you care to go to. In fact, I don't see how I shall ever be able to get any partners at all," she added plaintively.

At this idea the girl laughed and looked happier, which was just exactly what Joan meant her to do. Her spirit was returning. [pg 24

Joan rose briskly.

"Now, Sylvia," she said, "I'm going to leave you for two minutes, because I want to find a man to send round and tell all my partners that you've agreed to take them on. Then I'll come back and get you started. Just put yourself straight. There's a loose end of hair here: I'll roll it up. There! Your eyes are getting better every minute. Give your skirt a shake out, and have a look at yourself

in that mirror, and you'll be simply perfect. So long!"

"There's somebody coming," said Sylvia, turning from her toilet and looking over her shoulder.

A masculine form filled the passage. It was Hughie, who, deprived of a partner through Joan's absence,—the result of standing on his dignity in the matter of number eight,—was prowling about in search of a quiet spot where he might indulge in the luxury of a pipe.

Joan, who had forgotten all about number eight, received him with unfeigned pleasure, and hurried him back whence he came. On the way she breathlessly explained the situation to him.

"Hughie, that poor child has come here not knowing a soul, and has stood against the wall for three hours. There isn't a partner to be had for love or money at this hour, so she must just have [pg 24
mine. Take my programme—wait a minute, I'll fill in some of these initials—and go round to all the men whose names are on it, and tell them I'm very sorry but I've got a headache and can't dance any more to-night, but they're to come to me at once at my pillar and be introduced to a substitute I've provided for them."

"Do you think they'll exactly—*jump* at the idea of a substitute?" suggested Hughie mildly.

"Their business," said Miss Gaymer with a sudden return to her usual manner, "is to do what I tell them! Run, Hughie. Don't say a word about the poor kid not having been able to get partners, will you? Say she came late—anything! You understand?"

Hughie nodded.

"I understand," he said. "She came late, and you have a headache. Those are the two essential facts of the case—eh?"

"Yes. Hurry!" said Joan, giving her guardian a push.

"Joey," said Hughie, "you're a brick!"

Half an hour later the members of the Midfield Hunt Ball were electrified to behold Miss Joan Gaymer sitting between two comatose and famished chaperons, watching the dancers with indulgent eye, and generally presenting the appearance of one whose time for these follies is overpast.

Then heads began to turn in another direction. People were asking one another who the little [pg 24
thing with the forget-me-nots might be, who danced like a fairy, and appeared to have made a "corner" in all Miss Gaymer's usual admirers. Had her appearance anything to do with Miss Gaymer's retirement? A case of pique—eh? Heads wagged sagely, and eyebrows were elevated. Poor Joan! Like all the great ones of the earth, she had her detractors.

Sylvia herself was lost in the clouds by this time. When not engaged in obeying Joan's mandate to dance the soles of her slippers through, she was granting interviews to obsequious young men, who surged round in respectful platoons and hoped that, though disappointed on this occasion, they might have the pleasure at the County Bachelors' on Thursday fortnight.

Never was there such a triumph. The girl, radiant and fluttering, smiled and blushed and wrote down hopeless hieroglyphics on the back of her programme, while Miss Joan Gaymer, the deposed, the eclipsed, sat contentedly by and realised to the full the truth of her own dictum that all Sylvia Tarrant wanted was a start.

Later in the evening the watchful eye of Hughie Marrable detected the fact that Joan had disappeared from amid the concourse of matrons, and he speculated as to where she might be. He [pg 24
himself was enjoying a brief period of freedom, his partner for the moment having pleaded urgent private repairs and vanished to the regions above, and the idea had struck him that Joan might be going supperless.

A brief scrutiny informed him that she was neither in the ballroom nor the supper-room. Then an inspiration seized him. Waiting for a comparatively quiet moment, he paid a hasty visit to the latter apartment, and having levied a contribution upon the side-table, slipped furtively round the big screen and down the dark passage.

His instincts had not failed him. Miss Joan Gaymer was sitting peacefully upon the roll of red carpet. Her head was lying back against the wall, and the rays of the dusty electric light glinted upon her coppery hair. Her eyes were closed, but she opened them at Hughie's approach, blinking like a sleepy Dryad.

"Hallo, Hughie!" she observed. "You nearly won a pair of gloves that time. Long evening, this!"

Hughie began to deposit articles on the floor.

"Supper," he observed briefly.

He laid out a plate of mayonnaise, another of trifle, a bottle about half-full of champagne, and a tumbler.

"Hughie," said Joan, "you're the only real friend I have in the world! I was nearly *crying* for [pg 24
something to eat. That, and seeing other people dance and not me. Hughie, it was simply awful! I had no idea: if I had sat there much longer I should have burst into tears. I'd forgotten, too, that by giving away all my partners I was giving away my supper. If I'd remembered I would have kept just one—a little one. But never mind, now: the plague is stayed. I owe you one for this. How did you manage to carry all those things?"

"Large hands," said Hughie. "Half a minute!"

He produced from his tail-pocket two forks, a napkin, and a bottle of soda-water.

"I remembered you liked your drink diluted," he said, pouring out both bottles at once. "I noticed it at dinner, the other night."

"Hughie, you're a dear!" said Joan impulsively.

"Say when!" remarked Hughie unsteadily.

It was five o'clock in the morning. The band had played "Whisper and I shall hear," followed by "John Peel," followed by "God save the King," followed by "John Peel," once more, followed by "God save the King" again, and the musicians were now putting away their instruments with an air of finality which intimated that in their humble opinion the Midfield Hunt Ball had had its money's [pg 24
worth.

The Manors party, all twelve of them, were being scientifically packed into an omnibus constructed to seat ten uncomfortably, and Joan was waiting her turn in the portico. At this moment Sylvia Tarrant, followed by a slightly sheepish brother, came down the steps. Her cheeks were excessively pink and her eyes blazed.

She saw Joan, and stopped.

"I was afraid I was going to miss you," she said. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Joan.

The little girl—she was a head shorter than Joan—placed her hands upon her new friend's shoulders, and stood on tiptoe.

"I should like to kiss you," she said shyly.

"Oh, my dear!" said Joan, quite flustered. "Of course—if you like. There!"

She was unusually silent all the way home, and when they reached Manors said good-night to Mrs. Leroy and flitted upstairs to her room. The rest of the party dispersed ten minutes later, and Hughie was left alone with his host and hostess.

"I have never known that child have a headache before," said Mrs. Leroy rather anxiously, as Hughie lighted her candle. "I hope there's nothing wrong."

"She's as right as rain," said Hughie. "She gave up all her partners—every man Jack of them—I [pg 24

mean—I'm sorry! I don't think she meant me to tell—"

"You may as well finish now," said Mrs. Leroy composedly.

Hughie did so. Mrs. Leroy nodded.

"It was like her," she said softly, "especially telling you to keep quiet about it. A good many women might have given up their dances, but very few could have resisted the temptation to make capital out of their generosity. Never tell me again, miserable creature," she continued, turning suddenly upon her comatose spouse, "that a woman is incapable of doing a good turn to another woman!"

"Cert'nly, m'dear," replied Captain Leroy, making a desperate effort to close his mouth and open his eyes.

"But of course," broke in Hughie unexpectedly, "there are precious few women like Joey."

Then he bit his lip, and turned a dusky red.

Mrs. Leroy, being a woman, took no outward notice, but her husband, who was a plain creature, turned and regarded his guest with undisguised interest.

"What *ho*!" he remarked, wagging his sleepy head.

"Good-night, old man!" said Hughie hurriedly.

CHAPTER XIV

[pg 24

BUSINESS ONLY

NEXT morning Hughie made Miss Joan Gaymer a proposal of marriage.

It was not an impressive effort—very few proposals are. But a performance of this kind may miss the mark as a spectacle and yet, by the indulgence of the principal spectator, achieve its end. Even thus Hughie failed, and for various reasons.

In the first place, he proposed directly after breakfast, which, as Joey pathetically observed to Mrs. Leroy long afterwards, was just the sort of brutal thing he would do. A woman, especially if she be young, likes to be won, or at any rate wooed, in a certain style. A secluded spot, subdued light, mayhap a moon; if possible, distant music—all these things tell. If Hughie had paid a little more attention to stage-effects of this kind he might have found his ward more amenable. Being a Marrable, he brushed aside these trappings and came straight to what he fondly imagined was the point, little knowing that to a young girl romance and courtship make up one great and glorious vista, filling the eye and occupying the entire landscape, while marriage is a small black cloud on the distant horizon.

[pg 24

His actual method of procedure was to sit heavily down beside his ward as she enjoyed the morning sun in a corner of the lawn, and say,—

"Joey, I want to talk to you—on business."

"All right, warder," replied Miss Gaymer meekly; "fire away!"

"I suppose you know," said Hughie, a little dashed, "that all your affairs have been left in my hands?"

"I do, worse luck!" said Miss Gaymer frankly. "And that reminds me, Hughie dear, I should like a trifle on account. You won't refuse poor Joey, will you?"

She squeezed her guardian's arm in a manner which a Frenchman would have described as *très câline*.

"I think I had better put you on an allowance," said Hughie.

Joan's eyes danced.

"Oh, you *ripper*! How much?"

"Can't say," replied Hughie, "until I've been up to town and seen the bankers."

"When are you going?"

"To-morrow: that's why I wanted to talk to you to-day. You see, your money is in two parts, so to speak. One lot is tied up in such a way that it can't be touched until poor Uncle Jimmy's death is actually proved." [pg 24

Joan's blue-grey eyes were troubled.

"Hughie," she said, "is there *any* hope? I still like to think so."

Hughie shook his head. "Not much," he said. "In fact, none. It is known that he went with that crack-brained expedition of Hymack's up the Congo,—to study the Rubber Question on the spot,—and the last letter he sent home said that he was suffering from black-water fever, and it is also known that the expedition came back without him. And—all that was two years ago, Joey."

Joan nodded her head submissively.

"Poor Uncle Jimmy!" she said softly.

"Still," continued Hughie stoutly, "you never know. I have sent a man out to make inquiries, and if he fails, perhaps I shall go myself. But until we learn something definite the will can't be proved. However, he left me very full instructions what to do in case he did not come back, so I must carry them out. There is plenty for you to go on with. I shall run up to town to-morrow, and when I come back I'll let you know how much it is, and how much a year I can allow you."

Miss Gaymer clasped her hands and sighed happily.

"We *will* have a time, Hughie!" she said. "I'll stand treat."

"Thank you," said Hughie gravely. [pg 25

There was a long silence. Hughie, suddenly ill at ease,—he had arrived at Part Two of his morning's syllabus,—made fatuous attempts to roll a cigarette. His ward sat with a rapt expression in her widely-opened eyes, mentally visualising a series of charitable enterprises (ranging from a turquoise pendant for Mildred Leroy to a new cap for the cook) made feasible by the sudden prospect of wealth.

Presently Hughie cleared his throat in a heart-rending manner, and said, in what he afterwards admitted to himself was entirely the wrong sort of voice,—

"Joey, I think you and I had better marry one another."

Miss Gaymer, who was more used to this sort of thing than her companion, turned and eyed him calmly.

"And why?" she asked.

There was only one possible answer to this question, and Hughie should have given it with the full strength of his heart and soul and body. But—well, reserve is a curious and paralysing thing. All he said was,—

"I think it would be very suitable; don't you?"

"For you or for me?" inquired Miss Gaymer.

"For both of us," replied Hughie. "No—for me!" he added, his habitual modesty getting the better of him. [pg 25

"In what way?" continued Miss Gaymer, with unnatural calm.

"Well—Uncle Jimmy was very keen about it," said Hughie desperately.

"You're a dutiful nephew, Hughie," observed Joan approvingly.

"And then," continued the suitor, "as I have been made your guardian, and all that, I think I am in a position to take care of you, and look after your money, and so on."

"You mean it would make it easier for you to manage my affairs?" said Miss Gaymer helpfully.

"Yes," said Hughie, feeling that he was getting on.

"Any more reasons?" inquired Miss Gaymer, with a docile appearance of intelligent interest.

Hughie made an immense effort, and grasped his chair until the veins stood out on his hands. *Parturiunt montes*—at last.

"Well, Joey," he said at last, "we have always been pals, and all that. I mean, we have known each other for a long time now, haven't we? You even offered to marry me once,"—he laughed nervously,—"when you were a kiddie. Do you remember? It seems to me we should get on first-rate together—eh? What's your opinion?"

Ridiculus mus!

Miss Gaymer sat up in her chair, and turned upon the unfortunate young man beside her. [pg 25

"And you *dare*," she said, "to come to a girl like me with a proposal like that! You sit there and tell me that you have taken me over from Uncle Jimmy like a—like a parcel from a porter, and that you have been saddled with my money and affairs, so perhaps it would be simplest and save trouble if you married me! *Me!*" she repeated, "who have to keep men off with a stick!"

The last sentence was a mistake. It was an inartistic and egotistical climax to a perfectly justifiable tirade. Joan realised the fact the moment she had uttered the words, but poor Hughie was too much occupied in retiring into his shell to notice anything. He had laid bare his heart, in his own fashion, for the first time in his life, and this was the result. Never again! He burned inwardly, like a child who has been laughed at by grown-ups.

"I'm sorry," he said stiffly. "My mistake! Shan't occur again."

Joey's ear was caught by the tone of his voice, and conscience gave her a twinge. She patted Hughie's arm in a friendly way.

"Old boy," she said, suddenly contrite, "I've made you angry, and I've hurt you. I'm sowwy—sorry, I mean! (I'm a bit upset, you see)," she said, smiling disarmingly. "But I *can't* marry you, [pg 25
really. I couldn't *bear* to be married at all at present. It seems so—so unnecessary. I don't see what I should get out of it. That's a selfish thing to say, I suppose, but I'll try to explain a girl's point of view to you. You're a terrible child in some respects, so I'll do it quite simply."

She stroked his sleeve in a motherly fashion, and continued:—

"Years ago, my dear, the only way a girl could get her freedom or any male society was by marrying. Now, she gets as much of both as she wants, and if she marries she loses all the freedom and most of the male society. So why should she marry at all?"

Hughie kept silence before this poser. He felt incapable of plunging into the depths of an argument: one has to keep to the surface in discussing these matters with a maiden of twenty.

"So I shan't marry for years, if at all," continued Miss Gaymer, with the air of one propounding an entirely new theory. "Not until I'm getting *passée* at any rate, and only then if I could find a man whom it wouldn't give me the creeps to think of spending the rest of my life with. Besides, the moment one gets engaged all the other men drop off,—all the nice ones, at any rate,—and that would never do. Don't you think my system is a sensible one?"

"It comes hard on the men," said Hughie.

"Yes, poor dears!" said Miss Gaymer sympathetically. "Still, one man is so tiresome and a lot is [pg 25
so nice!"

With which concise and not unmasterly summary of the marriage question, as viewed through the eyes of the modern maiden, Miss Gaymer turned the conversation into other channels, and the idyll terminated.

Half an hour later they were called into the house, to make ready for a boating expedition.

Joan, with her usual frankness, reverted for a moment before they left the seclusion of the trees to the topic that was uppermost in their minds.

"Hughie," she said softly, "does it hurt much?"

"I don't quite know yet," said Hughie.

"I mean, are you sad or angry—which? It usually takes a man one way or the other," observed this experienced damsel.

"I don't know that I'm either," said Hughie meditatively; "the only feeling that I have just now is that I'm desperately sorry. But I'm not kicking."

"It is my belief," remarked Miss Gaymer with sudden and pardonable asperity, "that you don't care for me in the least. Do you, now?"

They were a very honest and sincere couple, these. For a full minute they looked each other in the face, without speaking. Then Hughie said,— [pg 25

"Joey, I simply don't know! I thought I did half an hour ago, and I'd have sworn it last night, when—"

He checked himself.

"When what?" asked Joan swiftly.

"Nothing," said Hughie. "That's rather beside the point now, isn't it?"

Joan, curiosity struggling with honesty, nodded reluctantly.

"Anyhow," continued Hughie, "I thought I did then, but I'm blessed if I know now. In fact," he added in a sudden burst of confidence, "sometimes I can't stand you at any price, Joey dear!"

"Ah!" said Miss Gaymer, nodding a wise head, "I see you don't know your own mind yet. But you *will*—one way or another—as soon as you get away from me."

A week later another interview took place between the pair, on the same spot.

"Business only this time, Joey!" said Hughie, with rather laborious cheerfulness.

"All right. Did you have a good time in town?" inquired Miss Gaymer, in the inevitable manner of women and Orientals, who dislike coming to the point in matters of business without a few decent preliminaries.

"Yes, thanks. I have been picking up old friends again, and generally settling down," said Hughie. "Got a flat, and a comic man-servant—Scotchman—introduce you some day. He—" [pg 25

He plunged into a rather rambling description of John Alexander Goble. He was evidently no more anxious to get to business than Joan.

At last Miss Gaymer inquired,—

"Well, Hughie, have you fixed up my affairs?"

"Yes," said Hughie slowly. "Do you want details?"

"Mercy, no! I don't know anything about business, and I don't believe you do either, Hughie. *Do* you?"

"Not much," confessed the trustee. "However, I must tell you at once, Joey, that your income won't be nearly as large as I expected—"

"Right O!" replied Joan cheerfully. "When do I start for the workhouse?"

"It's not quite so bad as that," said Hughie, "but—"

"What am I worth?" inquired the practical Miss Gaymer.

"I can't quite tell you," said Hughie in a hesitating fashion. "You see"—he appeared to be choosing his words rather carefully—"the nominal value of investments, and their actual cash equivalent—"

Joan put her fingers in her ears. [pg 25

"Stop!" she cried, "or I shall scream! I don't know an asset from a liability, except that in the arithmetic book brokerage is one-eighth, and—Never mind! I should never understand. How much am I to have a year? Tell me that."

