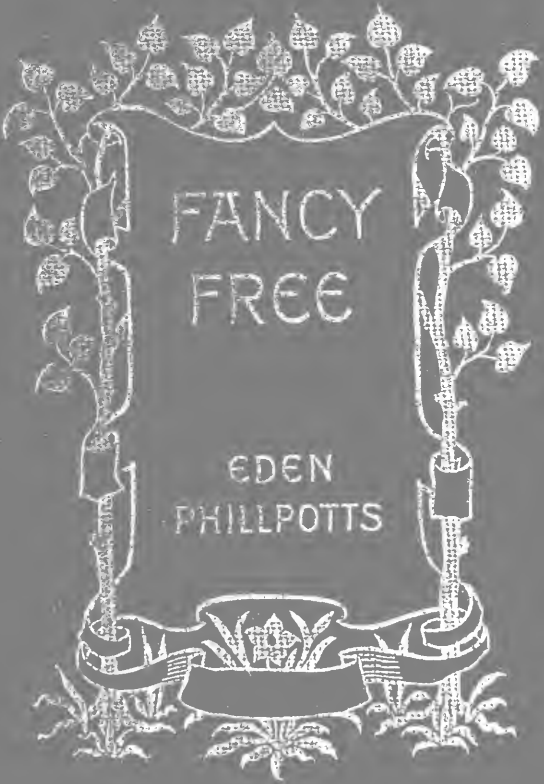

# FANCY FREE

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

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# FANCY FREE

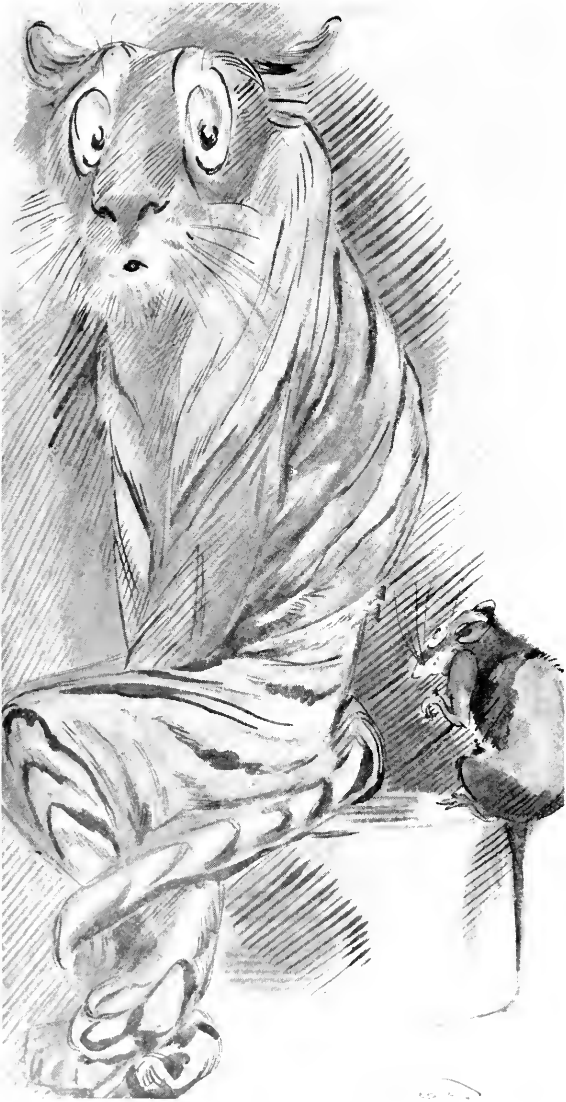
UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

THE HUMAN BOY

---

ALSO BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LYING PROPHETS
CHILDREN OF THE MIST
SONS OF THE MORNING
THE STRIKING HOURS



“BUT YOU'RE A POOR THING IN TIGERS”

PAGE 154

# FANCY FREE

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

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LONDON
1901

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TO
FRANCIS COWLEY BURNAND
WITH MOST HEARTY
REGARD

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# FANCY FREE

## THE ZAGABOG

### I

HERE'S a funny sort of story of an Isle beyond the sun,
Of a gleaming golden island seldom seen by anyone;
So prick your ears and listen to my most eccentric lays
Of the Island and the Zagabog from old pre-Cambrian days—
The mild and humble Zagabog,
The plain, good-hearted Zagabog
With prehistoric ways.

## II

Upon his wondrous head he wore a rather
ugly crown;
His eyes were green and somewhat sad, his
tail hung meekly down;
But on a throne of early mud he comfortably
sat
And ruled his Golden Island in a way I marvel
at.
He was a peaceful Zagabog,
A practical old Zagabog,
And quite unique at that.

## III

For Nature only made but one, though we
shall never know
Why just a single Zagabog exhausted Nature
so;
His subjects rose from trilobites, the newest of
the new,
To other bygone beasts that leapt and swam
and crawled and flew;
But all obeyed the Zagabog,
The good primeval Zagabog.
Which they were right to do.

IV

From periods ante-Primary he dated, as we know,
And with the greatest interest observed that wondrous show
Of shells and fish, of monstrous newts, of dragons on the wing;
Then chronicled the changes that the rolling ages bring,—
That scientific Zagabog,
That most observant Zagabog;
And he loved everything.

V

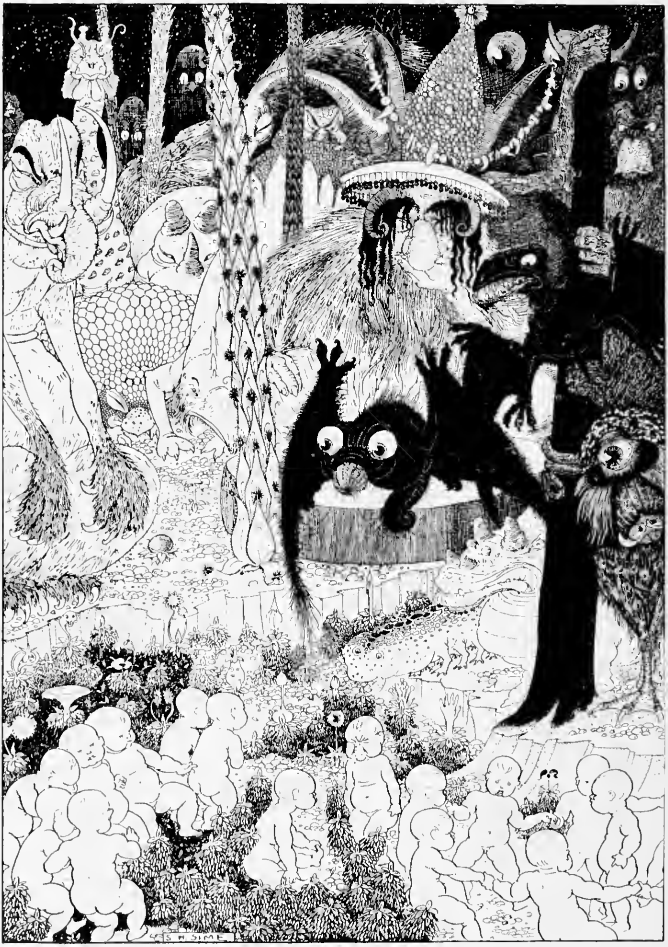
Some twenty million years passed by and all the Isle went well;
Great palms grew on the mountain-tops; huge ferns adorned the dell;
And everywhere vast reptiles took their Mesozoic ease,
And ate each other frequently, with snap and snarl and sneeze;
But their beloved Zagabog,
Their wise and wakeful Zagabog,
They always tried to please.

## VI

For in those Secondary times, when monsters had their day,
Triassic and Jurassic giants about his feet would play;
And through the air there sometimes came the Archæopteryx—
A funny sort of feathered thing where bird and dragon mix.
"Your fossil," said the Zagabog,
The humour-loving Zagabog,
"Will put them in a fix."

## VII

He made no laws, he made no fuss; he just sat on his throne
With a genial simplicity peculiarly his own.
The Plesiosaur, the Teleosaur, the Early Crocodile,
The weird Cretaceous ocean-folk, who never, never smile—
All worshipped the old Zagabog,
The quaint, benignant Zagabog
Of that enchanted Isle.



"THEY'RE LITTLE GIRLS AND BOYS!"

## VIII

More ages passed, more monsters passed, and
others took their place;
The Zagabog he still endured from endless
race to race;
Till Toxodons and Mammoths came, with
Sloths of stature grand,
Whose small relations still exist in many a
distant land.
Of course an old-time Zagabog,
A right down Early Zagabog,
Such moderns could not stand.