"Supposing it should be a mere trifle," said Hughie slowly, "what would you do?"

Miss Gaymer puckered her brow thoughtfully.

"You mean, if I hadn't enough to live on?"

Hughie nodded.

"Well, I shouldn't be a governess, I don't think. I love children, but children are always perfectly diabolical to their governess, and I shouldn't be able to stand their mothers, either. No: governesses are off! I shouldn't mind being a typewriter, though, or a secretary,—not that I can typewrite, or even spell,—provided it was to a really nice man. An author, you know, or a Cabinet Minister. He could walk about the room, rumpling up his hair and getting the stuff off his chest, and I would sit there like a little mouse, in a neat black skirt and a white silk blouse,—*perhaps* one or two carnations pinned on,—looking very sweet and taking it all down."

"It's a pretty picture," said Hughie drily.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Miss Gaymer, with genuine enthusiasm. "I think," she continued, soaring to still greater heights, "that I should like to go on the stage best of all. Of course, it wouldn't be the [pg 25
slightest good my going on the proper stage—learning parts, and all that; but a piece like 'The Merry Widow,' with different frocks for each act and just a few choruses to sing in, would be top-hole! *Say* I'm a pauper, Hughie!"

"You're not—thank God!" was Hughie's brutal but earnest response.

"All right, then! Don't bite my head off!" said Miss Gaymer, with unimpaired good temper. "Let us resume. How much are you going to give me?"

"How much can you live on?"

"Well, I was talking about it to Ursula Harbord—you know her, don't you?"

"I do," said Hughie, making a wry face.

"Very well, don't abuse her. She's the cleverest girl I know," said Joan warmly. "She is on the staff of 'The New Woman,' and can put a man in his place in about two minutes."

"So I discovered," said Hughie resignedly. "Popular type of girl. However, you were saying—?"

"I was asking Ursula," continued Joan, "about the cost of living in town, and so on, and we agreed to share a flat. She said I could get along on three hundred a-year."

Joan paused expectantly, and waited for an answer to her unspoken question.

"That," said Hughie, after hesitating a moment as if to work out a sum in mental arithmetic, "is [pg 25
just what I can give you."

A pair of Archdiaconal shoe-buckles, the glimmer of a lady's white evening wrap, and a glowing cigar-end were discernible in the half-light of the verandah outside the drawing-room window after

dinner. Two Olympians, to whom human hearts were as an open book, were discussing mortal affairs.

"Is there no way of bringing it off?" inquired one voice.

"Lots," replied the other. "But they have so bungled things between them that we shall have to go slow for a bit. Why, oh, why do men whom you could trust to do almost *anything* in the ordinary way always make such a mess of their love-affairs? Why aren't *you* married, for instance, Mr. D'Arcy?"

"To return to the point," said the reverend gentleman evasively, "what ought Hughie to do? Take her by the shoulders and shake her? I have known such a method prove most efficacious," he added, rather incautiously.

"N-no," said Mrs. Leroy, "I don't think so—not in Joey's case. It would bring some women to reason—most women, in fact—in no time. But the child is too high-spirited. Her pride would never forgive such treatment. A better way would be for him to make love to some one else." [pg 26

"Being Hughie, that is out of the question. He could only make love to some one else if he meant it; and that would rather defeat your object, Mrs. Leroy."

"*My* object?"

"Well, ours, then. But is there no other way?"

"Yes. He must get into trouble of some kind. At present he is too popular: everybody likes him. If they turned against him she would come round fast enough. Yes, he must get into *trouble*."

"Well, perhaps he will," said the Venerable the Archdeacon hopefully.

BOOK FOUR [pg 26

THE UNJUST STEWARD

CHAPTER XV [pg 26

DEPUTATIONS—WITH A DIFFERENCE

HUGHIE let himself into his chambers in Jermyn Street, and rang the bell of his sitting-room. It was a comfortable bachelor apartment, with sporting trophies on the walls, cavernous arm-chairs round the fireplace, and plenty of pipes dotted about the mantelpiece.

It was eleven o'clock on a fine morning in March, and Hughie had been to Putney to stroke a scratch eight against the Cambridge crew, who had rowed a full trial on the early flood and required a little pacing between bridges.

Presently the sitting-room door opened, and John Alexander Goble presented himself upon the threshold. Since his unregenerate days on board the Orinoco a new and awful respectability had descended upon him, and in his sober menial attire he looked more like a Calvinistic divine than ever. He regarded his employer with some displeasure.

"Your breakfast has been sitting in the fender these twa hours," he observed bitterly.

"Sorry, John. Afraid I forgot to countermand it. I had some at Putney."

"At what hour?" inquired the inexorable Mr. Goble. [pg 26

"Half-past seven, about, with the crew."

"It's eleven the noo. You'll be able for some mair, I doot. Forbye it's a pity to waste good food. Bide you, while I'll get it."

Hughie, who was as wax in the hands of his retainer, presently found himself partaking of a lukewarm collation and opening his letters.

He glanced through the first.

"John!" he called.

Mr. Goble appeared from the bedroom.

"Were you cryin' on me?" he inquired.

"Yes. Did two gentlemen call here at ten?"

"Aye."

"Who were they?"

"Yon felly Gaymer, and anither."

"Who was he?"

"I couldna say."

"What was he like?"

Mr. Goble cast about him for a suitable comparison.

"He was just a long drink o' watter," he announced at last, with an air of finality.

"Did he look—like an actor?" inquired Hughie, with a flash of intuition.

"Worse than that," replied Goble.

"Um—I think I know him. Thank you, that will do. By the way, I'm expecting some friends to lunch. Captain and Mrs. Leroy—and Mr. D'Arcy. You know him, don't you?" [pg 26

"D'Arcy? Aye, I mind him fine. A fat yin, wi' a lum hat tied up wi' string. A popish-lookin' body," commented Mr. Goble sorrowfully.

He retired downstairs, to ponder upon the dubiety of the company into which his employer appeared to be drifting, and Hughie returned to his letters.

The sight of the next caused him to glow suddenly, for on the back of the envelope he observed the address of Joan's flat. But he cooled when he turned it round and read the superscription. It was in the handwriting of the lady with whom Joan shared the flat.

"Dear Mr. Marrable [it said],—

"Joan and I are coming to call on you to-morrow about twelve—"

"They'd better stay to lunch." Hughie touched the bell and continued,—

"Dear Joan is very young in some ways, and she has no idea of the value of money; but since talking the matter over with *me* recently, she would like to have a few words with you about her financial position.

"How delightful to see the leaves coming out again!—Believe me, yours sincerely,

"Ursula Harbord."

"'Dear Joan would like'—*would* she?" commented Hughie. "I'm afraid it's Ursula Harbord I'm [pg 26

going to have the few words with, though. Hades!"

He rose and crossed the room to the fireplace, where he kicked the coals with unnecessary violence. Then he sighed heavily, and picked up a photograph which stood upon the mantelpiece.

Joan had spoken nothing but the truth when she told Hughie that he would discover his true feelings as soon as he found himself away from her. For six or eight months he had gone about his day's work with the thoroughness and determination of his nature. He had administered the little estate of Manors, was beginning to dabble in politics, had taken up rowing again, and was trying to interest himself generally in the course of life to which he had looked forward so eagerly on his travels. He had even tried conclusions with a few *débutantes* who had been introduced to his notice by business-like Mammas. But whatever his course of life, his thoughts and desires persisted in centring round a single object,—a very disturbing and elusive object,—and try as he would, he failed to derive either pleasure or profit from his present existence.

In other words, he had made a mess of a love-affair.

Most men—and most women too, for that matter—undergo this experience at least once in their lives, and no two ever endure it in the same way. One rants, another mopes, a third forgets, a fourth bides his time, a fifth seeks consolation elsewhere, a sixth buries himself in work or dissipation. Hughie, who cherished a theory that everything ultimately comes right in this world provided you hold on long enough, and that when in doubt a man should "stand by the Day's Work and await instructions," like Kipling's Bridge-Builders, had gone steadily on, because it was his nature so to do. It was uphill work at present,—a mechanical perfunctory business, with no reward or alleviation in sight,—but he was determined to go on doing his duty by Joan to the best of his ability, and combine so far as he was able the incompatible *rôles* of stern guardian, undesired suitor, and—to him most paradoxical of all—familiar friend. [pg 26

For there was no doubt that Joan liked him. She trusted him, consulted him,—yea, obeyed him, even when he contradicted her most preposterous utterances and put down a heavy foot on her most cherished enterprises. For this he did without flinching. The fact that he was a failure as a lover seemed to be no reason why he should fail as a guardian.

Not that Joan submitted readily to his *régime*. To Hughie's essentially masculine mind her changes of attitude were a complete mystery. They seemed to have no logical sequence or connection. She would avoid him or seek him out with equal unexpectedness. She might be hopelessly obstinate or disarmingly docile. One day she would behave like a spoilt child; on another she would be a very grandmother to him. Sometimes she would blaze up and rail against her much-enduring guardian for a tyrant and a monster; at others she would take him under a most maternal wing, and steer him through a garden-party or a reception in a manner which made him feel like a lost child in the hands of a benevolent policeman. On one occasion, which he particularly remembered, she had rounded on him and scolded him for a full half-hour for his stolid immobility and lack of *finesse*; the self-same afternoon he had overheard her hotly defending him against a charge of dulness brought by two frivolous damsels over the tea-table. [pg 26

All this was very perplexing to a man who hated subtlety and liked his friends and foes marked in plain figures. It unsettled his own opinions, too. Joey's variegated behaviour prevented him from deciding in his own mind whether he really liked her or not. At present all he was certain of was that he loved her.

Meanwhile she was coming to see him—about her financial position. That did not promise romance. And Ursula Harbord was coming too. Help! Certainly life was a rotten business at present. And it had been so full and glorious before he had forsaken the wide world and taken to this sort of thing. It might have been so different too, if only— [pg 26

Poor Hughie replaced Joan's photograph, sighed again—and coughed confusedly. A funereal image appeared over his shoulder in the chimney-glass.

"Were you ringin'?" inquired a sepulchral voice.

"Yes, John. Miss Gaymer and a friend of hers are coming to see me this morning. They'll probably stay to lunch. You can clear away that food over there."

He returned to his letters. Only one remained unopened, and proved to be from a man with whom he had arranged to shoot in the autumn.

"This seems to promise a little relief from the present cheery state of affairs," he mused. "Four men on a nice bleak moor, with no women about! Thank God! A hundred pounds a share. Well, Lord knows, trusteeing is an unprofitable business, but I think I can just do it. I'll accept at once."

He began to write a telegram. Bachelors have a habit of conducting their correspondence in this manner.

"Here's they twa whigmalearies," announced Mr. Goble dispassionately. [pg 27

He ushered in Lance Gaymer and the histrionic Mr. Haliburton.

"After compliments," as they say in official circles, Lance came to the point.

"Marrable," he said, after an almost imperceptible exchange of glances with Haliburton, "aren't you keeping my sister rather short of money?"

Hughie turned and stared at him in blank astonishment.

Mr. Haliburton, exuding gentlemanly tact at every pore, rose instantly.

"You two fellows would like to be alone, no doubt," he said. "I must not intrude into family matters. I'll call for you in half an hour, Lance."

Hughie had risen too.

"You need not trouble, Mr. Haliburton," he said. "Lance is coming with you."

Mr. Gaymer was obviously unprepared for such prompt measures as these.

"But look here—I say—what the devil do you mean?" he spluttered.

"I mean," replied Hughie deliberately,—he had realised, almost exultantly, that here once more was a situation which need not be handled with kid gloves,—"that I am your sister's sole trustee and guardian, and that you have nothing whatever to do with the disposition of her property, and —" [pg 27

"I think you forget," said Lance truculently, "that I am her brother."

"I do not forget it," said Hughie. "Neither did Jimmy Marrable. It was no oversight on his part which left Joan's inheritance and yours locked up in separate compartments, so to speak. He gave you an independent income long ago, Lance, because he was particularly anxious to give you no opportunity of interfering with Joan's affairs when the time came. For some reason he had chosen me for the job, and he preferred that I should have a free hand. Therefore I am not going to allow you to cut into my department. I am sorry to have to put it so brutally, but, really, you have been infernally officious of late. This is the fourth reference which you have made to the subject during the past six weeks. I don't know whether your enterprise is inspired by brotherly love or the desire to make a bit, but whichever it is I don't think you'll get much change out of me. I also object to your latest move—bringing in Mr. Haliburton, presumably as an accomplice, or a witness, or whatever you like to call him."

"Really, Mr. Marrable!" Mr. Haliburton's voice quivered with gentlemanly indignation.

Hughie rang the bell.

"Look here, Marrable," burst out Lance furiously, "you are getting yourself in a hole, I can tell you! We—I happen to know that Jimmy Marrable left thirty or forty thousand pounds at least for Joey's immediate use; and I am pretty certain he left something for mine too. Now—" [pg 27

"I'm sorry I can't ask you to stay to lunch," said Hughie, "but I have some friends coming. Show these gentlemen out, John."

The deputation was ruthlessly shepherded downstairs by the impassive Mr. Goble, and Hughie was left to his own reflections. He filled a pipe meditatively.

"I wonder," he said, lighting a spill and puffing, "where young Lance got his figures from. I also wonder what the game is. He was obviously a bit worked up, and I should say he had been fortifying himself for the interview before he arrived. I knew, of course, that he had never forgiven me for being put in charge of Joey's affairs: he has always made things as difficult for me as possible. Perhaps he wants a trifle for himself: his closing remarks rather pointed that way. But what on earth is friend Haliburton doing in that galley? I fancy he has been at the back of things all along. What interest has *he* in the amount of Joey's fortune? I don't know much about him, but I wouldn't trust him a yard. Perhaps Lance owes him money. Have they gone, John?" [pg 27

"Aye," replied Mr. Goble. "They went quite quietly," he added regretfully.

He began to lay the table for luncheon.

"I say, John," began Hughie awkwardly.

"Aye?"

"There's a thing I want to speak to you about. I have been losing money lately, and I have to give up some luxuries I can't afford. I—I am afraid you are one of them. I have always regarded a man-servant as an extravagance," he went on with a rush, "and I must ask you to look about for another place. Take your time, of course, and don't leave me till you are suited. I shall be glad to give you a character, and all that. You understand?"

There was a silence, while Mr. Goble folded a napkin. Then he replied: "Fine!" Then he added, after a pause, "So you've been lossin' your money? Aye! Aha! Mphm!"

"Yes. I'm desperately sorry," said Hughie penitently. "I don't want to lose you. Perhaps it will only be tempor—"

"You'll no be daen' that yet a while," remarked Mr. Goble morosely. "I'm an ill body tae move."

"But, John, you don't understand. I can't afford to keep you for more than—"

"There a cab!" observed Mr. Goble. [pg 27

Hughie looked down out of the window.

"So it is," he said hastily. "I'll show them up, John. You go on with your work."

He was across and out of the room in three strides, and could be heard descending the stairs kangaroo fashion.

Mr. John Goble breathed heavily into a spoon and rubbed it with the point of his elbow.

"I wunner wha his visitors is," he mused caustically. "Of course he always opens the door himsel' tae all his visitors! Of course I dinna ken wha she is! Oh, no!"

He wagged his head in a broken-hearted manner, and gave vent to a depressing sound which a brother Scot would have recognised as a chuckle of intense amusement.

To him entered Miss Ursula Harbord. She wore *pince-nez* and a sage-green costume of some art fabric—one of the numerous crimes committed in the name of Liberty. She was Joan Gaymer's latest fad; and under her persuasive tutelage Joan was beginning to learn that the men who all her life had served her slightest whim were at once monsters of duplicity and brainless idiots; and that, given a few more fervid and ungrammatical articles in "The New Woman," women would shortly come to their own and march in the van of civilisation, and that people like Ursula Harbord would [pg 27
march in the van of the women.

Pending this glorious destiny, Miss Harbord acted as unsettler-in-general of Joan's domestic instincts, and worried Hughie considerably.

She was followed into the room by Joan; very much the Joan of last summer, if we make allowances for the distressing appearance presented by a young woman of considerable personal attractions who is compelled by Fashion's decree, for this season at any rate, to obscure her features under a hat which looks like an unsuccessful compromise between a waste-paper basket and a dish-cover.

"Well, John," she inquired in her friendly fashion, "have you quite settled down in London?"

"Aye, mem."

"Not missing Scotland?" continued Joan, peeling off her white gloves and sitting down in an arm-chair.

"Naething to speak of," said John.

"I thought," continued Miss Gaymer, surveying Mr. Goble's Cimmerian features, "that you had perhaps left your heart there."

"Ma hairt? What for would I dae a thing like that?" enquired the literal Mr. Goble. "A hairt is no a thing a body can dae wi'oot," he explained. "It's no like a rib. Ye jist get the ane, so ye canna afford tae get leavin' it ony place."

Miss Gaymer smilingly abandoned the topic, and in all probability the ghost of Sydney Smith chuckled. [pg 27

"When are you going to pay us another visit at Manors?" was Joan's next question.

"I'm no sure," said Mr. Goble. "Mr. Marrable has jist given me notice."

"Oh, John!" said Joan, "what have you been doing? Breaking his china?"

"Drinking his wine?" suggested Miss Harbord, turning from a scornful inspection of Hughie's stock of current literature.

"I doot I'm no givin' satisfaction," said John.

"But, John, I am *sure* you are!" said Joan. "Was that the reason he gave?"

"He said he was givin' up keepin' a man-servant."

Miss Harbord, who had been craning her neck to see something in the street, turned round sharply.

"Why? Has he been losing money?"

"I couldna say, mem," said Mr. Goble woodenly. He shared his master's antipathy to Miss Harbord.

That lady shook her head resignedly.

"I thought so!" she said. "Joan, dear—"

At this moment Hughie entered, and Miss Harbord's fire was diverted.

"Mr. Marrable, have you got rid of that cabman?" she enquired with truculence. [pg 27

"Rather!" said Hughie. "He went like a lamb."

"He was intoxicated," remarked Miss Harbord freezingly.

"I didn't notice it," said Hughie. "He was quite tractable. Apparently you engaged him at Hyde Park Terrace and stopped at two shops on the way."

"That is correct."

"And you gave him one and threepence for a drive of over two miles and a stop of about ten minutes."

"His legal fare. We employed him for exactly half an hour."

"But did you tell him that you were engaging him by the hour?"

"Of course not! They simply *crawl* if you do. You might have known that, Mr. Marrable."

"Well, it's all right now," interposed Joan cheerfully.

"Mr. Marrable," persisted Miss Harbord, "I fear you were weak with him. How much did you give him?"

"Nothing out of the way," said Hughie uneasily. "You'll stay to lunch, won't you? I am expecting the Leroys and D'Arcy. We can all go on to a *matinée* afterwards."

Miss Harbord assumed the expression of one who is not to be won over by fair words, and endeavoured to catch Miss Gaymer's eye—an enterprise which failed signally, as the latter lady rose from her seat and strolled to the window. [pg 27

"Mr. Marrable," began Miss Harbord, taking up her parable single-handed, "Joan wishes to have a chat with you about money-matters."

"No I don't, Hughie," said Miss Gaymer promptly, over her shoulder.

"Well then, dear," said Miss Harbord calmly, "you ought to. Women leave these things to men far too much as it is. Joan has an old-fashioned notion," she added to Hughie, "that it is not quite nice for girls to know anything about money-matters: hence her reluctance. However, I will conduct her case for her."

Miss Harbord crossed her legs, threw herself back in her chair in a manner which demonstrated most conclusively her contempt for appearances and feminine ideas of decorum, and began:

"Tell me, Mr. Marrable, what interest does Joan get on her money?"

Hughie gaped feebly. Half an hour ago he had put Mr. Lance Gaymer to the door for an almost precisely similar question. But Lance Gaymer was a man, and Miss Harbord, conceal the fact as she might, was a woman; and Hughie's old helplessness paralysed him once more. [pg 27

"The usual rate of interest," he said lamely, "is about four per cent."

Ursula Harbord nodded her head, as who should say, "I expected that!" and produced a crumpled newspaper from her muff.

"That," she said almost indulgently, "reveals your ignorance of the world, Mr. Marrable. If you mixed a little more in affairs, and followed some regular occupation, you would have more opportunities of discovering things for yourself, and so be spared the indignity—I suppose you consider it an indignity?—of having to be advised by a woman."

The afflicted Hughie murmured something about it being a pleasure.

"Now here," continued Miss Harbord, slapping the newspaper as an East-End butcher slaps the last beef-steak at his Saturday night auction, "I have the report of the half-yearly meeting of the International Trading Company, Limited, where a dividend of seven per cent was declared, making a dividend on the whole year of fourteen per cent. *Now* do you see what I—what Joan wants?"

"Hughie," said Joan, who was making a tour of inspection of the room, "where did you get this lovely leopard-skin? Have I seen it before?"

"Shot it, Joey. I beg your pardon, Miss Harbord?" [pg 28

"Do you see what Joan wants you to do?" repeated that financial Amazon.

"Afraid I don't, quite. I'll get on to it in a minute, though," replied the docile Hughie.

"Surely, the whole thing is quite clear! You must take Joan's capital out of whatever it is in and buy shares in The International Trading Company with it. And be sure you order *preference* shares, Mr. Marrable. They are the best sort to get. That is all; but I ought not to have to point these things out to you."

Hughie surveyed his preceptress in an undecided fashion. Was it worth while endeavouring to explain to her a few of the first principles of finance, or would it be simpler to grin and bear it? He decided on the latter alternative.

"The shares," continued Miss Harbord, having evidently decided to follow up her whips with a few selected scorpions, "should be bought as cheap as possible. They go up and down, you know, like—a—"

"Monkey on a stick?" suggested Hughie, with the air of one anxious to help.

Miss Harbord smiled indulgently.

"No, no! Like a—a barometer, let us say; and you have to watch your opportunity. There is a thing called 'par' which they go to,—anybody will tell you what it is,—and that is a very good time to buy them." [pg 28

Hughie, fighting for breath, rose and joined Joan in the window recess, while Miss Harbord, with much ostentatious crackling, folded up the newspaper and put it away.

"Hughie," said Joan, under cover of the noise, "you are angry."

"Not at all," replied Hughie, wiping his eyes furtively. "A bit flummoxed—that's all. No idea your friend was so up in these things."

"She *is* clever, isn't she?" said Joan, with unaffected sincerity. "But, Hughie dear, don't bother about it if it worries you. My affairs must be a fearful nuisance to you, but Ursula was so keen that I should come—"

"I'm glad you did, Joey. It was worth it," said Hughie simply.

"Of course," continued the unlearned Miss Gaymer, "to people like Ursula these things are as easy as falling off a log, but for you and me, who know nothing about business, they're pretty stiff to tackle, aren't they?"

"Quite so," agreed Hughie meekly. "But look here, Joey," he continued, "are you really in want of money?"

"Of course she is!" said Miss Harbord, overhearing and resuming the offensive.

"I *could* do with a few more frocks, Hughie," said Miss Gaymer wistfully, "if it wouldn't be a [pg 28
bother to change those investments about a bit, as Ursula advises. Still, if it can't be done, we'll say no more about it."

"Will another hundred a-year be any use to you?" said Hughie suddenly.

"Oh, Hughie, I should *think* so! Can it be managed without a fearful upset?" cried Miss Gaymer, her eyes already brightening over a vista of blouse-lengths and double-widths.

"Yes," said Hughie shortly. "I'll—I'll make the necessary changes and see that the cash is paid into your banking account."

"You dear!" said Miss Gaymer, with sincerity.

"A hundred pounds? It might be more!" observed the daughter of the horse-leech on the sofa. Fourteen per cent still rankled in her Napoleonic brain.

Hughie crossed to the writing-table and tore up a telegraph-form.

"Capt'n Leroy!" announced Mr. Goble's voice in the doorway.

That easy-going paladin entered the room, and intimated that his wife had sent him along to say that she would arrive in ten minutes.

"That means twenty," said Joan. "Ursula, we have just time to run round and see that hat we thought we'd better not decide about until we had heard from Hughie about the thing we came to [pg 28
see him about. Now I can try it on with a clear conscience. Back directly, Hughie!"

She flitted out, the prospective hundred pounds obviously burning a hole in her pocket (or wherever woman in the present era of fashion keeps her money), followed by Miss Harbord.

Hughie turned to Leroy.

"Take a cigarette, old man," he said, "and sit down with a glass of sherry while I do myself up for lunch. Been down at Putney."

Leroy obeyed. When Hughie returned from his bedroom a quarter of an hour later, he found that Mrs. Leroy had arrived. She and her husband were engaged in a low-toned conversation, which they broke off rather abruptly on their host's entrance.

Hughie shook hands, and sweeping some newspapers off the sofa, offered his latest-arrived guest a seat.

"No, thanks, Hughie," said Mrs. Leroy; "I prefer to look out of the window."

She walked across the room and began to gaze down into the street with her back to Hughie. Her husband, evidently struck with the suitability of this attitude, rose and joined her.

"The fact is, Hughie," began Mrs. Leroy, staring resolutely at the house opposite, "Jack and I want to talk to you like a father and mother, and I can do it more easily if I look the other way."

"Same here," corroborated Leroy gruffly. [pg 28

Hughie started, and surveyed the guilty-looking pair of backs before him with an uneasy

suspicion. Surely he was not going to be treated to a third variation on the same theme!

"Go on, Jack!" was Mrs. Leroy's next remark.

"Can't be done, m'dear," replied the gentleman, after an obvious effort.

"Well, Hughie," continued Mrs. Leroy briskly, "as this coward has failed me, I must say it myself. I want to tell you that people are talking."

"Ursula Harbord, for instance," said Hughie drily.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"She delivered a lecture to me this morning. Gave me to understand that she darkly suspects me of being a knave, and made no attempt to conceal her conviction that I am a fool."

"Well, of course that's all nonsense," said Mrs. Leroy to a fly on the window-pane; "but really, Hughie, with all the money that her Uncle Jimmy left her, you ought to be able to give Joey more than you do, *shouldn't* you? The child has to live in quite a small way—not really poor, you know, but hardly as an heiress ought to live. You give her surprisingly small interest on her money, Jack says—didn't you, Jack?"

Captain Leroy made no reply, but the deep shade of carmine on the back of his neck said "Sneak!" as plainly as possible. [pg 28

"And you know he would be the last to say anything against you—wouldn't you, Jack?"

"Rather!" said Leroy, in a voice of thunder.

"Hughie," said Mrs. Leroy, turning impulsively, "won't you confide in me?"

Hughie kicked a coal in the grate in his usual fashion, and sighed.

"I can't, *really*," he said.

"Fact is, old man," broke in Leroy, in response to his wife's appealing glances, "we didn't want to say anything at all, but the missis thought it best—considerin' the way people are talkin', and all that. Can *I* be of any use? Been speculatin', or anything?"

"No, Jack, I haven't," said Hughie shortly.

Mrs. Leroy gave a helpless look at her husband, and said desperately:

"But, Hughie, we can't leave things like this! You simply don't *know* what stories are going about. It is ruining your chances with Joey, too. She thinks you are a noodle."

"I know it," said Hughie.

"Well, look here," said Leroy, "can't you give us some sort of explanation—some yarn we could put about the place to account for this state of things—"

"What state of things?" said Hughie doggedly. He was in an unpleasant temper. [pg 28

"Well, Hughie," said Mrs. Leroy, keeping hers, "here is Joan, known to have been left a lot of money for her immediate use,—she admits it herself,—living quite humbly and cheaply, and obviously not well off. People are asking why. There are two explanations given. One, the more popular, is that you have embezzled or speculated the money all away. The other, which prevails among the *élite*—"

"The people who are really in the know, you know," explained Leroy.

"Yes: *they* say," continued his wife, "that Joan won't marry you, so you have retaliated by—by —"

"By cutting off supplies," suggested Hughie.

"Yes, until—"

"Until she is starved into submission—eh?"

"That's about the size of it, old son," said Leroy.

There was a long pause. Finally Hughie said:—

"Well, it's a pretty story; but, honestly, I'm not in a position to contradict it at present."

Mrs. Leroy desisted from plaiting the window-cord, swung round, walked deliberately to the fireplace, and laid a hand on Hughie's arm.

"Hughie," she said, in tones which her husband subsequently affirmed would have drawn ducks off a pond, "what have you done? Tell *us*!" [pg 28

Leroy followed his wife across the room. "Get it off your chest, old man," he said, with the air of a father confessor.

Hughie smiled gratefully. He took Mrs. Leroy's two hands into one of his own, and laid the other on Jack Leroy's shoulder.

"Jack and Milly," he said earnestly, "my two pals!—I would rather tell you than anybody else; but—I simply *can't*! It's not my secret! You'll probably find out all about it some day. At present I must ask you to accept my assurance that I'm not so black as I'm painted."

"Hughie," said Mrs. Leroy, "you are simply stupid! We have not come to you out of idle curiosity—"

"I know that," said Hughie heartily.

"And I think you might give us some sort of an inkling—a sort of favourable bulletin—that I could pass on to Joey, at any rate—"

"Joey!" said Hughie involuntarily; "Lord forbid!"

Mrs. Leroy, startled by the vehemence of his tone, paused; and her husband added dejectedly,—

"All right, old man! Let's drop it! Sorry you couldn't see your way to confide in us. Wouldn't have gone any further. Rather sick about the whole business—eh? No wonder! Money is the devil, anyway." [pg 28

Somehow Leroy's words hit Hughie harder than anything that had been said yet. He wavered. After all,—

"We've bought the hat, and I'm perfectly *ravenous*," announced Joan, appearing in the doorway. "And we've brought Mr. D'Arcy. Hughie, are those plover's eggs? Ooh!"

This was no atmosphere for the breathing of confidential secrets. The party resumed its usual demeanour of off-hand British *insouciance*, and began to gather round the luncheon-table. Only Mr. D'Arcy's right eyebrow asked a question of Mrs. Leroy, which was answered by a slight but regretful shrug of the shoulders.

Hughie's apartment was L-shaped, and the feast was spread in the smaller arm, out of the way of draughts and doorways. Consequently any one entering the room would fail to see the luncheon table unless he turned to his left and walked round a corner.

Hughie was helping the plover's eggs,—it is to be feared that Miss Gaymer received a Benjamin's portion of the same,—when Mr. Goble suddenly appeared at his elbow and whispered in his ear,—

"Him again!"

Muttering an apology, Hughie left the table and walked round the corner to the other arm of the room. Lance Gaymer had just entered. His face was flushed and his eyes glittered, and Hughie's half-uttered invitation to him to come in and have some lunch died away upon his lips. [pg 28

"Hallo, Lance!" he said lamely.

Mr. Gaymer replied, in the deliberate and portentously solemn tones of a man who is three parts drunk,—

"I understand you have got a party on here."

"Yes," said Hughie, endeavouring to edge his visitor through the doorway.

"What I want to say," continued Mr. Gaymer in rising tones, "is that I accuse you of embezzling my sister's property, and I'm going to make things damned hot for you. Yes—*you*! Go and tell that to your luncheon-party round the corner!" he concluded with a snort. "And—glug—glug-glug!"

By this time he had been judiciously backed into the passage, almost out of ear-shot of those in the room. Simultaneously Mr. Goble's large hand closed upon his mouth from behind, and having thus acquired a good purchase, turned its owner deftly round and conducted him downstairs.

Death-like silence reigned at the luncheon-table. Hughie wondered how much they had heard. [pg 29
Not that it mattered greatly, for Master Lance's accusations, making allowances for alcoholic directness, partook very largely of the nature of those already levelled at Hughie by more conventional deputations.

Before returning to his seat, Hughie crossed to the window and looked down into the street.

Mr. Lance Gaymer was being assisted into a waiting hansom by the kindly hands of Mr. Guy Haliburton.

Hughie, having seen all he expected to see, returned with faltering steps to his duties as a host.

It was a delicate moment, calling for the exercise of much tact. Even Mildred Leroy hesitated. Joan had flushed red, whether with shame, or anger, or sympathy, it was hard to say. Mr. D'Arcy regarded her curiously.

But heavy-footed husbands sometimes rush in, with success, where the most wary and diplomatic wives fear to tread. Jack Leroy cleared his throat.

"Now, Hughie, my son," he observed, "when you've *quite* done interviewin' all your pals on the door-mat, perhaps you'll give your guests a chance. With so many old friends collected round your table like this, we want to drink your health, young-fellow-my-lad! Fill up your glass, Miss Harbord! No heel-taps, Milly!"

There was an irrelevant *bonhomie* about this whole speech which struck exactly the right note. [pg 29
Mrs. Leroy glanced gratefully at her husband, and lifted her glass. The others did the same. But it was Joan who spoke first.

"Hughie!" she cried, with glowing eyes.

"Hughie!" cried every one. "Good health!"

In the times of our prosperity our friends are always critical, frequently unjust, generally a nuisance, and sometimes utterly detestable. But there is no blinking the fact that they are a very present help in trouble.

Hughie suddenly felt himself unable to speak. He bowed his head dumbly, and made a furious onslaught upon a plover's egg.

CHAPTER XVI

[pg 29

IN WHICH CHARITY SUFFERETH LONG, AND JOAN MISSES HER CUE

HUGHIE spent the next few months chiefly in wondering.

He wondered what Mr. Haliburton's game might be. What was he doing behind Lance Gaymer? That the latter might consider himself justified in poking his nose into his only sister's affairs was understandable enough—but why drag in Haliburton? Was that picturesque ruffian a genuine

friend of Lance's, enlisted in a brotherly endeavour to readjust Jimmy Marrable's exceedingly unsymmetrical disposition of his property, or was he merely a member of that far-reaching and conspicuously able fraternity (known in sporting circles as "The Nuts"), to whom all mankind is fair game, and whose one article of faith is a trite proverb on the subject of a fool and his money, pursuing his ordinary avocation of "making a bit"? In other words, was Lance Gaymer pulling Haliburton, or was Haliburton pushing Lance Gaymer?

Hughie also wondered about a good many other things, notably—

(*a*) Joan.

(*b*) More Joan; coupled with dim speculations as to how it was all going to end. [pg 29

(*c*) More Joan still; together with a growing desire to go off again to the ends of the earth and lose himself.

But for the present life followed an uneventful course. Since Lance's display of fireworks at Hughie's luncheon-party, Hughie's friends had studiously avoided the mention of the word money in their late host's presence; and Master Lance himself, evidently realizing that, however excellent his intentions or pure his motives, he had made an unmitigated ass of himself, avoided Hughie's society entirely.

Of Joan Hughie saw little until the beginning of October, when he arrived at Manors to shoot pheasants.

He was greeted, almost with tears of affection, by John Alexander Goble, who had been retained by Jack Leroy as butler when Hughie relinquished his services; and found the house packed with young men and maidens, the billiard-room strewn with many-hued garments, and the atmosphere charged with the electricity of some great enterprise in the making.