## IX

But still, with all the wisdom of a hundred
million years,
He tried to be more sanguine and resist his
growing fears,
Till Palæolithic ages brought Dame Nature's
latest joys
And all that Golden Island rang and rippled
with the noise.
"Good gracious!" said the Zagabog;
"God bless us!" cried the Zagabog,
"They're little girls and boys!"

## X

About his throne with laughter shrill the lads
and lasses came,
And put their little hands in his and bade him
make a game ;
So still he rules and still he helps the children
with their fun.
Of course he'll never die himself, there being
only one—
One calm, persistent Zagabog,
One good pre-Cambrian Zagabog
Beyond the setting sun.

# QUITE OUT OF THE COMMON

## I

I WASN'T even thinking of the fool. It is enough to be in the same market on 'Change with Norton Bellamy, and outside my office or the House I like to forget him.

But long ago he joined the City of London Club, to my great regret, and now, in the smoking-room after lunch, during my cup of coffee, cigar, and game of dominoes, he will too often hurl himself uninvited into a conversation that he is neither asked to join nor desired to enlighten.

Upon a day in January last my friend George Mathers had a chill on the liver, and was suffering under sustained professional ill-fortune. From his standpoint, therefore, in the Kaffir Market, he looked out at the world and agreed with Carlyle's unreasonable estimate of mankind. As a jobber in a large way he came to this conclusion; while I, who am a broker and a member of the Committee, could by no means agree with him.

"The spirit of common-sense must be reckoned with," I explained to Mathers. "This nation stands where it does by right of that virtue. Take the giving and receiving of advice. You may draw a line through that. There is a rare, a notable genius for giving advice in this country. The war illustrates my point. You will find every journal full of advice given by civilians to soldiers, by soldiers to civilians, by the man in the street to the man in the Cabinet, and by the man in the Cabinet to the man in the street. We think for ourselves, develop abnormal common-sense, and as a consequence, I maintain that much more good advice is given than bad."

But Mathers, what with his chilled liver and business depression, was unreasonable. He derided my contention. He flouted it. He raised his voice in hard, simulated laughter, and attracted other men from their coffee and cigars. When he had won their attention, he tried to crush me publicly. He said:

"My dear chap, out of your own mouth I will confute you. If more good advice is given than bad, every man will get more good than harm by following advice. That's logical; but you won't pretend to maintain such a ridiculous position, surely?"

I like a war of words after luncheon. It sharpens the wits and assists digestion. So, without being particularly in earnest, I supported my contention.

"Assuredly," I said. "We don't take enough advice, in my opinion—just as we don't take enough exercise or wholesome food. It is too much the fashion to ask advice and not take it. But if we modelled our lives on the disinterested opinion of other people, and availed ourselves of the combined judgment of our fellows, the world would be both happier and wiser in many directions. And if men knew when they were invited to express an opinion that it was no mere conventional piece of civility or empty compliment which prompted us to ask their criticism, consider how they would put their best powers forward. Yes, one who consistently followed the advice of his fellow-creatures would be paying a compliment to humanity and——"

"Qualifying himself for a lunatic asylum!" Here burst in the blatant Bellamy from his seat by the fire. He put down a financial journal, and then turned to me. "If there's more good advice flying about than bad, old man, why don't you take some?" he said. "I could give you plenty of excellent advice at this moment, Honeybun. For instance, I could tell you to play the fool only in your own house; but you wouldn't thank me. You'd say it was uncalled-for and impertinent; you know you would."

Bellamy is the only man who has any power to annoy me after my lunch; and knowing it, he exercises that power. He can shake me at a word, can reach my nerve-centres quicker than a tintack. Seen superficially, he appears to be nothing more than the mere, common stockbroker, but his voice it is that makes him so hated—his voice, and his manners, and his sense of humour. I turned upon him and did a foolish thing, as one often does foolish things when suddenly maddened into them by some bigger fool than oneself. I answered:

"There's bad advice—idiotic advice—given as well as good. When I've exhausted creation, and want *your* opinion, my dear Bellamy, I'll trouble you for it; and as to playing the fool, why, *nemo mortalium omni-*

*bus horis sapit*—not even Norton Bellamy. You'll admit that?"

Bellamy has no education, and nothing irritates him quicker than a quotation in a foreign language, though any other quotation he's more than a match for. He scowled and meant mischief from the moment the laugh went with me. He ignored the Latin, but stuck to the English of my remark.

"Bad as well as good," he answered. "Just what I say. Only you assert 'more good than bad,' and I declare 'more bad than good,' which means that the more advice I refuse the better for me in the long run."

"You judge human nature from an intimate knowledge of your own lack of judgment, my dear fellow," I said, in a bantering voice.

"Well, I'll back my judgment all the same," he answered hotly, "which is a good deal more than you will. You talk of common-sense, and lay down vague, not to say inane rules for other people to follow, and pose as a sort of Book of Wisdom thrown open to the public every afternoon in this smoking-room; but anybody can talk. Now, I'll bet you a thousand pounds that you'll not take the advice of your fellow-man for twelve consecutive hours. And, what is more, I'll bet you another thousand that I'll do the other thing and go distinctly contrary to every request, suggestion, or scrap of advice offered me in the same space of time. And then we'll see about your knowledge of human nature, and who looks the biggest fool at the end of the day."

I repeat, it was after luncheon, and no man unfamiliar with Norton Bellamy can have any idea of the studied insolence, the offence, the diabolic sneer with which he accompanied this preposterous suggestion. I was, however, silent for the space of three seconds; then he made another remark to Mathers, and that settled it.

"Some of us are like the chap who said he'd take his dying oath the cat was grey. Then they asked him to bet a halfpenny that it was, and he wouldn't. So bang goes another wind-bag!"

He was marching out with all the honours when I lost my temper and took the brute at his word.

"Done!" I said. Think of it! A man of five-and-fifty, with some reputation for general mental stability, and a member of the Committee of the Stock Exchange!

"You'll take me?" he asked, and there was an evil light in the man's hard blue eyes, while his red whiskers actually bristled as he spoke. "You'll back yourself to follow every scrap of advice given you throughout one whole day for a thousand pounds?"

In my madness I answered, only intent upon arranging miseries for him:

"Yes, if you'll back yourself to act in an exactly contrary manner."

"Most certainly. It's my ordinary rule of life," he replied. "I never do take advice. I'm not a congenital idiot. Let us say to-morrow."

Now, upon the Stock Exchange we have a universal system by which honour stands for security. In our peculiar business relations this principle is absolutely necessary. And it seldom fails. There is a simple, pathetic trust amongst us unknown in other walks of life. It can only be compared to that universal spirit said to have existed in King Alfred's days, when we are invited to believe that people left their jewellery about on the hedges with impunity, and crime practically ceased out of the land. One's only assumption can be that the jewellery of those benighted days was not worth the risk—though, understand me, I am merely speaking of the times, not of King Alfred, who was, without question, the greatest

Englishman of whom we have any record. So when Bellamy and I made this fatuous bet, we trusted each the other. I knew that, with all his faults, the man was absolutely straightforward and honest; and I felt that, having once taken his wager, I should either win it—at personal inconvenience impossible to estimate before the event—or lose and frankly pay.

"To-morrow," said Bellamy. "Let us say to-morrow. You don't want a thing like this hanging over you. We'll meet here and lunch and compare notes—if you're free to do so, which is doubtful, for I see a holy chaos opening out before you."

"To-morrow!" I said. "And, be what it may, I would not change my position for yours."

I went home that night under a gathering weight of care. To my wife and daughters I said nothing, though they noticed and commented upon my unusual taciturnity. In truth, the more I thought of the programme in store for me, the less I liked it; while Bellamy, on the contrary, so far as I could see, despite my big words at parting from him, had only to be slightly more brutal and aggressive than usual to come well out of his ordeal. I slept ill and woke depressed. The weather was ominous in itself. I looked out of my dressing-room window and quoted from the classics:

> "She is not rosy-fingered, but swoll'n black;
> Her face is like a water turned to blood,
> And her sick head is bound about with clouds,
> As if she threatened night ere noon of day!"

which shows, by-the-by, that Ben Jonson knew a London fog when he saw it, though chemists pretend that the vile phenomenon wasn't familiar to the Elizabethans.

My breakfast proved a farce, and having wished my dear ones a dreary "good morning," I crept out into a bilious, fuliginous atmosphere, through which black smuts fell in legions upon the numbed desolation of South Kensington. Only the urban cat stalked here and there, rejoicing, as it seemed, in prolonged night. My chronic cough began at the first gulp of this atrocious atmosphere, and changing my mind about walking to the District Railway Station, I turned, sought my cab-whistle, and summoned a hansom. It came presently, clinking and tinkling out of nothingness—a chariot with watery eyes of flame; a goblin coach to carry me away through the mask of the fog, from home, from wife and children, into the vast unknown of man's advice.