"Theatricals!" explained Mrs. Leroy resignedly, as she handed him his tea. "Tableaux, rather. At least, it is a sort of variety entertainment," she concluded desperately, "in the Parish Hall. In aid of some charity or other, but that doesn't matter." [pg 29

"Joey's latest, I suppose?"

"Yes; the child is wild about it. What, sweet one?" (This to the infant Hildegard, in an attitude of supplication at her side.) "Cake? certainly not! You are going out to tea at the Rectory in half an hour. Do you remember what happened the last time you had two teas?"

Stodger reflected, and remembered; but pleaded, in extenuation,—

"But I did it *all* at the Rectory, mummy."

"She was sick," explained her sister, turning politely to Hughie.

"Twice!" corroborated Stodger, not without pride.

"Yes; in a decent basin provided by the parish," continued Duckles hazily. She had recently begun to attend church, and her reading during the sermon had opened to her a new and fertile field for quotation.

"Tell me more about the tableaux, Jack," said Hughie hastily, as Mrs. Leroy accelerated her ritualistic progeny's departure upstairs.

"They're spendin' lashings of money on them. Won't make a farthing profit, I don't suppose; but the show should be all right. They're getting a 'pro.' down to stage-manage 'em."

"My word, they are going it! Hallo, Joey!"

Miss Gaymer's entrance brought theatrical conversation up to fever heat; and for the rest of the meal, and indeed for the next few days, Hughie lived and breathed in a world composed of rickety scenery, refractory pulleys, and hot size, inhabited by people who were always talking, usually cross, and most intermittent in their feeding-times. [pg 29

One afternoon Joan took him down to the Hall, ostensibly as a companion, in reality to shift some large flats of scenery, too wide for feminine arms to span.

Captain Leroy had already offered himself in that capacity, but his services had been brutally declined, on the ground that the scenery was not concave.

"The programmes are being printed to-day. We are going to have the tableaux in the first half," Joan rattled on, as they walked through the plantations. "Well-known pictures, you know. Some of them are perfectly lovely. I am in three," she added, rather naïvely.

Hughie asked for details.

"Well, the first one is to be The Mirror of Venus—a lot of girls looking into a pool."

"Are you in that?"

"Not much! *That* is for all the riff-raff who have crowded in without being invited—the Mellishes, and the Crumfords, and the Joblings. (You know the lot!) There's another tableau for their men: *such* horrors, my dear! But that disposes of them for Part One: they don't have to appear again until the waxworks. Then there's a perfectly sweet one—The Gambler's Wife." [pg 29

"Who is she to be?"

"Sylvia Tarrant. She sits under a tree in an old garden, looking sad," gabbled Joan without pausing, "while her husband gambles with some other men on the lawn behind. You'll cry! I come after that—Two Strings to her Bow. A girl walking arm-in-arm with two men. She looks quite pleased with herself: the men have both got camelious hump."

"Who are they?"

"It's not quite settled yet. I told them they could fight it out among themselves. I expect it will be Binks and Cherub, though. But they must decide soon, because time is getting on, and Mr. Haliburton says—"

"Who?"

"Mr. Haliburton."

"Haliburton?" said Hughie, stopping short.

"Yes. Didn't you know? He is stage-managing us. He came down this morning."

"Is he staying in the house?" was Hughie's next question.

"No: we couldn't get him in. He's putting up at The Bull, in the village," said Joan. "I wish we could have found room for him," she added, with intention. She knew that most men neither loved Mr. Haliburton nor approved of their girl friends becoming intimate with him; and this alone was quite sufficient to predispose her in that misjudged hero's favour. [pg 29

In her heart of hearts Miss Gaymer was just a little *éprise* with Mr. Haliburton, and, as becomes one who is above such things, just a little ashamed of the fact. She had found something rather compelling in his dark eyes and silky ways, but, being anything but a susceptible young person, rather resented her own weakness. Still, the fact remained. She had seen a good deal of Mr. Haliburton in London—how, she could hardly explain, though possibly Mr. Haliburton could have done so—and had listened, not altogether unmoved, to tales of a patrimony renounced for Art's sake, of an ancestral home barred by a hot-headed but lovable "old pater"; and to various reflections, half-humorous, half-pathetic, on the subject of what might have been if this world were only a juster place.

Joan, who did not know that Mr. Haliburton's ancestral home had been situated over a tobacconist's shop somewhere between the back of Oxford Street and Soho Square, and that his "old pater" had but lately retired from the post of head waiter at a theatrical restaurant in Maiden Lane, in order to devote his undivided attention to the more perfect colouring of an already carnelian proboscis, felt distinctly sorry for her romantic friend. When a young girl begins to feel sorry for a man, the position is full of possibilities; and when heavy-handed and purblind authority steps in and forbids the banns, so to speak, the possibilities become probabilities, and, in extreme cases, certainties. [pg 29

Joan glanced obliquely at Hughie. That impassive young man was advancing with measured strides, frowning ferociously. She continued, not altogether displeased:—

"The next tableau is Flora Macdonald's Farewell—very Scotch. A man in a kilt stands in the centre—"

She babbled on, but Hughie's attention wandered.

Haliburton again! He did not like the idea. Consequently it was not altogether surprising if, when Joan paused to enquire whether he regarded Queen Elizabeth or a suffragette as the most suitable vehicle for one of Mrs. Jarley's most cherished "wheezes," Hughie should have replied:—

"Joan, how did that chap come here? Was he engaged by you, or did he offer himself?"

"He offered himself—very kindly!" said Joan stiffly.

"I suppose he is being paid?" [pg 29

"Yes, of course—a guinea or two. It's his profession," said Joan impatiently. "Do you object?"

The occasion called for considerable tact, and poor heavy-handed Hughie sighed in anticipation. Joan heard him.

"What *is* the trouble?" she asked, more amused than angry. "Out with it, old Conscientiousness?"

"Joey," said Hughie, "I don't like the idea of your taking up with that chap."

On the whole, it could not have been put worse.

"It seems to me," said Miss Gaymer scornfully, "that it's not women who are spiteful, but men. I wonder why every male I know is so down on poor Mr. Haliburton. Silly children like Binks and Cherub I can understand, but *you*, Hughie—you ought to be above that sort of thing. What's the matter with the man, that you all abuse him so? Tell me!"

Hughie's reply to this tirade was lame and unconvincing. The modern maiden is so amazingly worldly-wise on various matters on the subject of which she can have had no other informant than her own intuitions, that she is apt to scout the suggestion that there are certain phases of life of which happily she as yet knows nothing; and any attempt to hint the same to her is scornfully greeted as a piece of masculine superiority. Consequently Joey thought she knew all about Mr. Haliburton; wherein she was manifestly wrong, but not altogether to be blamed; for when your knowledge of human nature, so far as it goes, is well-nigh perfect, it is difficult for you to believe that it does not go all the way. [pg 30

It was a most unsatisfactory conversation. All Hughie did was to reiterate his opinion of Mr. Haliburton without being able (or willing) to furnish any fresh facts in support of it; and the only apparent result was to prejudice Joan rather more violently in Haliburton's favour than before, and to make Hughie feel like a backbiter and a busybody. It was a relief when Joan abruptly changed the conversation, and said:—

"Hughie, have you seen anything of Lance lately?"

No, Hughie had not. "Why?"

"I'm bothered about him," said Joan, descending from her high horse and slipping into what may be called her confidential mood. "He used to write to me pretty regularly, even after he married that freak, and we were always fond of one another, even though we quarrelled sometimes. But he seems to have dropped out of things altogether lately. Do you know what he is doing?"

"Can't say, I'm sure," said Hughie. [pg 30

"Could you find out for me?"

"Of course I will," said Hughie, quite forgetting the present awkwardness of his relations with Lance in the light of the joyous fact that Lance's sister had just asked him to do her a service. "I'll go and look him up. He may be ill, or short of cash. But can't you get news of him from—from—"

He stopped suddenly. He had been about to ask a question which had just struck him as rather ungenerous.

"You mean from Mr. Haliburton?" said Joan, with her usual directness. "I did ask him, but he says he has seen nothing of Lance for quite a long time; so I'm afraid I must bother you, Hughie. I don't like to, because I know you won't want to go out of your way on his account, after—"

"Never mind that!" said Hughie hastily. "I'll go and look him up."

Joan turned to him gratefully.

"You're a good sort, Hughie," she said. "I don't know what I should do without you."

Hughie glowed foolishly. Her words did not mean anything, of course; still, they warmed him for the time being. He never thought of making capital out of Joan's impulsive outbursts of affection. He regarded them as a sort of consolation prize—nothing more. He had never attempted [pg 30
to make love to her since his first rebuff. The memory of that undignified squabble still made him tingle, and in any case it would never have occurred to him to renew the attack. Man-like, he had taken for granted the rather large proposition that a woman invariably means what she says. To pester Joan with further attentions, especially in his exceptional position, savoured to him of meanness.

For all that, the girl and he seemed of late to have adjusted their relations with one another. Joan never played with him now, encouraging him one moment and flouting him the next, as in the case of most of her faithful band. Her attitude was that of a good comrade. She was content to sit silent in his company, which is a sound test of friendship; she brought to him her little troubles, and occasionally ministered to his; and in every way she showed him that she liked and trusted him. A vainer or cleverer man would have taken heart of grace at these signs. Hughie did not. He was Joan's guardian, and as such entitled to her confidence; also her very good friend, and as such entitled to her affection. That was all. It was rotten luck, of course, that she was not sufficiently fond of him to marry him, but then rotten luck is a thing one must be prepared for in this world. He would get accustomed to the situation in time: meanwhile there must be no more castles in the air. [pg 30

"I'll tell you what," he continued presently. "I shall be in town on Wednesday. I'll go and look Lance up then."

"But, Hughie," cried Joan in dismay, "Wednesday is the day of the entertainment. You *must* come to that. What is your engagement, if it's not indiscreet to inquire?"

"Dentist," said Hughie lugubriously.

"Dentist?" Joan laughed, or rather crowed, in her characteristically childlike way. "Hughie at the dentist's! It seems so funny," she explained apologetically.

"It will be the reverse of funny," said Hughie severely, "when he gets hold of me. Do you know how long it is since I sat in a dentist's chair? Eight years, no less!"

"You'll catch it!" said Miss Gaymer confidently. "But you simply must not go on that day. I want you at the show. Can't you change the date?"

"The assassin gave me to understand," said Hughie, "that it was a most extraordinary piece of luck for me that he should be able to take me at all; and he rather suggested that if I broke the appointment I need not expect another on this side of the grave. Besides, next Wednesday is about our one off-day from shooting. I also—"

Miss Gaymer fixed a cold and accusing eye on him. [pg 30

"Confess, miserable shuffler!" she said. "You arranged that date with the dentist on purpose, so as to escape the theatricals."

"Guilty, my lord!" replied the criminal resignedly.

"Well, you are let off with a caution," said Joan graciously, "but you'll have to come, all the same. You *will*, won't you, Hughie?"

"Will my presence make so much difference?" said Hughie, rather boldly for him. He was inviting a heavy snub, and he knew it.

Joan raised her eyes to his for a moment.

"Yes," she said, rather unexpectedly, "it will."

"Then I'll come," said Hughie, with vigour. "I go to the dentist at ten. I'll get that over, ask Lance to lunch, and come down by the afternoon train. What time does the show begin?"

"Eight."

"The train gets in at seven-fifty. I'll come straight to the Parish Hall—"

"You'll get no dinner," said Joan in warning tones.

"Never mind!" said Hughie heroically. "There's to be a supper afterwards, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"I'll last out, then. By the way, does it matter if I'm not in evening kit?"

"Not a bit, if you don't mind yourself. Of course the front rows will be full of people with their glad rags on," said Joan. "But if you feel shy, come round behind the scenes. Then you'll be able to keep an eye on me—and Mr. Haliburton!" she added, with a provocative little glance. [pg 30

Hughie duly departed to town, promising faithfully to come back for the theatricals, and wondering vaguely why Joan had insisted so strongly on his doing so. Joan felt rather inclined to wonder herself. She was a little perplexed by her own impulses at present. But her mind was occupied by some dim instinct of self-preservation, and she felt somehow distinctly happier when Hughie promised to come.

However, there was little time for introspection. Rehearsals—"with the accent on the hearse," as Mr. Binks remarked during one protracted specimen—were dragging their slow length along to a conclusion; tickets were selling like hot cakes; and presently the great day came.

Amateur theatricals are a weariness to the flesh, but viewed in the right spirit they are by no means destitute of entertainment. The drama's laws, as interpreted by the amateur, differ materially from those observed by the professional branch—the members of which, it must be remembered, have to please to live—in several important particulars; and with these the intending playgoer should at once make himself conversant. [pg 30

Here is a *précis*:—

(1) Remember that the performance has been got up entirely for the benefit of the performers, and that you and the rest of the audience have merely been brought in to make the thing worth while.

(2) Abandon all hope of punctuality at the start or reasonability in the length of the intervals. Amateur scene-shifters and musicians do not relish having their "turns" curtailed any more than the more conspicuous members of the cast.

(3) Bear in mind the fact that the play is *not* the thing, but the players. The most thrilling Third Act is as dross compared with the excitement and suspense of watching to see whether Johnny Blank will *really* kiss Connie Dash in the proposal scene, or whether the fact (known to at least two-thirds of the audience) that they have not been on speaking terms for the past six months will result in the usual amateur *ne plus ultra*—a sort of frustrated peck, falling short by about six inches. Again, the joy of hearing the hero falter in a stirring apostrophe to the gallery is enhanced by the knowledge that he is reading it from inside the crown of his hat, and has lost the place: while the realistic and convincing air of deference with which the butler addresses the duchess is the more readily recognized and appreciated by an audience who are well aware that he happens in private life to be that lady's husband. [pg 30

The entertainment to which we must now draw the reader's unwilling attention was to consist of three parts. First, the Tableaux Vivants—thirty seconds of tableaux to about ten minutes of outer darkness and orchestral selection; then a comedietta; and finally, Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks.

The largest room behind the scenes had been reserved for the lady *artistes*; a draughty passage, furnished chiefly with flaring candles and soda-water syphons, being apportioned to the gentlemen. The *loge des dames* was a bare and cheerless apartment, but tables and mirrors had been placed round the walls; and here some fifteen or twenty maidens manœuvred with freezing politeness or unrestrained elbowings (according to their shade of social standing) for positions favourable to self-contemplation.

Joan and Sylvia Tarrant foregathered in the middle of the floor.

"I think we'd better dress here, dear," said Joan cheerfully, "and leave the nobility and gentry to fight for the dressing-tables. After all," she added complacently, "you and I need the least doing up of any of them." [pg 30

The tableaux on the whole were a success, though it was some time before the audience were permitted to inspect them. The musical director, a nervous individual with a *penchant* for applied

science, had spent the greatest part of two days in fixing up an electric bell of heroic proportions controlled from the conductor's desk, and ringing into the ear of the gentleman in charge of the lighting arrangements. A carefully type-written document (another by-product of the musician's versatility) apprised this overwrought official that one ring signified "stage-lights up," and two rings "stage-lights down."

Just before the curtain rose for the first tableau the conductor pressed his button once. After an interval of about two seconds, since the stage-lights showed no inclination to go up,—as a matter of fact the controller of illuminants was tenderly nursing a hopelessly perforated eardrum,—the agitated musician, convinced that the bell had not rung, rang it again. Consequently, just as the curtain rose, every single lamp on the stage, from the footlights to the overhead battens, was hastily extinguished. Confusion reigned supreme. The conductor pressed his button frantically and continuously; the electrician lost his head completely, and began to turn off switches which [pg 30
controlled the lights in the dressing-rooms and the hall itself; while the faithful orchestra, suddenly bereft of both light and leadership, endeavoured with heroic but misguided enthusiasm to keep the flag flying by strident improvisations of the most varied and individual character.

The audience, who had come prepared for anything, sat unmoved; but dolorous cries were heard from the dressing-rooms and vestibule. Above all rose the voice of the conductor, calling aloud for the blood of the electrician and refusing to be comforted. The first *tableau vivant* partook of the nature of an "extra turn," and was not foreshadowed in the programme. It took place in the middle of the stage, and depicted two overheated gentlemen (one carrying a *bâton* and the other *en déshabille*) explaining (*fortissimo*) the purport of a type-written document to a third (who caressed his right ear all the time) by the light of a single wax vesta.

After this gratuitous contribution to the gaiety of the proceedings the official programme came into force, and various attractive and romantic visions were unfolded to the audience. Certainly the tableaux were well mounted. The success of A Gambler's Wife and Two Strings to her Bow was beyond question. Haliburton, too, made a striking appearance in Orchardson's Hard Hit—the [pg 31
famous gambling picture with the countless packs of cards strewn upon the floor—wherein the broken gamester turns with his hand on the door-handle to take a last look at the three men who have mastered him.

There were minor blemishes, of course. The composure of the beauteous band who were discovered—when the conductor had been hounded back to his stool and the bemused electrician replaced by a man of more enduring fibre—contemplating their own charms in The Mirror of Venus was utterly wrecked—yea, transformed into helpless giggles—by a totally unexpected ejaculation of "Good old Gertie!" proceeding from a young man in the front row—evidently a brother—chiefly remarkable for a made-up tie and a red silk handkerchief, and directed apparently (if one may judge by consequences) at a massively-built young woman kneeling third from the end on the prompt side. During another tableau, as Prince Charles stood rigid in the embrace of Flora Macdonald, the audience sat spellbound for thirty breathless seconds, what time the unhappy prince's tartan stockings slipped inch by inch from the neighbourhood of his knees, past the boundary line where artificial brown left off and natural white began, right down to his ankles—a *contretemps* which, as Mr. D'Arcy remarked to Mrs. Leroy, added a touch of animation to what [pg 31
would otherwise have been a somewhat lifeless representation.

The comedietta was not an unqualified success. It was one of those characteristic products of what may be called the Back-Drawing-Room School, in which complications begin shortly after the rise of the curtain with the delivery and perusal of a certain letter, and are automatically adjusted at the end of about thirty-five minutes by the introduction of another, which explains everything, settles differences, precipitates engagements, and brings the curtain down upon all the characters standing in a row in carefully assorted couples.

This somewhat trite and conventional plot was agreeably varied by the vagaries of the talented gentleman who played the footman responsible for the delivery of the letters. He brought on the second letter first, with the result that the heroine found herself exclaiming: "How foolish I have been! Gerald had been true to me through all! I must go to him at once! We can be married to-morrow!" after the drama had been in progress some three minutes,—a catastrophe only tided over by some perfectly Napoleonic "gagging" by the comic man and an entirely unrehearsed entrance (with obvious assistance from the rear) of the footman, with the right letter.

Fortunately these divergences from the drama's normal course were lost upon the majority of [pg 31
the audience; for the actors, whether from nervousness or frank boredom, were inaudible beyond the first three rows of seats. Even here the feat of following the drift of the dialogue was rendered almost impossible by the persistent and frantic applause of two obvious "deadheads" in the front row,—poor relations of the gentleman who played the footman,—who, since they occupied free seats, evidently considered it their bounden duty to applaud every entrance and exit of their munificent relative, even when he came on with the wrong letter or was elbowed off to fetch the right one. The only member of the company who performed his duties with anything like thoroughness was the prompter, a retired major with lungs of brass. He had evidently decided, with the true instinct of a strong man, that if you want a thing well done you must do it yourself. Consequently his voice re-echoed through the hall in an unceasing monologue which, while it lacked the variety inseparable from the deliverances of a whole company, did much to keep the

occupants of the back benches *au fait* with the intricacies of the plot. The best laugh of the evening, however, was aroused by the temerity of one of the actors, who suddenly interrupted the prompter to remark mildly but distinctly: "All right, old man, I know this bit!"

Then came Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks. The curtain rose upon the usual group of historical and [pg 31
topical characters, seated round the stage in a semicircle, most of them twitching with incipient hysteria, and all resolutely avoiding the eye of the audience. Presently Mrs. Jarley (Binks), accompanied by Master Jarley (Cherub, in a sailor suit and white socks), made her appearance, and plunged into a slightly laboured monologue, what time her offspring walked round the stage, and, by dint of dusting, oiling, and other operations, stimulated any of the figures which could possibly have been mistaken for waxworks into a fitting display of life and activity.

One "Mrs. Jarley" is very like another, and the audience, who were beginning to suffer from a slight attack of theatrical indigestion, were a little slow in responding to Binks's hoary "wheezes" and unfathomable topical allusions. It was not until a bench at the back of the stage, occupied by Oliver Cromwell, General Booth, Dorando, and a Suffragette, suddenly toppled over backwards, and discharged its tenants, with four alarming thuds, into the chasm which yawned between the back of the staging and the wall, that the entertainment could be said to have received a proper fillip. After the first sensation of surprise and resentment at finding themselves reposing upon the backs of their necks in the dust, the four gentlemen affected (who, it is to be feared, had been [pg 31
priming themselves for this, their first appearance on any stage, in the customary manner) accepted the situation with heroic resignation. Remembering that they were waxworks, and for that if for no other reason incapable of getting up, they continued in their present posture, invisible to the naked eye except for their legs, which stuck straight up into the air. The flagging audience, imagining that the entire disaster was part of the performance, applauded uproariously, and Mrs. Jarley seized the opportunity to deliver a pithy *extempore* lecture upon character as read from the soles of the feet.

The performance concluded with a song and chorus, specially composed for the occasion, and sung by Mrs. Jarley and her exhibits in spasmodic antistrophe. Mrs. Jarley began,—

"Some ladies have one figure—one, home grown!
But I have quite a lot, like Madam Tussaud.
And whatever sort of one you'd like to own,
Just order me to make it, and I'll do so.
I can make you waxen figures that can walk,
Or wave their arms, or turn and look behind 'em—"

Here, in attempting to suit the action to the word, the singer tripped heavily over her own train, and was only saved from complete *bouleversement* by the miraculously animated and suddenly outstretched arm of Henry the Eighth, who was sitting close behind. Binks continued, [pg 31
quite undisturbed,—

"And some of them (the female ones!) can talk,
And it's wonderful how useful people find them.

"So send for Mrs. Jarley on the spot!
And she'll reproduce each feature that you've got.
It will save a deal of trouble
If you have a waxen double,
Which will do your work when you would rather not!"

"Now then, waxworks! All together! Give them a lead, Sousa!"

Mr. Sousa (second from the end, o. p. side) obediently began to agitate his *bâton*, partially scalping Sunny Jim in the process, and the waxworks sang out, *fortissimo*, with a distinct but unevenly distributed *accelerando* toward the end,—

"Then send for Mrs. Jarley on the spot!
And she'll reproduce each feature that you've got.
All your business she will see to,
Black your boots, and make your tea, too,
If you'll only put a penny in the slot!"

The tune was good, and the chorus went with a swing. But now a difficulty arose. The second verse should have been sung by one of the late occupants of the back bench—Dorando, to be precise; and Mrs. Jarley, realizing the circumstance, was on the point of beginning it herself, when [pg 31
a muffled voice, proceeding apparently from the infernal regions, struck into the opening lines. Dorando, faint yet pursuing, was evidently determined to fulfil his contract, even if he had to do it on his head. For various reasons (chiefly dust and incipient apoplexy), his articulation was not all that could be desired, and the verse, which told of the ingenious device of one Tommy Sparkes, who, faced by the prospect of corporal punishment,

"Sent for Mrs. Jarley on the spot,
And explained that he was going to get it hot"—

whereupon that resourceful lady

"Made a figure, small and ruddy,
To be Tommy's understudy;
And the figure got—what Tommy should have got!"

was lost upon the audience. But every one took up the chorus with a will, and the third verse entered upon its career under the happiest auspices.

On this occasion the lines were distributed among the figures themselves.

"Now Mrs. Bumble-Doodle gave a ball"—

began Queen Elizabeth;

"But twenty-seven men all wired to say"—

continued Peter Pan;

"That they very much regretted, after all"— [pg 31

carolled Sunny Jim;

"To find they simply *couldn't* get away!"—

bellowed a voice (Oliver Cromwell's) from under the platform.

"Said Mrs. Bumble-Doodle, in despair"—

resumed Master Jarley, after a yell of laughter had subsided;

"The ball will be a failure—not a doubt of it!"

announced a Pierrette, with finality.

"The girls won't find a single partner there"—

wailed a waxwork in a kilt (possibly Rob Roy or Harry Lauder)—

There was a break. The piano paused expectantly, and all the waxworks turned their heads (most unprofessionally) to see what had happened to Cherry Ripe, whose turn it was to sing the next verse. Apparently that lady had permitted her attention to wander, for she was scrutinising the audience, to the neglect of her cue. The sudden silence—or possibly the attentions of Master Jarley, who bustled up and assiduously oiled her mouth and ears—seemed to recall her errant wits.

"Sorry!" she remarked calmly, and sang in a clear voice,—

"Oh, what a mess! How are we to get out of it?"

"She sent for Mrs. Jarley on the spot!" [pg 31

declaimed that lady triumphantly,

—"And the girls were quite content with what they got.
True, a dummy cannot flirt;
But he does not tear your skirt,
Or say that he can dance when he can not!"

"Now, then, *all* together!"

Mrs. Jarley, waxworks, and audience swung into the final chorus. Even the four inverted Casabiancas at the back assisted by swinging their legs.

"She sent for Mrs. Jarley on the spot!
And the girls were quite content with what they got.

They were spared that youth entrancing,
Who says: 'I don't much care for dancing,
But I don't mind sitting out with you—eh, what?'"

But Cherry Ripe was not singing. She was saying to herself,—

"Not in the hall, and not behind the scenes! I wonder where he can have got to! He *may* have missed his train, of course; but then he could have wired, hours ago. Well, Hughie, *mon ami*, if that's the way you treat invitations—"

But the curtain had fallen, and all the waxworks were scuffling off their high chairs and trooping to the dressing-rooms. Cherry Ripe, following their example, put an arm round Pierrette, and said:—

"Come along, Sylvia! Home, supper, and a dance! That's the programme now." [pg 31

On reaching Manors, Joan enquired of Mr. Goble,—

"Is Mr. Hughie back, John?"

"'Deed, no, mem."

"Any telegram, or anything?" asked Joan carelessly.

"Naething whatever! He'll no be back till the morn, I doot," said Mr. Goble.

Two hours later, when supper was over and the dancing at its height, Mr. Haliburton approached Joan.

"Our dance, I think, Cherry Ripe?" he said.

Cherry Ripe concurred.

"Will you come and sit in the conservatory?" continued Haliburton. "I want to say something particular to you."

Joan regarded him covertly for a moment.

"All right!" she said.

CHAPTER XVII

[pg 32

IN WHICH CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME, AND HUGHIE MISSES HIS TRAIN

THE dentist laid aside his excavating pick with a regretful sigh, and began to fit what looked like a miniature circular saw into the end of the electric drill.

Hughie, recumbent in the chair, telling himself resolutely that, appearances to the contrary, the man was doing this because it was really necessary, and not from mere voluptuousness, cautiously inserted his tongue into the hole, and calculated that the final clearance would be a three minutes' job at the shortest.

"It seems hard to believe," said the dentist morosely, setting the machinery of the drill in motion with his foot, "that your teeth have not been attended to for eight years. A little wider, please!"

Hughie realised that he was being called a liar as unmistakably as a man can be; but at this moment the drill came into full operation, and he merely gripped the arms of the chair.

"A man," continued the dentist, removing the drill and suddenly syringing the cavity with ice-

cold water,—"empty, please!—should make a point of having his teeth inspected once every six months; a woman, once every three." [pg 32

"A man," replied Hughie (who believed that the operations with the drill were completed), "must have his teeth inspected when he can. That is," he added rapidly,—the dentist was deliberately fitting a fresh tool into the drill,—"I have been abroad for the last eight or nine years."

"Away from civilisation, perhaps," said the dentist compassionately, getting good leverage for his operating hand by using Hughie's lower jaw as a fulcrum.

"Quite!" gurgled Hughie, whose head at the moment was clasped tight to his inquisitor's waistcoat buttons.

"In that case," said the dentist in distinctly mollified tones, "we must not be too hard on you. Tongue down, please!"

He completed his excavating and inundating operations, and, regretfully pushing away the arm of the drilling-machine, began to line his victim's mouth with some material which tasted like decomposing sponge-bags.

"Your teeth have preserved their soundness in quite an unaccountable way," he continued, with the air of a just man conscientiously endeavouring to minimise a grievance. "There is one other small hole here,"—he ran a pointed instrument well into it to prove his statement,—"but beyond that there is nothing further to find fault with." [pg 32]

He began to pound up a mysterious mixture in a small mortar, and ran on:—

"You must have been very careful in your diet."

"No sweets," said Hughie laconically. "And I used very often to eat my meat right off the bone. That keeps teeth white, doesn't it?"

The dentist put down the mortar with some deliberation, and glared. Anything in the shape of levity emanating from occupants of the rack jars upon a Chief Tormentor's sense of what is professionally proper. But Hughie was lying back in the chair with his mouth open and eyes shut, exhibiting no sign of humorous intention. Still, this must not occur again. The dentist looked round for a gag. He produced from somewhere a long snaky india-rubber arrangement, terminating in a hooked nozzle. This he hung over Hughie's lower ερκος οδονΤων, effectually stifling his utterance and reducing his share in the conversation to a sort of Morse Code of single gurgles and long-drawn sizzles suggestive of the emptying of a bath.

Then, taking up his mortar, he proceeded, with the air of one who is using a giant's strength magnanimously,—

"You have visited the Antipodes, perhaps?"

"Gug-gug-guggle!" proceeded from the india-rubber-lined orifice before him. [pg 32]

"Ah! that must have been very interesting," continued the dentist. "Had you many opportunities of discussing the question of Colonial Preference with the leading men out there?"

"Glug!" came the reply.

"That was unfortunate. But perhaps you were able to form some idea of the general Australian attitude towards the question?"

"G-r-r-r-r-r! Guggle, guggle! Ch'k, ch'k!" observed Hughie.

"Personally," continued the dentist, rolling the pulverised substance in the mortar between his finger and thumb, and lighting a spirit-lamp, "I am an ardent upholder of the principles of that truly great man, the immortal Richard Cobden. Are you?"

Hughie, thoughtlessly lifting the gag for a moment, replied—with fatal distinctness.

It was a mad act. The dentist simply took up a humorous-looking bulb-shaped appliance, and having filled it with red-hot air at the spirit-lamp, discharged its contents, in one torrid blast, into the excavated tooth.

Twenty minutes later Hughie was ushered into the street, and stood poising himself doubtfully on the doorstep. He did not know what to do.

Strictly speaking, his next engagement should have been to entertain Mr. Lance Gaymer at luncheon. But that exposer of fraudulent trustees had not replied to Hughie's written invitation. Hence Hughie's stork-like attitude outside the dentist's premises. Personally he had not the slightest desire to entertain Lance Gaymer at luncheon or any other meal. On the other hand, he had promised Joan to seek out her brother and ascertain if all was well with him. Ergo, since the Mountain declined to come to Mohammed, or even answer his letters, Mohammed must put his pride in his pocket and go to the Mountain. [pg 32

The prophet accordingly hailed a hansom, and was directing the cabman to drive to the Mountain's residence in Maida Vale,—a paradoxical address for a Mountain, by the way,—when a strange thing happened. Nay, it was a providential thing; for if Hughie had not resolutely summoned up his courage and told the dentist to go in and finish off the small hole in the last tooth,—a treat which that sated epicure was inclined to postpone until another occasion,—he would have hailed this hansom twenty minutes sooner and so missed his just reward.

Mrs. Lance Gaymer suddenly came round a corner of the quiet square, and crossed the road directly in front of Hughie's hansom. Hughie dismounted, and greeted her.

"Why," cried Mrs. Lance, "I do declare, it's Mr. Marrable!" [pg 32

She smiled upon Hughie in a manner so intoxicating that the cabman coughed discreetly to the horse. That intelligent animal made no comment, but turned round and looked at the cabman.

"Fancy meeting you!" she continued archly.

"Did your husband get a letter from me yesterday, Mrs. Gaymer, do you know?" asked Hughie.

No, Mrs. Gaymer was sure he had not. The poor boy had took to his bed a week ago, with the "flu"; so Mrs. Lance had been conducting his correspondence for him, and could therefore vouch for the non-arrival of Hughie's letter. She hazarded the suggestion that possibly Hughie had written to Maida Vale.

Yes. Hughie had.

"That's it, then!" said Mrs. Lance. "We moved from there six weeks ago. We live in Balham now."

Hughie was not sufficiently conversant with suburban caste distinctions to feel sure whether this was a step up or down in the social scale, so he merely expressed a hope that Lance was getting well again.

"I want to come and see him, if I may," he said. "I asked him to come and lunch with me, but I suppose that is out of the question at present." [pg 32

"You're right there," said Mrs. Lance in distinctly guarded tones. "He ain't what you'd call spry. He's not seeing anybody."

"I shouldn't stay long," urged Hughie.

"Is it business?" enquired Mrs. Gaymer with a touch of hostility.

"Yes," said Hughie.

Mrs. Gaymer surveyed him curiously. To most people she would have said flatly and untruthfully that her husband was unfit to see any one, for she had her own reasons for discouraging visitors to Balham just now. But she had always cherished a weakness for Hugh Marrable. He treated her exactly as he treated all women—with a scrupulous courtesy which, while it slightly bored frivolous damsels of his acquaintance, was appreciated at its true value by a lady whose social status was more than a little equivocal. It is only when one has secret doubts about being a real lady that one appreciates being treated as such.

"Could you come to-morrow?" she said at last.

"I have to get back to Manors to-night," said Hughie. "Might I come out to Balham this afternoon? Or, better still, will you come and lunch with me somewhere now, and we can drive out there afterwards? Or must you get back to the invalid?" he added, with just a suspicion of hopefulness. [pg 32

Mrs. Lance, however, expressed her willingness to come and lunch, but insisted on being allowed to precede Hughie to Balham by at least one hour. The house was *that* untidy! she explained.

Accordingly Hughie, having decided in his mind upon an establishment where he would not be likely to encounter any of his own friends, and which would yet conform with Mrs. Gaymer's notions of what was sufficiently "classy," conveyed his fair charge thither in a hansom; and presently found himself engaged in that traditional *ne plus ultra* of dissipation—the entertainment of another man's wife to a meal in a public restaurant.

Mrs. Lance, after she desisted from her efforts to impress upon her host the fact that she was quite accustomed to this sort of thing, was amusing enough. She addressed the waiter—an inarticulate Teuton—as "Johnny," and made a point of saying a few words to the manager when he passed their table. She smoked a cigarette after lunch, and was good enough to commend Hughie's taste in champagne—a brand which he had hazily recognised in the wine-list as being the sweetest and stickiest beverage ever distilled from gooseberries. (It was the sort of champagne which goes [pg 32
well with chocolate creams: "Chorus Girls' Entire," he remembered they used to call it.) At any rate it met with Mrs. Lance's undivided approval, and Hughie realised for the first time that a University education can after all be useful to one in after-life.