The cabman began it—a surly, grasping brute who, upon taking my shilling, commented, and added something about the weather.

"Your fare, and you know it very well," I answered, whereupon he replied:

"Oh, all right. Wish I could give you the cab an' the hoss in. Don't you chuck away your money, that's all. You're a blimed sight too big-'earted—that's what's the matter with you."

I felt cheered. Here was practical advice given by a mere toiler from the ranks. I promised the man that I would not waste my money; I reciprocated his caution, beamed upon him, ignored his satire, and went downstairs to the trains. A newspaper boy offered me *Punch.* I bought it, and with rising spirits lighted a cigar and got into a City train. It happened to come from Ealing, and contained, amongst other people, my dear old friend Tracy Mainwaring—cheeriest, brightest, and best of men. The fog deepened, and somewhere about the Temple a violent fit of coughing caused me to fling away my cigar, and double up in considerable physical discomfort. Mainwaring, with his universal sympathy, was instantly much concerned for me.

"My dear Honeybun, you'll kill yourself—you will indeed. It's suicide for you to come to town on days like this. How often have I expostulated! And nobody will pity you, because you need not do it. Why don't you go to the South of France? You ought to go for all our sakes."

"Mainwaring," I said, "you're right. You always are. Here's the Temple. I'll return home at once, and start as soon as I conveniently can—to-morrow at latest."

The amazement which burst forth upon the face of every man in that carriage was a striking commentary on my original assertion that advice is not taken habitually in this country.

As for Mainwaring himself, I could perceive that he was seriously alarmed. He followed me out of the train, and his face was white, his voice much shaken, as he took my arm.

"Old chap," he said, "I've annoyed you; I've bored you with my irresponsible chatter. You're trying to escape from me. You mustn't let a friend influence you against your better judgment. Of course, I only thought of your good, but——"

"My dear fellow," I answered, "nobody ever gave me better advice, and unless circumstances conspire against it, I mean to do as you suggest."

"Yes, yes—capital," he said, with the voice we assume when trying to soothe an intoxicated acquaintance or a lunatic. "You *shall* go, dear old fellow, and I'll see you home."

Now, here is the effect of taking advice upon the man who gives it! Mainwaring is a genial, uncalculating, kindly soul, who is always tendering counsel and exhortation to everybody, from his shoeblack upwards; yet, in a moment, I had him reduced to a mere bundle of vibrating nerves, simply because I had promptly undertaken to follow one of his suggestions. Of course I knew the thought in his mind: he believed that I was out of mine. So I said:

"Yes, old fellow, I see what you think; but, consider, if I'm a lunatic to take your advice, what must you be to give it?"

This conundrum, if possible, increased his uneasiness. He fussed anxiously around me and begged to be allowed to see me home; whereupon, being weary of his cowardice, I waved Mainwaring off, left the station to be free of him, and hastily ascended Arundel Street.

My object was now an omnibus which should convey me almost to my door; and my heart grew fairly light again, for if by the terms of the wager I could legitimately get back under my own roof, the worst might be well over. I pictured myself packing quietly all day for the Continent. Then, when morning should come, I had merely to change my mind again and the matter would terminate. Any natural disappointment of my wife and the girls, when they heard of my intention to stop in London after all, might be relieved with judicious gifts.

At a corner in the Strand I waited, and others with me, while the fog increased—noisome veil upon veil—and the lurid street seemed full of dim ghosts wandering in a sulphur hell. My omnibus was long in coming, and just as it did so I pressed forward with the rest, and had the misfortune to tread upon the foot of a threadbare and foul-mouthed person who had been waiting beside me. Standing there, the sorry creature had used the vilest language for fifteen minutes, had scattered his complicated imprecations on the ears of all, but especially, I think, for the benefit of his wretched wife. She—a lank and hungry creature—had flashed back looks at him once or twice, but no more. Occasionally, as his coarse words lashed her, she had shivered and glanced at this face and that to see whether any champion of women stood there waiting for the South Kensington omnibus. But apparently none did, though, for my part, at another time I had certainly taken it upon me to reprove the wretch, or even call a constable. But upon this day, and moving as it were for that occasion under a curse, I held silence the better course, and maintained the same while much pitying this down-trodden woman. Now, however, Fate chose me for a sort of Nemesis against my will, and leaping forward to the omnibus, I descended with all my fourteen stone upon the foot of the bully. He hopped in agony, lifted up his voice, and added a darkness to the fog. His profanity increased the ambient gloom, and out of it I saw the white face of his wife, and her teeth gleamed in a savage smile as he hopped in the gutter, like some evil fowl. People laughed at his discomfort, and a vocabulary naturally rich was lifted above itself into absolute opulence. He loosed upon me a chaos of sacred and profane expletives, uttered in the accent of south-west London. His words tumbled about my ears like a nest of angered hornets. The man refused to listen to any apology, and, from natural regret, my mood changed to active annoyance, because he insisted upon hopping between me and the omnibus, and a crowd began to collect.

Then his bitter-hearted wife spoke up and bid me take action, little dreaming of the position in which I stood with respect to all advice.

"Don't let the swine cheek you like that," she cried. "He's all gas, that's what he is—a carwardly 'ound as only bullies women and children. You're bigger than him. Hit him over the jaw with your rumberella. Hit him hard, then you'll see."

It will not, I trust, be necessary for me to say that never before that moment had I struck a fellow-creature, either in the heat of anger or with calculated intention. Indeed, even a thousand pounds would seem a small price to expend if for that outlay one might escape such a crime; yet now, dazed by the noise, by the fog, by emotions beyond analysis, by the grinning teeth and eyes of the crowd shining wolfish out of the gloom around me, by the woman's weird, tigerish face almost thrust into mine, and by the fact that the man had asked me why the blank blank I didn't let my blank self out at so much a blank hour for a blank steam-roller—I let go. If Bellamy could have seen me then! My umbrella whistled through the fog, and appeared to strike the man almost exactly where his wife had suggested. He was gone like a dream, and everybody seemed pleased excepting the unfortunate creature himself. There were yells and cat-calls and wild London sounds in my ears. Somebody rose out of the pandemonium and patted me on the back, and told me to 'hook it before the bloke got up again.' Somebody else whispered earnestly in my ear that I had done the community a good turn. The omnibus proceeded without me, for I was now separated from it by a crowd. The fog thickened, lurid lights flashed in it, my head whirled, the man who had whispered congratulations in my ear endeavoured to take my watch, and I was just going to cry for the police, when my recumbent victim, assisted, to my amazement, by the tigerish woman, rose, clothed in mud as with a garment, and advanced upon me.

There are times and seasons when argument and even frank apology is useless. There are very rare occasions when coin of the realm itself is vain to heal a misunderstanding or soothe a wounded spirit. I felt that the man now drawn up in battle array before me was reduced for the moment to a mere pre-Adamite person or cave-dweller, first cousin to, and but slightly removed from, the unreasoning and ferocious dinosaur or vindictive megatherium. This poor, bruised, muddy Londoner, now dancing with clenched fists, and exuding a sort of language which rendered him almost incandescent, obviously thirsted to do me physical hurt. No mere wounding of my tenderest feeling, no shaming of me, no touching of my pride or my pocket would suffice for him. Indeed, he explained openly that he was going to break every bone in my body and stamp my remains into London mud, even if it spoilt his boots. Hearing which prophecy, one of those inspirations that repay a studious man for his study came in the nick of time, and I remembered a happy saying of the judicious Hooker, how that many perils can best be conquered by flying from them. I had not run for thirty years, but I ran then, and dashing past a church, a cheap book-shop, and the Globe Theatre, darted into the friendly shelter of a populous neighbourhood that extends beyond. So sudden was my action, and so dense the fog, that I escaped without loss, and within three minutes from that moment, all sorrow past, sat in a hansom, had the window lowered, and drove off with joy and thankfulness for my home.

So far I had done, or set about doing, everything my fellow-man or woman deemed well for me. As it was now past eleven o'clock, I felt that the day would soon slip away, and all might yet be well.

Then the Father of Fog, who is one with the Prince of this world, took arms against me. There was a crash, a smash, loud words, a breath of cold air, a tinkle of broken glass, a stinging lash across my face, an alteration abrupt and painful in my position. My horse had collided with another and come down heavily, the window was broken, and my face had a nasty cut across the cheekbone within a fractional distance of my right eye.