Suddenly Mrs. Lance enquired:—

"Do you know any theatrical managers, my dear boy?"

Yes, Hughie had come across one or two. "Why?"

"Well," said Mrs. Lance expansively, "you've always treated me like flesh and blood, which is more than what some of your relations have done; so I'll tell you. After all, I've got me feelings, same as—"

"What about the theatrical managers?" inquired Hughie tactfully.

"Oh, yes. Do you think you could ask one of 'em to give me a shop? The chorus would do. I was in it before," said Mrs. Gaymer candidly.

"Why do you want to go back there?"

"I—I've got a fancy for it—that's all," replied Mrs. Gaymer in a thoroughly unconvincing tone.

Hughie wondered if Lance and his wife were beginning to tire of one another.

"I do know one or two men," he said, "who are interested in some of the musical-comedy [pg 32
syndicates. Shall I try them?"

"Will you reelly? You'll be a duck if you do," said Mrs. Gaymer.

After the deliverance of this unsolicited testimonial Hughie's guest observed that she must be getting home, and Hughie, having put her into a cab and paid the driver, retired to his club, clogged with viscous champagne and feeling excessively unwell, to wait until it should be time for him to follow her.

To look at the double row of eligible residences which composed Talbot Street, Balham, you would hardly have suspected that any of them would support what the Inland Revenue Schedule calls a "male servant." And yet, when Hughie rang the bell of Number Nineteen, the door was opened by such an appanage of prosperity. He was an elderly gentleman with a rheumy but humorous eye, and a nose which suggested the earlier stages of elephantiasis. He wore a dress-coat of distinctly fashionable cut (which, needless to say, did not fit him) and the regulation white shirt and collar, the latter quite two sizes too small; but his boots and trousers apparently belonged to a totally different class of society.

"Name of Marrable?" he enquired, smiling benevolently upon Hughie.

"Yes."

"Step in. We've been expectin' of you for 'alf-an-hour. Don't wipe your boots on that mat. It's [pg 33
worth one-and-eight."

After this somewhat remarkable confidence, the Gaymers' major-domo conducted the visitor upstairs. Here he threw open a door with truly theatrical grandeur, and announced,—

"'Ere's the young toff for you, my de—"

"Thank you, James: that will do," interposed Mrs. Lance Gaymer, with a very fair imitation of the manner of a musical-comedy duchess. "How do you do, Mr. Marrable?"

She was attired in the faded glories of a tea-gown, of a material more pretentious than durable; and in the half-light of the drawing-room—the blinds were partially lowered—looked extremely handsome in a tawdry way.

She apologised for her retainer's familiarity. Mr. Marrable would doubtless know what old servants was. Still, James must certainly be spoke to about it.

"You'll drink a cup of tea with me," she continued, "and then we'll pop up and see Lance, pore boy! Ring the bell, please."

Hughie did so, and a rather laborious quarter-of-an-hour followed. He ploughed his way through a morass of unlikely topics, while Mrs. Lance, who was obviously perturbed at the non-appearance of tea, replied in *distrait* monosyllables. Hughie was conscious about half-way through [pg 33
the conversation of a faint crash in the lower regions, and wondered dimly whether calamity had overtaken the afternoon meal. If so, he had no doubt as to which of the domestic staff of Number Nineteen was responsible.

At last the door opened, and the inestimable James appeared.

"You done it this time!" he remarked severely. "The 'andle of that tea-pot 'as came right away in me 'and. It must have been that way this long while. You won't get no tea now. Wot's more, that tea-pot will 'ave to come off the invent—"

By this time Mrs. Lance Gaymer, with dumb but frenzied signallings, was herding her censorious hireling through the door, and his concluding remarks were lost in the passage outside.

Presently she returned, smiling bravely. Hughie experienced a sudden pang of pity and admiration. Lance's wife was the right sort of girl after all.

"I *reelly* must apologise—" she began.

But Hughie interrupted her. He rose, and looked her frankly in the face.

"Mrs. Gaymer," he said, "please don't bother about keeping up appearances with me. I never cared a hang about them, and never shall. Tell me, what are you doing with a bailiff in the house?"

Mrs. Lance broke down and cried,—more from relief than anything else,—and presently [pg 33
Hughie, much to his surprise, found himself sitting beside her, patting her large but shapely hand, and uttering words of comfort and encouragement into her ear.

Half an hour later he concluded an interview with Mr. Albert Mould, broker's man,—late James, the butler,—in the dingy dining-room downstairs. The latter gentleman, the more gorgeous items of his apparel now replaced by garments of equal social standing with his boots and trousers, was laboriously writing a receipt with Hughie's fountain-pen, following the movements of the nib with the end of a protruding tongue. Presently he finished.

"There you are, sir," he said, breathing heavily upon the paper to dry the ink. "Twenty-seven, fifteen, eight—and thank you! What beats me," he added reflectively, "is 'ow you spotted me. What was it give me away? Seems to me I *looked* all right. I was wearin' the young feller's evenin' coat and one of 'is shirts, and I thought I was lookin' a treat all the time. Was it me trousis?"

To avoid wounding his guest's feelings, Hughie agreed that it *was* his trousis.

"It's a queer trade, this of yours," he said.

"You got to earn a livin' some'ow," said Mr. Mould apologetically, "same as any other yewman [pg 33
bean. It's not a bad job, as jobs go. They carry on a lot, o' course, when you're first put in, and usually the wife cries; but they soon finds out as you won't do 'em no 'arm. You makes your inventory and settles down in the kitching, with a pint o' somethink in your 'and an' a pipe in your face, and in less than 'alf a tick you're one o' the family, a'most. Why, I've 'elped wash the baby

afore now."

"Don't you ever get thrown out?" asked Hughie.

"I *'ave* bin," replied Mr. Mould, in a tone which gently reproved the tactlessness of the question, "but not often. After all, I only come *in* agin; and it's a matter of seven days for assault, p'raps, on top o' the distraint. Most of 'em 'as the sense to remember that, so they humours me, as it were. They speak me fair, and give me jobs to do about the house. Still, it were a bit of a surprise when 'er ladyship comes 'ome to-day about two o'clock and asks me would 'arf-a-crown be any good to me, and, if so, would I mind playin' at bein' a butler for a hour or two. I felt a fool, like, dressed up that way, but I always was one to oblige a bit o' skirt. Been weak with women," he added autobiographically, "from a boy. This fer me?" as Hughie opened the street-door and sped [pg 33
the parting guest in a particularly acceptable manner. "Thank you, Captain! *Good* day!"

He shuffled down the steps and along the street, obviously on his way to liquidate Hughie's half-crown, and the donor of that gratuity returned to the dining-room, where he took Mr. Mould's laboriously indited receipt from the table. Then he went upstairs, feeling desperately sorry for Mr. and Mrs. Lance. He had done what he could for them, in his eminently practical fashion, and set them on their feet again; but—for how long? Debts! Millstones! Poor things!

On the landing above he encountered Mrs. Gaymer, wide-eyed and incredulous.

"Lance would like to see you now," she said. "In here!" She opened a door. "And—and—I say," she added, half in a whisper, "surely you don't mean to say he's been and *gawn*!"

For answer Hughie awkwardly handed her the stamped receipt, and passed into the bedroom.

His interview with Lance lasted an hour and a half. Much passed between them during that period, and by the time Hughie rose and said he must be going, each man had entirely revised his opinion of the other. Most of us have the right stuff concealed in us somewhere, however heavily it may be overlaid by folly or vanity or desire to make a show. There are few men who do not improve [pg 33
on acquaintance, once you get right through the veneer.

Poor Lance, struggling in deep waters, suddenly discovered in the dour and undemonstrative Hughie a cheerful helper and—most precious of all to a proud nature—an entirely uncritical confidant. Hughie on his part discovered what he had rather doubted before, namely, that Lance was a man. Moreover, he presently laid bare a truly human and rather sad tale of genuine ability and secret ambition, heavily handicapped by youthful cocksureness and want of ballast.

They discussed many things in that dingy bedroom: Lance's past; Uncle Jimmy's little allowance, mortgaged many years in advance; the creditors to whom, together with the law of the land, he was indebted for the presence beneath his roof of the versatile Mr. Mould; his future; the journalistic work which was promised him as soon as he should be fit again; Mrs. Lance; and also Mr. Haliburton.

Joan's name was barely mentioned. Lance exhibited a newborn delicacy in the matter. His officious solicitude on his sister's behalf was dead; he knew now that no woman need ever regret having trusted Hugh Marrable; and he was content to leave it at that.

"Well, I must be moving," said Hughie at last. "Buck up, and get fit! It's good to hear that [pg 33
there's work waiting for you when you get about again. Grand tonic, that! So long!"

He shook Lance's hand, and the two parted undemonstratively. Lance made no set speech: he appreciated Hughie's desire that there should be no returning of thanks or contrite expressions of gratitude. All he said was:—

"Hughie, you are a sportsman!"

Then he settled down on his pillow with a happy sigh. He had paid Hughie the highest compliment it was in his power to bestow—and that costs an Englishman an effort.

So they parted. But Mrs. Lance did not let Hughie off so easily. As she accompanied him downstairs to open the door for him, she suddenly seized his hand and kissed it. Tears were running down her cheeks.

Hughie grew red.

"I say, Mrs. Lance," he said in clumsy expostulation, "it's all right, you know! He'll soon be quite well again."

"Let me cry," said Mrs. Lance comfortably. "It does me good."

They stood together in the obscurity of the shabby little hall, and Hughie, surveying the flamboyant but homely figure before him, wondered what the future might hold in store for this little household. It all depended, of course, on—

"Mrs. Lance," he said suddenly, "tell me—do you—love him?" [pg 33

"I do!" replied Mrs. Lance, in a voice which for the moment relegated her patchouli and dyed eyebrows to nothingness.

"And does he—love you?"

"He *does*—thank God!"

"You are both all right, then," said Hughie, nodding a wise head. "Nothing matters much—except that!"

"That's true," said Mrs. Gaymer. "But—I wonder how *you* knew!" she added curiously.

"Good-bye!" said Hughie.

As Hughie stood in the darkening street a church clock began to chime. He looked at his watch.

It was six o'clock, and he had promised faithfully to be at Joey's entertainment at eight! He had good reason for his absence, it is true, but a reason is not always accepted as an excuse.

"I've fairly torn it, this time!" he reflected morosely.

He was right.

Early next morning he arrived at the village station by the newspaper train, and made his way on foot to Manors. A sleepy housemaid was sweeping out the hall, which was strewn with *confetti*, —some cotillion figures had been included in last night's festivities,—and as Hughie made his way [pg 33
to his dressing-room, intent upon a bath and shave before breakfast, he reflected not without satisfaction that, despite Joey's prospective fulminations, he had escaped something by missing his train.

On his dressing-table he found a note, addressed to him in Joan's handwriting. It said:—

> Dear Hughie,—To-night at the dance Mr. Haliburton asked me to marry him. Being a dutiful ward above all things, I have referred him to you. He is coming to see you to-morrow afternoon—that is, if you are back. I hope you had a good time in town. J.

CHAPTER XVIII [pg 33

EX MACHINA

Miss Joan Gaymer, pleasantly fatigued after last night's dissipation, reclined in a canvas chair on the lawn at Manors. She had just finished reading a letter which had arrived by the afternoon post. It was from her brother Lance, and conveyed, probably a good deal more fully than Hughie himself would have done, the reasons for Hughie's absence on the previous evening. Joan's brow was puckered thoughtfully, and she surveyed the tips of her small shoes, which were cocked at an unladylike altitude upon a stool in front of her, with a profundity of maiden meditation which was perhaps explained by the fact that she had received a proposal of marriage the evening before, and was expecting the proposer to come and second his own motion at any moment.

To her entered suddenly Jno. Alex. Goble.

"Yon felly!" he intimated austerely.

"Mr. Haliburton, do you mean, John?" inquired Miss Gaymer, hastily letting down her feet.

"Aye. Wull I loose him in here?"

"Yes, please. No—I mean—" [pg 34

But Cupid's messenger was gone. Presently he returned, and, with the air of one introducing the Coroner to the foreman of the jury, announced Mr. Haliburton.

That ardent suitor advanced gallantly across the lawn, and taking Joan's hand with an air of respectful rapture, endeavoured to draw its owner into the shade of the copper beech. Joan forestalled his intentions by saying at once,—

"Come along into the library, Mr. Haliburton, and we'll see what my guardian has to say to you."

Mr. Haliburton hinted that there was no hurry, and made a pointed reference to Amaryllis and the shade; but his unsentimental nymph marched him briskly across the lawn, round the corner of the house, and in at the front door.

They crossed the cool, dark hall, and Joan tapped at the oaken door of the library.

"Come in," said a voice.

The lovers entered.

"I have brought Mr. Haliburton to see you, Hughie," remarked Miss Gaymer, much as one might announce the arrival of a person to inspect the gas meter.

Mr. Haliburton, who was not the man to show embarrassment, whether he felt it or not, advanced easily into the room. Joan surveyed his straight back and square shoulders as he passed her, and the corners of her mouth twitched, ever so little. [pg 34

Then she looked at Hughie. It was her first meeting with him since his return home that morning. He had answered her note by another, saying that he would be in the library at five o'clock. There was no twitching about his mouth. It was closed like a steel trap; and he stood with his back to the wood-fire which glowed in the grate—it was getting on in September, and cold out of the sun—with absolute stolidity. Joan saw at a glance that, whatever the difficulties of the position, her guardian's line of action was now staked out and his mind made up—one way or the other.

She dropped into an arm-chair.

"Now, you two," she remarked encouragingly, "get to work! I want to hear what each of you has got to say about my future. It will be quite exciting—like going to a palmist!"

The two men turned and regarded her in unfeigned surprise. They had not expected this. Haliburton began swiftly to calculate whether Joan's presence would be a help to him or not. But Hughie said at once:—

"You must leave us alone, Joan, please! I can't possibly allow you to remain."

Joan lay back in her chair and smiled up at him, frankly mutinous. She had never yet failed, when she so desired, to "manage" a man. Hughie was regarding her stonily; but two minutes, she calculated, would make him sufficiently pliable. [pg 34

She was wrong. At the end of this period Hughie was still rigidly waiting for her to leave the room. Joan, a little surprised at his obstinacy, remarked:—

"If you are going to object to—to Mr. Haliburton's suggestions, Hughie, I think I ought to hear what the objections are."

"Before you go," said Hughie in even tones, "I will tell you one thing—and that should be sufficient. It is this. There is not the slightest prospect of this—this engagement coming off. My reasons for saying so I am prepared to give to Mr. Haliburton, and if he thinks proper he can communicate them to you afterwards. But I don't think he will. Now will you leave us, please?"

Joan was genuinely astonished. But she controlled herself. She was determined to see the

matter out now. All the woman in her—and she was all woman—answered to the challenge contained in Hughie's dictatorial attitude. Besides, she was horribly curious.

She heaved a sad little sigh, and made certain shameless play with her eyes which she knew stirred poor Hughie to the point of desperation, and surveyed the result through drooping lashes [pg 34
with some satisfaction. Hughie's mouth was fast shut, and he was breathing through his nose; and Joan could see a little pulse beating in his right temple. (Both of them, for the moment, had forgotten the ardent suitor by the window.) She would win through in a moment now.

But alas! she had forgotten a masculine weapon against which all the Votes for Women in the world will avail nothing, when it comes to a pinch.

Hughie suddenly relaxed his attitude, and strode across to the door, which he held open for her.

"At *once*, please!" he said in a voice which Joan had never heard before, though many men had.

Without quite knowing why, Miss Gaymer rose meekly from her chair and walked out of the room. The door closed behind her.

When Joan found herself on the lawn again she gasped a little.

"Ooh!" she said breathlessly. "I—I feel just as if I'd been hit in the face by a big wave! This game is not turning out quite as you expected, Joey, my child: the man Hughie is one up! Still, I'll take it out of him another time. But—heavens!"—She was staring, like Red Riding-Hood on a historic occasion, at a recumbent figure in her canvas chair beneath the copper beech—"Who on [pg 34
earth is that in my chair? It's—it's—oh! Joey Gaymer, you've got hysterics! It's—it's—Uncle Jimmy! *Uncle Jimmy!... My Uncle—Jimmy!*"

Next moment she was reposing comfortably, a distracted bundle of tears and laughter, in the arms of Jimmy Marrable.

"A bit sudden—eh, young lady?" enquired that gentleman at last. "I ought to have written, I suppose. But I quite forgot you would all think I was dead. Never mind—I'm not!"

He blew his nose resonantly to substantiate his statement.

Joan, satisfied at last that he was real, and greatly relieved to find that she was not suffering from hysterical delusions arising from Hughie's brutal treatment of her, enquired severely of the truant where he had been for the last five years.

Jimmy Marrable told her. It was a long story, and the shadow of the copper beech had perceptibly lengthened by the time the narrator had embarked at Zanzibar for the port of Leith. They had the garden to themselves, for the Leroys were out.

"I don't want to hear any more adventures, because I'm simply bursting with questions," said Miss Gaymer frankly. "First of all, why did you go away? You rushed off in such a hurry that you [pg 34
had no time to explain. I was barely eighteen then."

"It was the old failing—the Marrable wandering tendency," replied her uncle. "I had kept it at bay quite easily for close on fifteen years, but it came back very hard and suddenly about that time."

"Why?"

"Partly, I think, because the only thing that had kept me at home all those years seemed to be slipping away from me."