The driver was one of that chicken-hearted sort of cabmen rare in London, but common in provincial towns. He had fallen from his box-seat, it is true, and had undoubtedly hurt himself here and there on the outside, but I doubt if any serious injury had overtaken him ; yet now he stood at the horse's head, and pulled at its bridle, and gasped and gurgled, and explained how a railway van had run into him, knocked over his horse, and then darted off into the fog. I told the man not to cry about it, and people began collecting as usual, like evil gnomes from the gloom. The air soon hummed with advice, and personally, knowing myself to be worse than useless where a horse in difficulties is concerned, I acted upon the earliest suggestion that called for departure from the scene. Ignoring directions about harness, cutting of straps, backing the vehicle, and sitting on the horse's head, I fell in with one thoughtful individual who gave it as his opinion that the beast was dying, and hurried away at my best speed to seek a veterinary surgeon. My face was much injured, my nerves were shaken, I had a violent stitch in my side and a buzzing in the head; but I did my duty, and finding a small corner hostelry, that threw beams of red and yellow light across the fog, I entered, gave myself a few moments to recover breath, then asked the young woman behind the bar whether she knew where I might most quickly find a horse doctor.

"There has been an accident," I explained, "and a man on the spot gives it as his opinion that the horse is seriously unwell, and should be seen to at once. Personally, I suspect it could get up if it liked, but I am not an expert and may be mistaken."

"'Fraid you've hurted yourself, too, sir," answered the girl. "I *am* sorry. Sit down and have something to drink, sir. Sure you want it."

I sat down, sighed, wiped my face, and ordered a little brandy. This she prepared with kindly solicitude, then advised a second glass, and I, feeling the opinion practical enough, obeyed her gladly.

She knew nothing of a veterinary surgeon, but there chanced to be a person in the bar who said that he did. He evidently felt tempted to proclaim himself such a man, for I could see the idea in his shifty eyes; but he thought better of this, and admitted that he was only a dog-fancier himself, though he knew a colleague in the next street who enjoyed a wide experience of horses. Now, my idea of a dog-fancier is one who habitually fancies somebody else's dog. I told the man this while I finished my brandy-and-water, and he admitted that it was a general weakness in the profession, but explained that he had, so far, fought successfully against it. Then we started to find the veterinary surgeon, and soon passed into a region that I suspected to be Seven Dials.

"'Ullo, Jaggers! Who's your friend?" said a man in a doorway.

"Gent wants a vet," answered my companion.

"Gent wants a new fice, more like!"

I asked the meaning of this phrase, suspecting that some bit of homely and perhaps valuable advice lay under it, but Jaggers thought not.

"Only Barny Bosher's sauce," he said. "He's a fightin' man—pick of the basket at nine-stone, five—so he thinks he can sye what he likes; but he's got a good 'eart."

We pushed on until a small shop appeared, framed in bird-cages. Spiritless fowls of different sorts and colours sat and drooped in them—parrots, cockatoos, budgerigars, and other foreigners of a kind unfamiliar to me.

"Come in," said Jaggers. "This is Muggridge's shop; and what he don't know about 'osses, an' all livin' things for that matter, ain't worth knowin'."

Mr. Muggridge was at his counter, busy about a large wooden crate bored with many holes. From these proceeded strange squeaks and grunts.

"'Alf a mo," he said. "It's a consignment of prize guinea-pigs, and they wants attention partickler urgent; for they've been on the South Eastern Railway, in a luggage train, pretty near since last Christmas by all accounts, and a luggage train on that line's a tidy sample of eternity, I'm told."

Mr. Muggridge was a little, bright, cheerful person, who framed his life on the philosophy of his own canaries. The shop was warm, even stuffy, perhaps—still warm; so I said one or two kind things about the beasts and birds, then took a chair and looked at my watch.

"I can wait," I told him.

"Can the 'oss? That's the question," asked Jaggers, and he began to murmur something about being kept away from his work, and hard times; so I gave him a shilling, and he thanked me, though not warmly, and instantly vanished into the fog—to go on dog-fancying, no doubt.

Mr. Muggridge complimented me on my love for animals. He then began to pull strange, rough bundles of white, black, and yellow fur from his wooden crate. The things looked like a sort of animated blend between a penwiper and a Japanese chrysanthemum. Indeed, I told him so, and he retorted by advising me to take a couple home for my young people.

With a sigh, I agreed to do so, and Mr. Muggridge, evidently surprised at such ready acquiescence, grew excited, and suggested two more.

"You try a pair o' them Hangoras, and a pair o' them tortoiseshells," he said, and before you can look round you'll be breedin' guinea-pigs as'll take prizes all over Europe—pedigree pigs, pigs with a world-wide reputation!"

"Very well, two pairs," I answered, "since you wish it."

And then I observed that Muggridge was thinking very hard. I fancy he realised that the opportunity of a lifetime lay before him.

"Yes," he said suddenly, answering his own reflections, "to a gentleman like you, I *will* part with it, though it's dead against the grain. But you ought to have it—my last mongoose—a lady's pet—a little hangel in the 'ouse! Five guineas!"

"There's a large brown horse fallen down in the next street; that's what I'm here for," I cried aloud, ignoring the mongoose.

"Ah! they will go down; and I've got a lion-monkey, and while you *are* buying animals, I strongly advise you to have it. Not another in England to my knowledge. To be honest, he's not very well, but the hair will come again with kindness and my mange lotion. Peaceful as a lamb, too. I wish I could send them, but I'm run off my legs just now. Never remember such a rush or such competition. So if you'll let me suggest, you'll take your little lot right away with you. My cages are specially commended at the Crystal Palace and elsewhere, and I have a few left by me still. I suppose you couldn't do with a water-snake or two? Yes? Here, Sam! Come down here. A large horder!"

He shouted to a boy, who appeared and began putting strange beasts and reptiles into cages with lightning rapidity, while I stood and watched—a man gripped, tranced, turned to stone by the deadly incubus of a dream. All the time Mr. Muggridge chattered like the lid of a kettle on the boil, put up horrid-looking foreign birds in cages, fastened a string to a poodle, and incarcerated various other specimens of tropical or sub-tropical fauna that he wanted to be rid of. Then he made out an account, pressed it into my hand, rushed to the door, and whistled for a four-wheeler.

"You're a ready-money gen'leman like me. Seen it in your eye the minute you come into my shop," said Muggridge. "Twenty guineas and my book, on the *Insect Pests of Household Pets*, thrown in."

I rallied myself here—in the last ditch, so to speak; I made my effort, and while the horrible boy was converting a four-wheeler into a menagerie of screaming, snapping curiosities, I explained to Muggridge that I only had five pounds upon me. He put out his hand, and said something about a cheque for the balance, but, seeing my advantage, I declared that I had ordered nothing beyond the four guinea-pigs, needed nothing else, and should pay for nothing else.

Then he asserted that I might have the lot for ten pounds, as it was a pity to take them out of the cab again.

Still I refused, and he tried to get sentiment into the argument.

He said, "It's a reg'lar 'appy family. I should 'most call it cruelty to animals to separate them things again."

But I was firm, and he became desperate. He said: "Gimme the fiver, then, and clear out. It's robbery—that's what it is, an' I'm sure the beasts won't do you no good. But gimme the money, an' I'll fling in a tortoise to show there's no ill-feeling, if you'll go at once."

I said, "Listen to me; I do not want your tortoise. I'm a married man, with two grown-up daughters. We all detest wild animals of every sort, especially tortoises. I shall send your guinea-pigs to a children's hospital, where they may or may not be welcomed. For the rest of these creatures I have no earthly use, and I refuse to take them a yard."

"That's not good enough for me," declared Mr. Muggridge. "I've wasted a whole morning upon you"—I'd been in the shop a bare quarter of an hour—"and time is money, if birds and animals ain't. Besides, you hordered 'em."

He advanced threateningly, and I stepped forward with no less indignation; but as I did so, my arm knocked over a cage containing two long, black, red-beaked birds, which turned out to be Cornish choughs. These now uttered wild, west-country exclamations, flapped and fluttered and screamed, upset other cages in their downfall, and angered a badger (or some kindred brute) that dwelt beneath them in a box covered with corrugated iron wire.

Then, while I gathered myself from the ruins, ill-luck cast me against a bowl of gold-fish, a sea-water aquarium, the guinea-pigs, and a consignment of large green lizards that suddenly appeared, without visible cause, in the full possession of their liberty. These things fell in an avalanche, and Muggridge's shop instantly resembled the dark scene that preludes a pantomime. It is not strange, therefore, when you consider what I had already been through, that I was among the first of the intelligent animals present to lose my nerve and my temper.

Frankly I aimed a blow at Muggridge in an unchristian spirit, but missed him, and fetched down a case of birds' eggs.

Suspecting the emporium to be on fire, chance passers-by, always ready to thrust themselves into the misfortunes of other people, now rushed amongst us. A policeman entered also, and Mr. Muggridge, evidently disappointed to find his plans thus shattered and his scheme foiled, endeavoured to give me in charge. I explained the true position, however, or attempted to do so; but my self-respect deserted me. I raised my voice as Muggridge raised his; I even used language that will always be a sorrow to me in moments of retrospection. We raved each at the other and danced round the policeman, while goldfish flapped about our feet and green lizards tried to ascend our trouserlegs. The constable himself turned round and round, licking a pencil and trying to make notes in a little book. Presently I think he began to grow giddy and faint-hearted. At any rate, he realised the futility of working up an effective case, so he shut his book, showed anger, and took certain definite measures.

First he swept a few promiscuous spectators out of the shop, then he thrust the infuriated Muggridge back behind his counter, and finally turned to me.

" I'll have no more of this tommy rot, or the pair of you'll have to come along to the station," he said. " As for you, Muggridge, it's your old game, plantin' your rubbishy, stinkin' varmints on unoffendin' characters before they can open their mouths. I'm up to your hanky-panky; and you "—now he addressed me—" if you're not old enough to know better than come buyin' these 'ere hanimals, an' loadin' a cab with 'em, just because this man asks you to, you ought to be shut up. If you take my tip, you'll go and 'ang yourself—that's about the best thing you can do. Anyway, clear out of this 'ere shop."

I was deeply agitated, hysterical, not master of my words or actions; I had reached a physical and mental condition upon which the policeman's words fell as a fitting climax.

"Thank you," I said; "I've had some unequal advice to-day—good, bad, and indifferent. But there's no doubt that yours is the best, the soundest, the most suited to my case that I'm likely to get anywhere. I *will* go and hang myself. Nothing shall become my life like the leaving of it. Shake hands, constable; you at least have counselled well."

I pressed his palm and was gone. I forgot wife, children, business, honour, and Heaven in that awful moment. I, a member of the Committee of the Stock Exchange, passed through the streets of London like a mere escaped lunatic. My shattered, lacerated nerve-centres cried for peace and oblivion; I longed to be dead and out of it all. My self-respect was already dead, and what is life without that? I thought of the future after this nightmare-day, and felt that there could be no future for me. So I vanished into the fog—a palpitating pariah with one frantic, overmastering resolution—to destroy myself, and that at once.

"Norton Bellamy has murdered me," I said aloud.

## II

But a man cannot forget the training of his youth, the practice of his adult years, and the support of his middle age in one demonian hour. As I passed wildly through dim, bilious abysses of filth-laden atmosphere, though my body was soon lost, and hopelessly lost, in the fog, my mind became a trifle clearer and the steadfast principles of a lifetime reasserted themselves. I determined to go on with my shattered existence; indeed I felt tolerably sure that my fellow-man, who had kept me thus busily employed, would presently prevent me from carrying my purpose to its bitter end. I grew a little calmer, recollected the terms of my wager, and so proceeded with the directions delivered by the police constable, doubting nothing but that my next meeting with a human being would divert the catastrophe, and once more set me forward upon a new road.

Presently a little shop loomed alongside me, and I perceived that here might be procured an essential in the matter of destruction by hanging. A mean and humble establishment it was, lighted by one paraffin lamp. The stock-in-trade apparently consisted of ropes and door-pegs—in fact, the complete equipment proper to my undertaking. Time and place agreed. It was indeed just such a gloomy, lonesome, and sequestered hole as a suicide might select to make his final purchases. From a door behind the counter there came to me a bald and mournful little man with weak eyes, a subdued manner, and the facial inanity of the rabbit. Hints of a fish dinner followed him from his dwelling-room, and through the door I could catch a glimpse of his family, four in number, partaking of that meal.

"What might you want?" he asked, but in a despondent tone, implying, to my ear, that it was rarely his good fortune to have anything in stock a would-be customer desired to purchase.

"I want a rope to hang a man," I answered, and waited with some interest to see the result.

The small shopkeeper's eyes grew round; a mixture of admiration and creeping fear lighted them.

"My gracious! You're *him*, then! To think as ever I should——"

Here he broke off, and in a frenzy of

excitement opened the door behind him and spoke to his wife. I overheard, for he could not subdue his voice. I think he felt confronted by the supreme business transaction of his career.

"Jane, Jane! Creep in the shop quiet and look at this here man! By 'Eaven! it's the public executioner! To think as ever I should sell a rope to him! Hush!"

He turned, and while he addressed me with dreadful humility, the woman, Jane, crept into the shop, and stared morbidly upon my harrowed countenance.

Then she whispered to her husband—

"That's not him, for I seed his picture in the *Police News* last week. It's a new one, or else his assistant!"

Meantime I was being served, and it seemed that the little man suddenly awakened to the dignity of his calling before my sensational order. He began handling a wilderness of rope ends and discoursing upon them with the air of an expert as he rose to the great occasion.

"A nice twisted cordage you'll be wanting, and if you'll leave the choice to me, nobody shall be none the worse. I've been in rope since I was seventeen. Now, Manila hemp won't do—too stiff and woody, too lacking in suppleness. That's what you want: suppleness. The sisal hemps, from South America, are very pretty things, and the New Zealand hemp is hard to beat; but there's another still more beautiful cordage. Only it's very rarely used because it comes rather expensive. Still, when a fellow-creature's life's at stake, I suppose you won't count the cost. Besides, the Government pays, don't it? That's a Jubbulpore hemp—best of all—or bowstring hemp, as I'm told they use in the harems of the East, though what for I couldn't say. I've got a very nice piece—ten foot long and supple as silk—just try it—and any strain up to two hundred pound. Hand-spun, of course—a lovely thing, though I say so. But it's a terrible thought. Jute's cheaper, only I won't guarantee it; I won't indeed. You want a reliable article, if only for your own reputation. And one more thing; I suppose there's no objection to my using this as an advertisement? People in these parts is all so fond of horrors; and as it's Government I ought to be allowed the lion and unicorn perhaps?"

I bought the Jubbulpore hemp as the man advised. It cost thirty shillings, and the vendor wrestled between pleasure at the success of his extortion and horror at the future of his rope. But I told him he must neither advertise the circumstance, nor dare to assume the lion and unicorn on the strength of it. This discouraged him, and he lost heart and took a gloomy view of the matter.

"A hawful tride, if I may say so without offence," he ventured. "Would it be the Peckham Rye murderer as you're buying this rope for, or that poor soul who lost his temper with his wife's mother down Forest Hill wye?"

"Neither," I answered. "It is a man called Honeybun."

"Honeybun! Ah! A ugly, crool nime! What's he done?"

"Made a fool of himself."

"Lord! if we was hung for that, there wouldn't be much more talk of over-population—eh? Well, well, I s'pose he'll be as 'appy with you and that bit of Jubbulpore as we can hope for him. A iron nerve it must want. Yet Mr. Ketch was quite the Christian at 'ome, I b'lieve. Not your first case, of course?"

I picked up the rope and prepared to depart.

"My very first experience," I said.

"Pore soul!" exclaimed the feeling tradesman, but he referred to the criminal, not to me.

"For Gord's sake don't bungle it!" were the last husky words I heard from him; and then I set forth to hang Arthur Honeybun, who deserved hanging if ever a man did. I told myself this, and made a quotation which I forget.

And now arose one of the most sinister concatenations easily to be conceived in the life of a respectable citizen. Here was I on the brink of self-destruction; I only waited for some fellow-creature to restrain me. *But nobody attempted to do so!* My folly in disguising the truth from the little rope-merchant now appeared. Had he known, he had doubtless shown me my dreadful error in time; now it was too late; his only advice—sound undoubtedly—had been not to bungle it. The world pursued its own business quite regardless of me and my black secret and my hidden rope. Apparently there was really nothing for me to do but to lose my wager or hang myself—an alternative which I well knew would represent for my family a total pecuniary loss considerably greater than the sum involved.