"I *wasn't*!" declared Miss Gaymer stoutly. Then she reflected. "Do you mean—all those silly boys? Was it them?"

"It was," said Jimmy Marrable. "They not only put my nose out of joint but they bored me to tears."

"You were always worth the whole lot of them put together, dear," said Miss Gaymer

affectionately.

"I knew that," replied Jimmy Marrable modestly, "but I wasn't quite sure if you did. I saw that for the next two or three years you would be healthily and innocently employed in making fools of young men, and so could well afford to do without your old wreck of an uncle. The serious part would not come until you grew up to be of a marriageable age. So I decided in the meanwhile to treat myself to just one last potter round the globe, and then, in a couple of years or so, come home and assume the onerous duties of chucker-out." [pg 34

"Then why did you stay away so long?" demanded Miss Gaymer.

"Because I heard Hughie had come home," said Jimmy Marrable simply.

Joan started guiltily, and her hand, which was resting in one of the old gentleman's, relaxed its hold for a moment. Jimmy Marrable noticed nothing, and proceeded:—

"I got news of him from a man in Cape Town. His name was Allerton. He seemed a bit of a rolling stone, but had lately married the proprietress of a little public-house, Wynberg way, and was living in great contentment and affluence. His wife regarded his capture as the crowning achievement of her life, and altogether they were a most devoted couple. On hearing that my name was Marrable, he said he was sure I must be Hughie's uncle, as Hughie had told him I was the only relation he had. He was a gentleman, of sorts, and seemed to regard friend Hughie as a kind of cross between Providence and the Rock of Gibraltar. They had been through some rather tough times together—on board the Orinoco. I expect Hughie has often told you all about that?"

Joan shook her head.

"No? Well, it was like him not to. However, Allerton told me for a fact that Hughie was now home for good; so I knew then that my plans had worked out right after all, and that I need not hurry back. My little girl was safe." [pg 34

He sighed contentedly, and patted Joan's hand.

"I'm a happy old fossil, Joey," he said. "I've always schemed in a clumsy way to bring this about, and now it has happened. 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends,' you know. And now, I suppose, you are mistress of this old house. How long have you been married?"

"We're not," said Joan in a very small voice.

"Not what?"

"Married."

She held up a ringless hand in corroboration. Jimmy Marrable inspected it.

"Where's your engagement ring?" he demanded.

Joan felt that there was a bad time coming—especially for Uncle Jimmy.

"We—we're not engaged," she faltered. Then she continued swiftly, for there was a look on Jimmy Marrable's brown and wrinkled face that frightened her, and she wanted to get explanations over: "Hughie and I didn't quite care for one another—in that way. No, I'm a liar. *I* didn't care for Hughie in that way."

"He asked you, then?"

"Yes." [pg 34

"And you—wouldn't—?"

Joan nodded. She suddenly felt unreasonably mean and despicable. She had declined to marry Hughie in all good faith, as she had a perfect right to do, for the very sufficient reason that she did not like him—or his way of putting things—well enough; and she had felt no particular compunction at the time in dealing the blow. But none of these reasons seemed any excuse for hurting Uncle Jimmy.

Since then, too, her feelings towards Hughie himself had altered to an extent which she was just beginning to realise. Of late she had found herself taking a quite peculiar interest in Hughie's movements. Why, she hardly knew. He paid her few attentions; he was habitually uncompromising in what he considered the execution of his duty; and he had made a shocking mess of her affairs.

But—he was in trouble; people were down on him; and he had been her friend ever since she could remember.

Now Joan Gaymer, if she was nothing else, was loyal; and loyalty in a woman rather thrives on adversity than otherwise. And a woman's loyalty to a man who is her friend, if you endeavour to overstrain it or drive it into a corner, in nine cases out of ten will protect itself, Proteus-like, by turning into something entirely different, a something which is quite impervious to outward attack and can only be strained to breaking-point by one person—the man himself; and not always then, as countless undeserving husbands know. Joan's loyalty to Hughie was in some such process of transition. She thought about him a good deal, but she had never once faced the question of her ultimate relations with him. The modern maiden is not given to candid analysis of her own feelings towards members of the opposite sex,—she considers these exercises "Early Victorian," or "sentimental," or "effeminate"; and consequently Joan had never frankly asked herself what she really thought about Hughie Marrable. At times, say when she heard people speak ill of her deputy-guardian behind his back, she had been conscious that she was hot and angry; at others, when something occurred to bring home to her with special force the tribulations that Hughie was enduring, she had been conscious of a large and dim determination to "make it up to him," in some manner as yet undefined and at some time as yet unspecified. In short, like many a daughter of Eve before her, she had not known her own mind. She knew it now. Her heart smote her. [pg 34

Suddenly Jimmy Marrable's voice broke in with the rather unexpected but not altogether unreasonable question:—

"Then if you aren't either engaged or married to Hughie, may I ask what the deuce you are doing in his house?" [pg 35

"It isn't his house," replied Joan, recalling her wandering attention to the rather irascible figure by her side. "He has let it to the Leroys, and he and I are both staying here as guests just now."

"What on earth did the boy want to let the place for? Why couldn't you and the Leroys come and stay here as *his* guests?"

"I think," said Miss Gaymer delicately, "that Hughie is—rather hard up."

"Hard up? Stuff! He has eight hundred a year, and enough coming in from the estate to make it pay its own way without any expense to him. How much more does he want?"

"I don't think Hughie is a very good business man," said Joan.

She made the remark in sincere defence of Hughie, just as a mother might say, "Ah, but he always *had* a weak chest!" when her offspring comes in last in the half-mile handicap. But Jimmy Marrable, being a man, took the suggestion as a reproach.

"Nonsense!" he said testily. "Hughie has as hard a head as any man I know. What do you mean by running him down? Have you any complaint to make of the way he has managed *your* affairs—eh?"

"None whatever," said Joan promptly.

"But—bless my soul!" cried Jimmy Marrable; "I forgot! You haven't *got*—" He paused, and appeared to be working out some abstruse problem in his head. "Look here, Joey," he continued presently, "if you aren't married to Hughie, what are you living on?" [pg 35

Joan stared at him in astonishment.

"On the money you left behind for me," she said. "What else?"

The old gentleman regarded her intently for a moment, and then said:—

"Of course: I forgot. I suppose Hughie pays it to you quarterly."

"Yes—into my bank account," replied Miss Gaymer with a touch of pride.

"How much?"

"Is it *quite* fair to tell?" inquired Joan, instinctively protecting her fraudulent trustee.

"Of course. It was my money in the first instance. Go on—how much?"

"Four hundred a year," said Joan. "It was three hundred at first. Hughie told me you hadn't left

as much as he expected, and that I should have to be careful. But Ursula Harbord—she is the girl I share a flat with: she is frightfully clever about money and business—told me to ask Hughie what interest I was getting on my capital, or something. I found out for her—four per cent, I think it was —and she said it wasn't *nearly* enough. There were things called preference shares, or something, that pay ten or twelve per cent; and Hughie must sell out at once, and buy these instead. What's the matter?" [pg 35

Jimmy Marrable had suddenly choked.

"Nothing! Nothing!" he said, in some confusion. "A smart girl, this friend of yours! Takes a large size in boots and gloves, I should say, and acts as honorary treasurer to various charitable organisations! Twelve per cent! Aha!" He slapped himself feebly. "And what did Master Hughie say to *that*?"

"I could see he didn't half like it," continued Joan; "but Ursula had declared that if I wouldn't allow her to speak to him, she would consult some responsible person; as she was *sure* Hughie was mismanaging things disgracefully. So to keep her quiet I let her. I think Hughie saw there was something in what she said, though; because he immediately agreed to give me four hundred a year in future instead of three. *Is* it enough, Uncle Jimmy, or has poor Hughie really made a mess of things, as people say? *Say* it's enough, Uncle Jimmy! I *know* he did his best, and I'd rather go without—"

"Enough?"

Jimmy Marrable turned and scrutinised his ward closely, as if appraising her exact value. Certainly she was very lovely. He whistled softly, and nodded his head in an enigmatical manner. [pg 35

"I'd have done it myself," he murmured darkly. "Enough?" he repeated aloud. "My little girl, do you know how much capital an income of four hundred a year represents?"

Joan shook her head. Her experience of finance was limited to signing a cheque in the proper corner.

"Well, about ten thousand pounds."

"Hoo!" said Miss Gaymer, pleasantly fluttered. "Have I got all that?"

"No."

"Oh! How much, then?"

Jimmy Marrable told her.

CHAPTER XIX [pg 35

IN WHICH LOVE FLIES OUT OF THE WINDOW

HUGHIE closed the door on Joan, and breathed a gentle sigh of relief. He was spoiling for a fight, and he had just got his hands free, so to speak. Brief but perfect satisfaction lay before him.

He resumed his position in front of the fire. Mr. Haliburton sat on an oak table and swung his legs.

"Now, Marrable—" began the latter briskly.

Hughie interrupted him.

"Mr. Haliburton," he said, "you heard my intimation to Miss Gaymer just now?"

"I did," said Mr. Haliburton.

"Well, I should like to repeat it to you. The marriage which has been arranged—by you—will

not take place. That's all."

"That," replied Mr. Haliburton easily, "is a matter for Joan and myself—"

"We will refer to my ward as Miss Gaymer for the rest of this interview," said Hughie stiffly.

"Certainly. To resume. You see, Marrable, although you were appointed Miss Gaymer's guardian by the eccentric old gentleman who bears the same name as yourself, your authority does not last for ever. I understand that the lady will shortly become her own mistress." [pg 35

"She will."

"In which case she will have the control of her own property."

"That is so."

"Well,"—Mr. Haliburton paused, and flicked the ash off his cigarette,—"don't you think that this display of authority on your part, considering that it is subject to a time-limit, is rather ridiculous?"

"I have only one observation to make on that point," said Hughie coolly, "and that is, that I have made no display of authority of any kind."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Haliburton, raising his histrionic eyebrows, "aren't you forbidding the banns?"

"I have never forbidden anything. I have merely stated that the match will not come off."

"Don't let us quibble, man!" said Haliburton impatiently. He got off the table. "Look here, Marrable, there is no need for you and me to be mealy-mouthed in this matter. Let's be frank. You want this girl: so do I. She can't marry both of us, so she must pick one. She has picked me: I have her word for it. She says she cares for me more than any man in the world, and would tramp the roads with me. And I with her! Why, man—"

As he uttered these noble words Mr. Haliburton struck an attitude which many young women in the front row of the pit would have considered highly dramatic, but which merely struck the prejudiced and unsympathetic male before him as theatrical in the extreme. [pg 35

"Drop it!" said Hughie. "You make me quite sick."

He spoke the truth. He did not know whether Haliburton's rhapsody rested on any assured foundation or not. But in any case Joan's fresh and innocent youth was a very sacred thing, and even the suggestion that she could have anything in common with this glorified super made him feel physically unwell.

Mr. Haliburton broke off, and smiled.

"Marrable," he said, almost genially, "we understand each other! I see you want plain English. I said just now that we were both fond of the girl. So we are. But I fancy we are both a bit fonder of her little bit of stuff—eh? Now, you have been handling the dibs for a matter of eighteen months, I understand. You have feathered your nest pretty comfortably, from all I hear. Don't be a dog in the manger! Let your friends into a good thing too!"

The mask was off with a vengeance. Hughie swallowed something and thanked God that, if his wanderings among mankind had taught him nothing else, they had taught him to hold himself in till the time came. He said:— [pg 35

"Haliburton, I have told you several times that I do not forbid this engagement; because, as you have very acutely pointed out, my *veto* does not last for ever; but the match is not coming off, for all that. Before you go I will explain what I mean. I don't want to, because the consequences may be serious, both for Miss Gaymer and myself; but it will show you how absolutely determined I am to make a clean sweep of you.

"I should like to say in the first place that I should never have stood between Miss Gaymer and *any* man, so long as I honestly thought he could make her happy—not even a man whom I personally would regard as an ass or an outsider. But there are limits to everything, and you strike me as being the limit in this case. I have been making inquiries about you, and I now know your antecedents fairly well. You apparently are an actor of sorts, though all the actors of my acquaintance look distinctly unwell when your name is mentioned. However, whatever you are, I should be sorry to see any woman in whom I take an interest compelled to spend even half an hour

in your company. In fact, if you had not originally come down here as a friend of Lance Gaymer's,—over whom, by the way, I find you once had some hold,—I should have asked Captain Leroy's permission to kick you out of the place some time ago!" [pg 35

Mr. Haliburton looked a little uncomfortable. He held a good hand, but Hughie was obviously not bluffing. He had an uneasy feeling that there must be an unsuspected card out somewhere.

"To come to the main point," continued Hughie, "I want this engagement to be declared off by *you*, not by me. What is your price?"

Mr. Haliburton breathed again. Bribery? Was that all? He replied briskly:—

"How much have you got?"

"Is a thousand pounds any use?" asked Hughie.

"Twenty might be," replied the lover.

"My limit," said Hughie, who was not a man to haggle about what Mr. Mantalini once described as "demnition coppers," "is five thousand pounds."

"Talk sense!" said Mr. Haliburton briefly.

"The offer," continued Hughie steadily, "is open for five minutes. If you accept it I will write you a cheque now, and you will sit down and write a letter formally breaking off, on your own initiative, any engagement or understanding you may have entered into with Miss Gaymer, and undertaking never to come near her again; and I will see she gets it. If not—well, you'll be sorry, for you'll never make such a good bargain by any other means." [pg 35

Haliburton eyed him curiously.

"Is this your own money you are offering me?" he said.

"It is," said Hughie, looking at his watch. "Three minutes left."

"Won't it make rather a hole in your capital account?"

"It will. In fact, hole won't be the word for it! But it will be worth it."

Intelligence dawned upon Mr. Haliburton.

"I see," he said slowly. "You expect to recoup yourself later, when—when the marriage settlements are drawn up, eh? Or perhaps," he added sarcastically, "eighteen months of careful trusteeship have put you in a position to afford this extravagance!"

Hughie was surprised at his own self-control. Only the little pulse which Joan had noticed beat assiduously in his right temple.

"Fifteen seconds!" he said. "Do you take this offer, Mr. Haliburton?"

"No."

"Right!" Hughie put his watch back into his pocket and regarded the misguided blackmailer before him rather in the manner of a benevolent policeman standing over a small boy with a cigarette.

"Your last few remarks," he said, "have been so offensive that I know you would not have had the pluck to make them unless you thought you had me absolutely under your thumb. But I may as well proceed to my final move, and terminate this interview. I am very averse to taking this particular step, because its results may be awkward, as I said, for Miss Gaymer. That is why I offered you practically all the available money I have to call the deal off. But I see I can't help myself. Now, Haliburton,—by the way, I forgot to mention that your real name is Spratt: you seem to have become a big fish since you took to fortune-hunting,—I am going to make you break off your engagement. I am going to pay you a high compliment. I am going to give you a piece of information, known only to myself and Miss Gaymer's banker, for which you will ultimately be very grateful, and the knowledge of which will cause you, when you get outside (which will be very soon now), to kick yourself for a blamed fool because you did not accept my first offer." [pg 36

Mr. Haliburton-Spratt shuffled his feet a trifle uneasily, and Hughie continued:—

"You seem to be suffering from an aggravated attack of the prevailing impression that Miss Gaymer is an heiress. Her fortune has been variously estimated by tea-table experts at anything from forty to a hundred thousand pounds. I will now tell you what it really is. Get off the table: I want to open that dispatch-box." [pg 36

Mr. Haliburton, conscious of a slight sinking sensation just below the second button of his waistcoat, moved as requested, and Hughie took out of the box a bank-book and a bulky letter.

"When I came home from abroad," he said, "I found this letter awaiting me. It is from my uncle. The following passage will interest you: '... I have realised practically all my personal estate, and have placed the cash to your credit on Joey's behalf'—Joey is the name," he explained punctiliously, "by which Miss Gaymer is known to her intimate friends—'at the Law Courts Branch of the Home Counties Bank.... The rest of my property is set down and duly disposed of in my will, and cannot be touched until my death is authenticated.'"

"I hope there was a respectable sum in the bank," said Mr. Haliburton, his spirits rising again.

Hughie opened the pass-book.

"When I went to the bank in question," he said, "and asked to be allowed to see the amount of my balance, I was handed this pass-book. From it you will gather the exact value of Miss Gaymer's fortune at the moment when I took over the management of her affairs."

He handed the book to Mr. Haliburton. That devout lover glanced eagerly at the sum indicated on the balance-line—and turned a delicate green. [pg 36

"You see?" said Hughie calmly, taking the book back. "One hundred pounds sterling! A poor exchange for five thousand, Mr. Haliburton!"

"Where is the money?" said Haliburton thickly.

"That I can't tell you. But you will see by the book and this duly endorsed cheque,"—he picked a pink slip out of the dispatch-box,—"that the sum of thirty-nine thousand, nine hundred pounds—the amount he had put in a few days before, less one hundred—was drawn out of the bank, in a lump, by my uncle himself the day before he sailed. Why he did it, I can't imagine. He must have changed his plans suddenly. All I know is that he has put me in a very tight place as a trustee, and you in a much tighter one as a suitor, Mr. Haliburton!"

He took the cheque from the hands of the demoralized Haliburton, and closed the dispatch-box.

There was a long silence. At length Hughie said:—

"I presume I may take it that you now desire to withdraw from this engagement?"

"You may!" said Mr. Haliburton emphatically. He was too deeply chagrined to play his part any longer. [pg 36

Hughie surveyed him critically.

"You're a direct rascal, Spratt," he said; "you are no more hypocritical than you need be. But you're a rascal for all that. Well, I won't keep you. Good afternoon!"