I wandered down a lonely court and found an archway at the bottom. One sickly gas-lamp gleamed above this spot, and the silence of death reigned within it. Had I been in sober earnest, no nook hidden away under the huge pall of the fog could have suited me better. Some evil fiend had apparently taken charge of my volition and designed to see the matter through, for I pursued this business of hanging with a callous deliberation that amazed me. I even smiled as I climbed up the arch and made the rope fast upon the lamp above it. Not a soul came to interrupt. The lamp blinked lazily, the fog crowded closer to see the sight, the fiend busied himself with my Jubbulpore rope and arranged all preliminaries, while I sat and grinned over the sooty desolation. I felt my pulse calmly, critically; I indulged in mental analysis, endeavoured to estimate my frame of mind, and wondered if I could throw the experience into literary form for a scientific journal. I remember being particularly surprised that the attitude of my intellect towards this performance was untinctured by any religious feeling whatsoever.

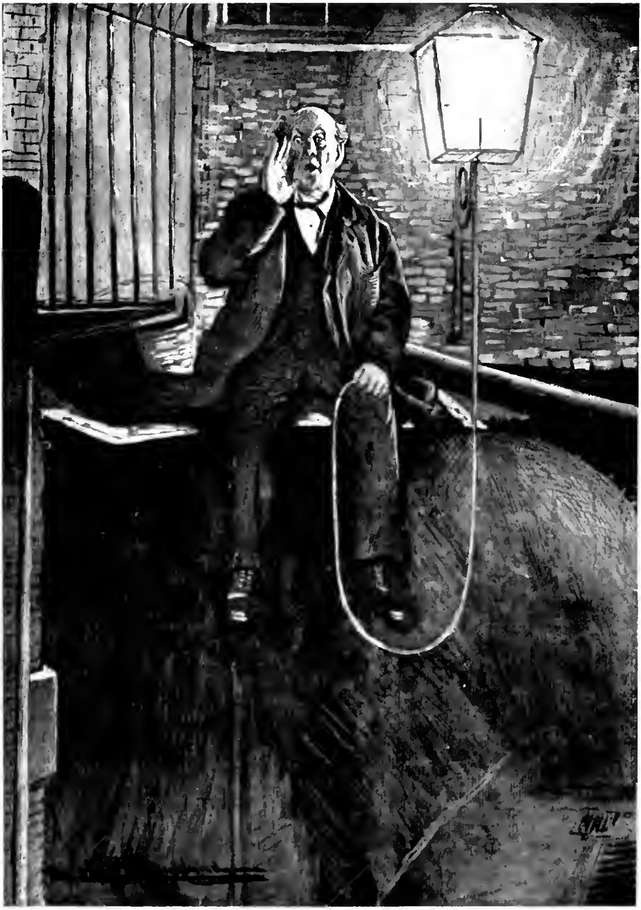
Then came a psychological moment when the fiend had done everything that he could for me. My task was merely to tie the loose end of the Jubbulpore masterpiece round my neck and cast forth into the void. How strange a thing is memory! For some extraordinary reason a famous definition of fishing flashed into my mind. I could not recall it exactly at that terrible moment, but I remembered how it had to do with a fool at one end of a piece of string.

Still not a footstep, but only the rumble and roar of all selfish London some twenty yards off, and never a hand to save me from a coward's doom. I grew much annoyed with London; I reminded London of the chief incidents in my own career; I asked myself if this was justice; I also asked myself why I had been weak enough to turn into a blind alley, evidently an unpopular, undesirable spot, habitually ignored. And then I grew melancholy, even maudlin. I saw my faults staring at me—my negligences and ignorances; and chiefly my crass idiotcy in not undertaking this matter at Piccadilly Circus, or some main junction of our metropolitan system, where such enterprises are not tolerated. It is, of course, a free country, and the rights of the subject are fairly sacred, speaking generally; but we draw the line here and there, and I knew that any attempt to annihilate myself upon some lamp-post amid the busy hum of men must have resulted as I desired. Interference would have prevented complete suspension there, but here the seclusion was absolute, and simply invited crime. The fog had now reached its crowning triumph, and promised to deprive my trusty Jubbulpore hemp of its prey, for I was suffocating, and asphyxia threatened to overwhelm me at any moment.

"Where the deuce are the police?" I asked myself at this eleventh hour. It was a policeman who had placed me in my present pitiable fix, and—blessed inspiration!—why should not another of the tribe extricate me from it? When in danger or imminent peril it is our custom to shout for the help of the law, and surely if ever a poor, overwrought soul stood in personal need of the State's assistance, it was Arthur Honeybun at that moment. So, with nerves strung to concert pitch, I lifted up my voice and called for a policeman. In these cases, however, one does not specify or limit, so my summons was couched generally to the force at large.

There followed no immediate response, then three boys assembled under my arch, and they formed a nucleus or focus about which a small crowd of the roughest possible persons, male and female, collected. Last of all a policeman also came.

"Now, then," he said, "what's all this, then?"



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The miserable boys took entire credit to themselves for discovering me perched aloft. They pointed me out and called attention to the Jubbulpore rope dangling from the lamp, and elaborated their own theories.

Very properly the constable paid no attention to them, but addressed all his remarks to me.

"You up there," he asked — "what d'you think you're plyin' at?"

There was no sympathy in his voice. He appeared to be a tall, harsh officer—a mere machine, with none of the milk of human kindness in him; or perhaps a beat in Seven Dials had long since turned it sour. Moreover, he felt that the crowd was on his side—a circumstance that always renders a constable over-confident and aggressive.

I felt unstrung, as I say—distracted and more or less emotional—or I should have approached the situation differently; but I was not my own master. I sat there, a mere parcel of throbbing nerves escaped from a hideous death. So, instead of being lucid, which is a vital necessity in all communion with the police, I uttered obscure sayings, went out of my way to be cryptical, and even spoke in spasmodic parables. But of course there exists no member of the body politic upon whom parables are wasted more utterly than a constable.

"You are surprised, and naturally so, to see me here," I said. "There are, however, more things in heaven and earth, policeman, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. I am the creature of circumstances—in fact, of a series of circumstances probably unparalleled. A colleague of your own—it may be a personal friend—is responsible for my position on this arch. Yonder wretched boy has not erred; I had seriously thought to destroy myself. I was driven to the very threshold of that rash act. *A fronte præcipitium, a tergo lupi*, policeman. I am here perched between the devil and the deep sea, a precipice in front, a pack of wolves in the immediate rear. Now, be frank with me. I place myself entirely in your hands. I desire your honest and dispassionate advice."

But this is not the way to talk to a policeman; perhaps it is not the way to talk to anybody.

The deplorable boy had another theory.

He said, "The blighter's off his onion!"

Then somebody else, dimly conscious that I had used a foreign language, suspected that I might be an anarchist. The policeman merely told me to come down, and I obeyed without hesitation, and gave myself up to him. I felt that, situated thus, at least I was safe enough, if he would only do his duty; but he appeared to believe in the opinion that I was a foreigner.

"Where do you come from?" he asked. "If you're not English, it's a case for your bloomin' Consul."

"I come from South Kensington," I answered, "and I am English to the backbone, and it's your duty to convey me to the police-station, which I'll thank you to do."

Here again I made a mistake. No man likes being told his duty, whether owing to the natural human aversion from thinking of it or doing it, or for other reasons connected with pride I know not; but the constable, upon this speech of mine, displayed annoyance, and even some idea of leaving me to my own devices. Seeing that he showed an inclination to let me escape into the fog without even a word of advice, I spurred him to his office. I said:—

"If you don't arrest me, I shall persuade some other member of the force to do so, and, as I have already made a note of your number, it will be the worse for you."

Upon this he started as if a serpent had stung him ; the crowd cheered me, and my object was attained. He felt his popularity was slipping away, and so set about regaining it.

"All right, all right, my bold 'ero!" he said. Then he blew a whistle, and summoned two colleagues.

"Dangerous lunatic—wants to be took up," he explained. "Clean off his chump. Tryin' to 'ang 'imself."

Then he turned to me, and adopted a conciliatory tone.

"Now, then, uncle, come along quiet," he said.

I suggested a cab, and offered to pay for it, but the constable held such a thing unnecessary extravagance.

"Won't hurt you to walk," he said. "And we'll go quicker than a four-wheeler in this fog."

So, with a large accompaniment of those who win entertainment from the misfortunes of their betters, I started to some sheltering haven, where it was my hope that the remainder of the day might be spent in security and seclusion behind bolts and bars. In this desire lurked no taste of shame or humiliation. I was far past anything of that kind. My sole unuttered prayer was to be saved from all further human counsel whatsoever. If an angel from heaven had fluttered down beside me, and uttered celestial opinions to brighten that dark hour, I should have rejected his advice, very likely with rudeness.

I thought of the cynical sagacity of Norton Bellamy. How wise he had been! And what a fool was I! I pictured his face when my story came to be told. I heard his horrid laughter, and my self-respect oozed away, and I almost wished I was back with the Jubbulpore hemp upon the arch.

Then, in the moment of my self-abasement, at the supreme climax of my downfall, I looked out through a yellow rift in the accursed fog, and saw Norton Bellamy himself.

At first, indeed, I did not credit this. The fog had lifted somewhat, livid patches and streaks of daylight relieved the gloom, and a dingy metropolis peeped and blinked through it, fungus-coloured and foul; but suddenly, painted upon the murky air, there took shape and substance a moving concourse of figures—of heads under helmets—and I, remembering the spectre of the Brocken, for a moment suspected that what I saw was but the shadows of myself, my policemen and my crowd projected over against us upon the dusky atmosphere.

Yet as that other company approached the splendid truth burst upon me. Vagrants, policemen, and rioting boys mainly composed it; but in the place of chief dishonour walked Norton Bellamy. He, too, it would seem, had violated the laws of his country. He too, by devious and probably painful ways, had drifted into Seven Dials, and there lost his freedom. An even-handed Nemesis, whose operations yet remained hidden from me, had clearly punished Bellamy for rejecting the advice of his fellow-man, even as she had chastened me for accepting it. And from cursory appearances it looked as though Bellamy had endured even more varied torments than my own. One might have thought that attempts had been made to clean the highway with him. He was dripping with mud, he lacked a hat, his white waistcoat awoke even a passing pity in my heart, and yet the large placidity, the awful calm of a fallen spirit, sat on Bellamy. He had doubtless exploded, detonated, boiled over, fumed, foamed, fretted, and thundered to his utmost limit. His bolt was shot, his venom was gone; he stood before me reduced to the potency of a mere empty cartridge-case.

We met each other's glance simultaneously, and a sort of savage and foggy beam of joy flitted across his muddy face; while for my part I doubt not that some passing expression of pleasure, which tact and humanity instantly extinguished, also illuminated my features. Our retinues mingled, and for a moment we had speech together.

Needless to say, the discovery that we were acquainted proved a source of much gratification to the crowd.

"Great Scott! You!" gasped out Bellamy. "What have you done?"

"Practically nothing," I answered; "but what I have suffered no tongue can tell and no human being will ever know. It is sufficient to say that I am here because I was deliberately advised by a fellow-creature to go and hang myself."

"They told you to do that?" he asked, with keen but suppressed excitement.

"They did."

He was silent for an instant, pondering this thing, while joy and sorrow mingled on his countenance. Then he answered me.

"I'll write your cheque the first moment I get back to the office. You were right. There is more good advice given than bad. I've proved it too. If I'd done half what I was told to-day, I——"

Here our respective guardians separated us, and we marched to our destination in silence; but about five or six minutes later we sat side by side in a police-station, and were permitted to renew our conversation.

"You've had a stirring day, no doubt," Bellamy began, while he scraped mud off himself. "Tell me your yarn, then I'll tell you mine. But how is it, if somebody advised you to go and hang yourself, that you are here now? You'll have to explain that first as a matter of honour."

I explained, and it must be confessed that my words sounded weak. It is certain, at any rate, that they did not convince Bellamy.

"I withdraw the promise to write a cheque," he said shortly. "On your own showing you dallied and dawdled and fooled about upon the top of that arch. You temporised. If you had followed that advice with promptitude and like a man, you wouldn't be here. This is paltry and dishonest. I certainly shan't pay you a farthing."

I told him that I felt no desire to take his money, and he was going into the question of how far he might be said to have won mine when we were summoned before the magistrate. Here fate at last befriended me, for the justice proved to be master of my lodge of Freemasons and an old personal friend. Finding that no high crime was laid at the door of Bellamy, and, very properly, refusing to believe that I had been arrested in an attempt on my own life, he rebuked my policeman and restored to us our liberty. Whereupon we departed in a hansom-cab, after putting two guineas apiece into the poor-box. This, I need hardly say, was my idea.

Then, as we drove to a hatter's at the wish of Norton Bellamy, he threw some light on the sort of morning he himself had spent. The man was reserved and laconic to a ridiculous degree under the circumstances, therefore I shall never know all that he endured; but I gathered enough to guess at the rest, and feel more resigned in the contemplation of my own experiences. He hated to utter his confession, yet the memory of that day rankled so deep within him that he had not the heart to make light of it.

"A foretaste of the hereafter," began Bellamy—"that's what I have had. And if such a fiendish morning isn't enough to drive a man to good works and a better way of life, I'd like to see what is. You say your trouble began in the railway-carriage coming to town. So did mine. But whereas your part was passive, and, by the mere putty-like and plastic virtue of ready obedience to everybody you finally found yourself face to face with death, I reached the same position through a more active and terrible sort of way."

"Nevertheless," said I, "taking into consideration the difference between my character and yours—remembering that by nature you are aggressive, I retiring—nothing you can say will make me believe that you have suffered more than I. Physically perhaps, but not mentally."

"Don't interrupt. I've heard you; now listen to me," he answered. "It began, as I say, in a train. An infernal inspector desired to see my season-ticket. Of course he was within his rights, and I had a whole carriage-load of fools down on me because I refused to show it. This day has taught me one thing: there's not a man, woman, or child in the country who minds their own business for choice if a chance offers of poking their vile noses into any other body's. The people who have interested themselves in me to-day! Well, this railway chap was nasty, of course, and took my name and address; but nothing more worth mentioning happened, except a row with a shoeblack, until I got to my office. There the real trouble began.

"You know Gideon? Who doesn't, for that matter? I had the luck to do him a good turn a week ago, and he came in this morning with a tip—actually went out of his way to cross Lombard Street and get out of his cab and look in.

"He said 'Good morning. Buy Diamond Jubilees—all you can get.' And I didn't look up from my letters, but thought it was Jones, who's always dropping in to play the fool, and remembered our loathsome bet. So I merely said, 'Shan't! Clear out!' Then I lifted my head just in time to see Gideon departing, about as angry as a big man can be with a little one, and my clerks all looking as though they'd suddenly heard the last trump.

"I tore after him, but too late; of course he'd gone. Then I dashed to his place of business, but he'd got an appointment somewhere else and didn't turn up till after twelve, by which time the tip was useless. And he showed me pretty plainly that I may regard myself as nothing to him henceforth. After that I was too sick to work, so went West to see a man and get some new clothes. Like a fool, I never remembered that with this bet on me I couldn't lie too low. It was all right at the hairdresser's, as you may imagine; but I'm accustomed to let my tailor advise me a good deal, and you can see the holy fix I was in after he'd measured me. I got out of that by saying that I'd drop in again and see his stuffs and his pictures by daylight; then I had a glass of port at Long's, and remembering my youngsters, went to find a shop where I could get masks and wigs and nonsense for them, because they are proposing to do some charades or something to wind up their holiday before they go back to school. Then, in the fog, I got muddled up and lost myself about a quarter of a mile from where we met. First I had a row with a brute from Covent Garden Market, who ran into me with a barrow of brussels-sprouts. We exchanged sentiments for a while, and then the coster said—

"'I don't arsk of you to pick 'em up, do I?'

"Well, of course, as he didn't ask me to pick them up, I immediately began to do it. And the man was so astonished that he stopped swearing and called several of his friends to make an audience. So that was all right as far as it went; but just then a bobby appeared out of the din and clatter of the street, and ordered me to move on. Of course I wouldn't, and while I was arguing with him, and asking for his reason, a fire-engine dashed out of the bowels of the fog and knocked me down in a heap before I knew who'd hit me.

"Everybody thought I was jolly-well killed, and I could just see the air thick with blackguard faces, getting their first bit of real fun for the day, when I suppose I must have become unconscious from the shock for the time being. Anyway, on regaining my senses, I found myself in a bed of mud and rotten oranges, with three policemen and about fifty busybodies, all arguing cheerfully over me, as if I was a lost child. Most of them hoped I was dead, and showed their disappointment openly when I recovered again. Two doctors —so they said they were—had also turned up from somewhere, and taken a general survey of me while I was in no condition to prevent them. After that I need hardly tell you I've lost my watch.

"The question appeared to be my destination, and now the policeman who had told me to move on explained, at great length, that depended entirely on whether I was physically shattered or still intact. If I was all right save for the loss of my hat and the gain of an extra coat or two of mud, the man had arranged to take me to a police-station for interfering with a fire-engine in the execution of its duty, or some rot of that sort; but if, on the other hand, I was broken up and perhaps mortally injured, then it struck him as a case for a stretcher and a hospital.