But Mr. Haliburton's quick-moving brain had been taking in the altered situation, with its strong and weak points so far as he himself was concerned. He had not lived by his wits twenty years for nothing.

"I suppose," he observed, reseating himself on the corner of the writing-table, "it would be indiscreet to inquire from what source the young lady, with a capital of one hundred pounds sterling, is at present deriving an income of apparently three or four hundred a year?"

"Not only indiscreet, but positively unhealthy," said Hughie, turning a dusky red. His fingers were curling and uncurling.

Mr. Haliburton directed upon him what can only be described as a depredatory eye.

"Don't you think, Mr. Marrable," he said, "that it would be a good thing to—*square* me? I could do with that five thousand. This is a censorious world, you know; and scandalous little yarns are apt to get about when a young lady accepts—*Hrrrumph!*"

It was the last straw. Hughie's iron restraint snapped at last. Both his and Mr. Haliburton's impressions of the next few moments were distinctly blurred, but at the end of that period Hughie, breathing heavily and feeling as if he had just won a valuable prize in a consolation race, found himself facing Jimmy Marrable, who had entered the door just as Love (as represented by Mr. Haliburton) flew out of the window. [pg 36

"Hallo, Hughie!"

"Hallo, Uncle Jimmy! Half a mo'!"

Mr. Haliburton, seated dizzily in a rose-bed in the garden, heard Hughie's step returning to the French window above his head. A walking-stick suddenly speared itself in the soil beside him, and a pair of gloves and a Homburg hat pattered delicately down upon his upturned countenance; while Hughie's voice intimated that there was a swift and well-cushioned train back to town at six-twenty.

Then, closing the window and leaving Mr. Haliburton to extract himself tenderly from his bed of roses, cursing feebly the while and ruminating bitterly upon the unreliability of proverbial expressions, Hughie turned to the room again. It had just occurred to him that in the heat of the moment he had been a trifle cavalier in his reception of a relative whom he had not seen for ten years, and who he imagined had been dead for four.

Half an hour later Jimmy Marrable enquired:— [pg 36

"Would it be too much to ask whom you were throwing out of the window when I came in?"

"Friend of Joey's," said Hughie briefly. "And now, Uncle Jimmy," he added, with clouding brow, —the joy of battle was overpast, and the horizon was dark with the wings of all kinds of chickens coming home to roost,—"I should like to inform you that you and your financial methods have put me in a devil of a hole. I want an explanation."

"Right. Fire away!"

"Well, when I took on the job bequeathed to me by you of administering Joan's affairs, I discovered that instead of being an heiress, the child was practically penniless. For some idiotic reason best known to yourself, you no sooner put money into the bank for her than you dragged it all out again. Consequently I discovered that I was booked to manage the affairs of a girl whom everybody thought to be the possessor of pots of money, but whose entire capital"—he picked up the pass-book—"amounted in reality to one hundred pounds sterling."

"Correct!" said Jimmy Marrable. "Proceed!"

"If," continued Hughie in an even and businesslike tone, "Joan had been prepared to marry me, the money wouldn't have mattered, as she could have had mine. Unfortunately that event did not occur." [pg 36

"Did she know she hadn't any money when you asked her to marry you?" enquired Jimmy Marrable.

"No."

"And did she go on refusing you after you had informed her she was a pauper?"

Hughie had seen this question coming from afar. He turned a delicate carmine. His uncle surveyed him, and nodded comprehendingly.

"Quite so!" he said. "Quite so! You never told her."

"No," said Hughie, "I hadn't the heart. It seemed like—like trying to coerce her into marrying me. No, I just let her imagine that she had a tidy little fortune invested, and that she could live on the interest—three hundred a year. I—I found that sum for her, and she took it all right. After all, she was a woman, and women will swallow almost anything you tell them about money matters. If they jib at all, all you have to do is to surround yourself with a cloud of technicalities, and they cave in at once. I think Joey was a *little* surprised at not getting more, for she had thought herself a bit of an heiress; but she never said a word. In fact, she was so kind about it that I saw she was convinced I had made a mess of things somewhere, and must be protected accordingly. She put it all down to my usual incompetence, I suppose,—as far as I can see, she considers me a born fool,— and accepted the situation loyally." [pg 36

"She would do that," said Jimmy Marrable.

"Well," continued Hughie, "Joan was all right, but everybody else was the devil. An awful girl friend of hers, called Harbord—"

"I know—twelve per cent!" gurgled Jimmy Marrable.

"Yes. Well, she came and gave me beans to begin with. Then young Lance began to suspect me,—he never could stand me at any price,—and he came and raised Cain one day at a luncheon party I was giving—but, by the way, that's all right now; Lance has come round completely. Even the Leroys couldn't conceal their conviction that I had made a bungle somewhere—an honest bungle, of course, but a bungle. And finally an unutterable sweep called Haliburton came along. I knew something of him—so much, in fact, that it never occurred to me that there was anything to fear from him. But he got the master-grip on me when every one else had failed. Joey—our Joey—fell in love with him and promised to marry him!"

"I have heard nothing of this. What sort of fellow is he?" enquired Jimmy Marrable.

"Much the same type, I should say, as the late lamented Gaymer, senior." [pg 36

"Are you sure—about her falling in love?" continued Jimmy Marrable, in a puzzled voice.

"Looks like it," said Hughie. "I was away yesterday, and got back early this morning. I found a note from Joey on my dressing-table, saying that Haliburton had proposed to her, and that she was sending him along to me to ask for my consent. She wouldn't have gone as far as that if she didn't—if she didn't"—His voice shook. "It was a pill for me, Uncle Jimmy!"

"What did you do?" said Jimmy Marrable.

"I did this. I knew quite well that if Joey—loved him"—the words came from between his clenched teeth—"she would stick to him, blackguard or not. She's that sort."

"She is. Well?"

"I came to the conclusion that if there was to be a rupture of the engagement it must come from him."

"You made him break it off?"

"Yes."

"How? By throwing him out of the window?"

"No. That would have been no good if he was really after her money. I simply told him the truth—the whole truth—about her bank balance, and so on. That did it. He backed out all right."

Jimmy Marrable rubbed his hands. [pg 36

"And then?"

"And then ideas began to occur to him—"

"Exactly. He began to ask questions—to make innuendoes—"

"Yes. I then threw him out of the window. It was some consolation. That is the story."

Hughie turned away, and gazed dejectedly into the fender. Presently Jimmy Marrable remarked:—

"And meanwhile the fat is in the fire?"

"It is," said Hughie bitterly. "Uncle Jimmy, what *will* she think? Everything is bound to come out now,—that fellow will run about telling everybody,—and when she hears of the cruel position I've placed her in she'll never speak to me again. We shan't even be ordinary good friends now. Poor little girl! I've done her the worst turn a man can do a woman; and I would have *died* for her—cheerfully!"

Hughie leaned against the tall mantelpiece and dropped his head upon his arms. "Joey! Joey!" he murmured to himself, very softly.

Jimmy Marrable retired to a remote corner of the room, where he spent some time selecting a

cigar from Jack Leroy's private locker. Presently he returned. Observing that his nephew was apparently not quite ready to resume the conversation, he spent some time in lighting the cigar, bridging over the silence with a rumbling soliloquy. [pg 37

"It is a blessing to be back on dry land again," he observed, "where cigars will keep in decent condition. No more green weeds for me! What I like is a good crisp Havana that splits open if you squeeze the end, instead of—"

Hughie once more stood erect on the hearthrug. The fit had passed.

Jimmy Marrable eyed him curiously.

"Hughie, boy," he said, "it was a mad, mad scheme. Why did you do it?"

Hughie turned upon him, and blazed out suddenly.

"Why?" he cried. "Because there was nothing else to do! Do you think I would let our Joey—no, damn it! *my* Joey—go out as a governess or a chorus-girl—yes, she actually suggested *that*!—when I could keep her happy and comfortable by telling one little white lie? It may have been a mad thing to do; but it was a choice of evils, and I'd do it again! So stuff that up your cigar and smoke it!"

"Silly young owl!" remarked Jimmy Marrable. He lit his cigar with fastidious care, and continued:—

"I suppose you want an explanation from *me* now?"

"Yes."

"Well, the withdrawal of that money was an eleventh-hour notion. It suddenly occurred to me that you, with your imbecile ideas about honour and filthy lucre, and so forth, might feel squeamish about making love to a girl with a fat bank balance. So just before I sailed I drew the money out, imagining that by so doing I should be removing the only obstacle to a happy union between you and Joey. The entire affair was intended to be a walk-over for you. Between us, we seem to have made a bonny mess of things. Hughie, we Marrables are not cut out for feminine fancywork." [pg 37

"What is to be done now?" said Hughie gloomily.

"I have thought of that," said Jimmy Marrable. "When a man gets in a hopeless tangle of any kind, his best plan is to ask a woman to help him out. That is what we shall have to do. Wait here a few minutes."

He turned towards the door.

"Mildred Leroy won't be in for half an hour yet," called Hughie after him, "so it's no good looking for her."

"All right!" replied Jimmy Marrable's voice far up the stairs.

CHAPTER XX [pg 37

SINFUL WASTE OF A PENNY STAMP

TEN minutes passed. Hughie, leaning heavily against the frame of the French window, gazed listlessly out at a squirrel which was inviting him to a game of hide-and-seek from the far side of a tree-trunk.

"One thing," he mused,—"I shall be able to go abroad again now. No more of this—"

There was the faintest perceptible rustle behind him. Joan must have come in very quietly, for the door was shut and she was sitting on the corner of the writing-table,—exactly where the recently-departed Haliburton had been posing,—swinging her feet and surveying her late

guardian's back. In her hand she held a pink slip of paper.

Hughie never forgot the picture that she presented at that moment. She was dressed in white —something workmanlike and unencumbering—with a silver filigree belt around her waist. She wore a battered Panama hat—the sort of headgear affected by "coons" of the music-hall persuasion —with a wisp of pale blue silk twisted round it. The evening sun, streaming through the most [pg 37
westerly of the windows, glinted on her hair, her belt, and the silver buckles on her shoes. Hughie caught his breath.

Joan spoke first.

"Here's something for you, Hughie," she said.

Hughie took the proffered slip of paper. It was a cheque, made out to himself and signed by Jimmy Marrable.

"I think that covers all the expense to which you have been put on my account while Uncle Jimmy has been away," said Joan. Her voice sounded gruff and businesslike.

Hughie examined the cheque. "Yes," he said, "it does."

"It was very good of you," said Joan formally, "to advance me so much money. I had no idea you were doing it. Apparently you might never have got it back again."

Hughie gazed at her curiously. He began to grasp the situation. He was to be whitewashed: the compromising past was to be decently buried, and "Temporary Loan" was to be its epitaph.

"Never mind that," he said awkwardly. "All in the day's work, you know! Afraid I was a rotten trustee."

Suddenly Joan's demeanour changed.

"And now, my man," she said briskly, "will you be good enough to explain what you mean by compromising a lady in this way?"

Hughie looked at her for a moment in dismay. Then he saw that her eyes were twinkling, and [pg 37
he heaved a sudden sigh of incredulous relief. He was forgiven!

"Joey!" he said,—"Joey, you mean to say you're not angry?"

"Furious!" replied Miss Gaymer, smiling in her old friendly fashion.

"Thank God!" said Hughie.

Miss Gaymer changed the subject, rather hurriedly.

"There's something else I want to ask you," she said. "Will you kindly inform me what has become of my—ahem!—young man?"

"Who?" said Hughie. "Oh, *that* chap? He is gone."

"Gone? Where?"

"London, I should think."

"Why?"

"In the first place, because I told him about your—I mean—I wouldn't advise you to ask me, Joey. You see—I should hate—"

"You would hate," said Miss Gaymer, coming to his rescue, "to say 'I told you so!' I know, Hughie. It's like you, and I love you for it."

Hughie winced. These colloquial terms of endearment are sometimes rather tantalising. Still, he must not mind that. The girl, too, had had her disappointment, and was bearing herself bravely. [pg 37
At least—

"Joey," he said suddenly, "did you *really* care for that bloke?"

The lady on the table stiffened suddenly.

"What—that poisonous bounder?" She rolled up her eyes. "My che-ild!"

"But you let him make love to you."

"*Did* I? I suppose you were there," observed Miss Gaymer witheringly, "disguised as a Chinese lantern!"

"Well, what *did* you do, then?"

"He asked me to be his blushing bride," said the unfeeling Miss Gaymer, "and tried to grab my hand. I squinted down my nose, and looked very prim and sweet, and thought we had better be getting back to the ballroom, and he could talk to Mr. Marrable in the morning. If that's your idea of allowing people to make *love*, dear friend—"

"But you—you—promised to marry him!" said poor Hughie.

Joan stared at him.

"Do you mean to tell me, Hughie," she said slowly, "that he told you *that*?"

"Yes—with one or two corroborative details. That was why I had to tell him—everything, you know. It was the only way, I thought, to choke him off."

"O—o—oh!" Miss Gaymer wriggled indignantly. "The creature! And when he heard I had no money, he cried off?" [pg 37

Hughie bowed his head. Joan gave a low gurgling laugh.

"There's no getting over it, Hughie!" she said. "He scored. A nasty slap for little me! But I deserved it, for trying to trifle with his young affections. Well, you have given me one reason for his departure. What was the other?"

Hughie eyed her in some embarrassment. Then he said,—

"He began to talk about you, Joey, in a way I didn't like, so I—"

His eye slid round towards the window, and then downward in the direction of his right foot. A smile crept over his troubled face, and he glanced at Joan.

"Oh, Hughie, *did* you?" she exclaimed rapturously.

"Yes. He landed in that rose-bed. Look!"

Joey shuffled off the table and joined him by the window. A few feet below them, on the rose-bed, lay the unmistakable traces of the impact of a body falling from rest with an acceleration due to something more than the force of gravity.

Joan cooed softly, evidently well pleased. Hughie turned and regarded her with a puzzled expression. No man ever yet fathomed the workings of the feminine mind, but he never quite gives up trying to do so. [pg 37

"Are you glad that he got thrown out?" he asked.

Joan pondered.

"It's not exactly that," she said. "I'm not glad he was thrown out: it must have hurt him, poor dear! But I'm glad you threw him out, if you understand the difference."

Hughie was not at all sure that he did, but he nodded his head in a comprehending manner. Then he continued:—

"Tell me, Joey, if you didn't care for him, why did you send him to me, instead of giving him the knock direct?"

Joey surveyed her retired "warder" with eyes half-closed.

"Well," she said reflectively, "there were heaps of reasons, but you are a man and wouldn't

understand any of them. But, roughly speaking, it was because I wanted to see how you would handle him. I knew you wouldn't let him marry me, of course, but I wanted to see how you would play your cards. (You simply don't *know* how fascinating these things are to watch.) Besides, I thought it would be good for him to come face to face with—a *man*," she added, almost below her breath.

"I only got the best of him," said Hughie humbly, "by laying all my cards on the table. There's not much *finesse* required for a game like that." [pg 37

"Still, you won," said Joan.

Hughie sighed.

"Haliburton lost, if you like," he said; "I don't quite see what *I*—"

"No—you *won*!" said a very small but very insistent voice by his side.

Hughie turned sharply. Miss Gaymer was breathing expansively upon the glass of the window, and assiduously scribbling a pattern thereon with her finger—an infantile and unladylike habit of which her nurse thought she had cured her at the age of eight. Also, her cheeks were aglow, and that with a richness of colouring which sufficed to convey some glimmerings of intelligence even into the brain of the obtuse young man beside her. Hughie suddenly felt something inside his head begin to buzz. His gigantic right hand (which still contained Jimmy Marrable's cheque tucked in between two fingers) closed cautiously but comprehensively upon Joan's left, which was resting on the window-frame, much as a youthful entomologist's net descends upon an unwary butterfly.

"Joey," he said unsteadily,—"Joey, what do you mean?"

Miss Gaymer sighed, in the resigned but persevering fashion of a patient Sunday-school teacher. Then she slipped her hand from under Hughie's, extracting as she did so the folded cheque from between his fingers. Hughie watched her dumbly. [pg 37

Joan unfolded the cheque, and perused it in a valedictory sort of manner. Then she kissed it softly. Then she tore it up very slowly into small pieces.

She sighed again pensively, and said:—

"There goes my ransom! It's a wicked waste—of a cheque-stamp! Now," she added cheerfully, "I am compromised worse than ever. Hughie, dear, I *really* think, after this, that you'll have to—Ough! Hughie! *Hughie!*"

For blind, groping Hughie's eyes were open at last. With an exultant whole-hearted roar he initiated a sudden enveloping movement; and then, turning away from the fierce light that beats upon actions performed at a window, strode majestically (if rather top-heavily) towards a great leather sofa in a secluded corner beyond the fireplace. The scandalised Miss Gaymer, owing to circumstances over which she had no control, accompanied him.

Transcriber Note:

Throughout the dialogues, there were words used to mimic accents of the speakers. Those words were retained as-is.

On page 27, a quotation mark was added after "And are you going down for good next week?".

On page 121, the period after "after gulping the water" was replaced with a comma.

On page 151, "it may he" was replaced with "it may be".

On page 172, the "care of" symbol was replaced with "c/o".

On page 252, the closing parenthesis was moved from the end of "smiling disarmingly." to the end of "you see".

On page 256, the "He" in "He appeared to be choosing" was changed to "He".

On page 270, "Mr Gaymer" was replaced with "Mr. Gaymer".

On page 315, "sitsing" was replaced with "sitting".

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A MAN'S MAN ***

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