"They were still arguing about this when I came to. Upon which the constable invited my opinion, and explained the two courses open to him. He seemed indifferent and practically left it to me; so, as I felt the police-station would probably represent the simplest and shortest ordeal, and as, moreover, so far as I could judge at the time, I was little the worse in body for the downfall, I decided in that direction. I told him I was all right and had mercifully escaped. Whereupon he congratulated me in a friendly spirit and took me in charge."

Thus Bellamy: and when the man had finished, we spoke further for the space of about two minutes and a half, then parted, by mutual understanding, to meet no more.

"I'm sorry for you," I said. "We were both wrong and both right. The truth is that there's a golden mean in the matter of advice, as in most things. Probably the proportions of good and bad are about equal, though I am not prepared to allow that our experiments can be regarded as in any sense conclusive."

"And as to the bet, I suppose we may say it's off?" asked Norton Bellamy. "I imagine you've had enough of this unique tomfoolery, and I know I have. I'm a mass of bruises and may be smashed internally for all I know, not to mention my watch."

"Yes," I replied, "the wager must be regarded as no longer existing. We have both suffered sufficiently, and if we proceeded with it *quod avertat Deus*, some enduring tribulation would probably overtake one or both of us. And a final word, Bellamy. As you know, we have never been friends; our natures and idiosyncrasies always prevented any mutual regard; and this tragedy of to-day must be said to banish even mutual respect."

"It has," said Norton Bellamy. "I won't disguise it. I feel an all-round contempt for you, Honeybun, that is barely equalled by the contempt I feel for myself. I can't possibly put it more strongly than that."

"Exactly my own case," I answered; "and, therefore, in the future it will be better that we cease even to be acquaintances."

"My own idea," said Bellamy, "only I felt a delicacy about advancing it, which you evidently didn't. But I am quite of your opinion all the same. And, of course, this day's awful work is buried in our own breasts. Consider if it got upon the Stock Exchange! We should be ruined men. Absolute silence must be maintained."

"So be it," I replied. "Henceforth we only meet on the neutral ground of Brighton A's. Indeed, even there it is not necessary, I think, that we should have any personal intercourse. And one final word; if you will take my advice——"

He had now alighted, but turned upon this utterance and gave me a look of such concentrated bitterness, malice, and detestation, that I felt the entire horror of the day was reflected in his eyes.

"*Your* advice! Holy angels and Hanwell!"

Those were the last words of Norton Bellamy. He felt this to be the final straw; he turned his back upon me; he tottered away into his hatter's; and, with a characteristic financial pettiness, raised no question about paying for his share of our cab.

# JOHNSON'S BOSWELL

LEARNING from a source sufficiently credible that the young Scotchman James Boswell, son and heir to the Laird of Auchinleck, designs some future biography of myself, I have favoured him with a measure of my company and conversation naturally denied to most men of his age. His attainments, without being considerable, are varied, and though the man's garrulity can command neither respect nor admiration, yet there is about him a charm of rude health, high spirits, and good temper, which to undervalue or overlook would be at once unreasonable and unfair. His veneration for the writer, if irksome, is genuine; if at times offensive, is consistent. He has not as yet broke to me his intention, but the ambition was imparted to others of high repute. Them it is not necessary that I should here distinguish by their several appellations, but one and all inform me that Mr. Boswell, by constant practice and unceasing attention to my utterances in company, has so far schooled his memory to retrace and record with a startling accuracy much of the varied disquisition which is said to fall from me in conversation, together with those aphorisms, similes, apothegms, new lights, illuminations, corruscations, and repartees likewise reported as occurring in the substance of my discourse. Whether such a piece as must result from his assiduity is desirable, or can be fashioned with art sufficient to justify its existence, I shall not presume to determine. Fame, by which is understood the survival of human achievement, must be won by a man's own labour; and it is surely vain to imagine that the attention of successive generations can be arrested by the idle elaboration of a daily life from an unknown pen, no matter how minute the record or illustrious the object of it. Be that as it may, with a purpose to prove whether, indeed, it be possible by system and attention to commit a man's trivial actions and utterances to paper, I shall adventure some brief data or memoranda carried out after the fashion that is reported to be followed by Mr. Boswell against myself. And it is fitting that my own embryo historian should be the subject of such an experiment.

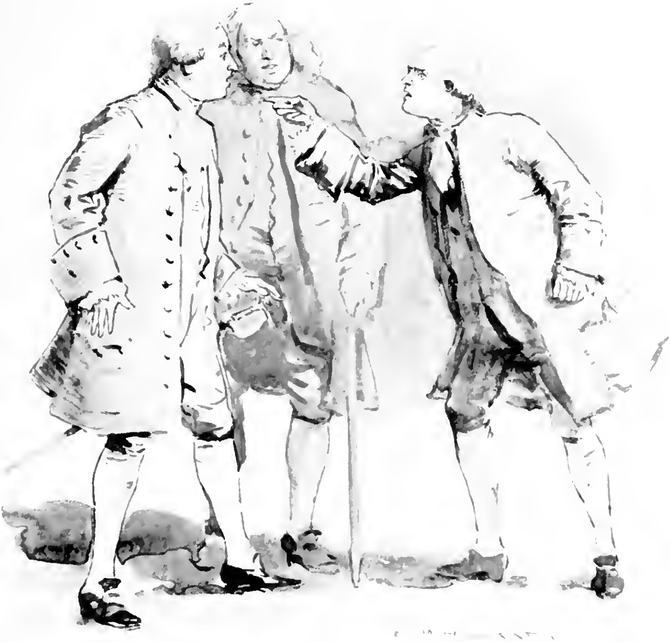
*Monday.*—At Thrale's. After dinner, to which repast Boswell was not invited, he arrived, and, finding a large company present, thrust himself into the talk without ingenuity and without decorum. Perceiving him to be intoxicated, I endeavoured to silence his alcoholic exuberance with as little occasion for offence to those present as the circumstance allowed. BOSWELL: "And pray, sir, have you dined to your satisfaction?" JOHNSON: "Sir! Thus to interrogate a guest before his host and hostess is to write yourself down a mighty ill-bred fellow, and reveal to the company a plentiful lack of good manners and just taste." MRS. THRALE: "The man has abandoned his manners for another cargo." JOHNSON: "Too true, madam." MR. GOLDSMITH: "He has sacrificed his wit to Bacchus, sir." JOHNSON: "Ay, sir; and no divinity within the compass of the classics ever received offering more paltry." There was laughter at this, and, under cover of it, I essayed to remove Mr. Boswell from a circle that in reality loved him, and was sad before the spectacle of his present lapse; but the man stood, temporarily stripped of reason, naked of proper sense, and unashamed. He turned upon me in a very frenzy of vinous anger. Boswell: "You are pleased, sir, to—to—make me the target of your el—elephantine pleasantries; but know, sir, that James Boswell of Auchinleck demands an answer to—to——" Here he attempted to draw his sword, and was immediately deprived of that weapon by those present. Johnson: "Get thee to bed, Bozzy, and——" But the sweep and force of the utterance I had designed were interrupted, for the man leapt towards me like an opera-dancer. His offensive intention failed of its effect, happily for him, and, at the very commencement of the onset, he fell over Mrs. Thrale's negro, who was about to hand me coffee and cakes. Ethiopian, Scotchman, cream, sugar, and sweetmeats of a dozen sorts encountered the ground in the very extremity of chaotic confusion. Whereupon Thrale sent men for a coach, and Boswell was presently conveyed from amongst us. Johnson: "Now who shall dare affirm that my notorious antipathy to the Scotch rests on a mere airy basis of humour, without sufficient incentive and provocation seldom long absent from my elbow?" None of the company took it upon themselves to traverse my utterance or question the justice of my conclusion.

*Tuesday.*—Mr. Boswell waited upon me about noon. He was of pallid aspect, and had suffered some temporary discoloration to the cuticle in the region of his right eye. He chose to enlighten me as to the cause, and explained that the men who conveyed him home on the previous night were responsible. BOSWELL: "Chairmen and coachmen always ask too much." JOHNSON: "No, sir, they never ask *me* too much." BOSWELL: "But the exception proves the rule. If it is a question of weights and measures, you——' JOHNSON (*taking him up sharply*): "Stay, sir! To what a pitiable extremity must that wretch be reduced who thrusts personality upon his argument. Know this, sir: all dead weight is heavier than that which lives, and folly dead drunk must ever cause a chairman more labour than wisdom sober." He made haste to assure me that he had intended no impertinent allusion, and he proceeded to deplore his conduct on the preceding evening with such humility and regret that my choler subsided. JOHNSON: "Alas, sir, if regret could but banish the consequences of folly! But religion testifies and experience proves that no ill deed escapes from due exaction of penalty." Boswell: "I visit Mrs. Thrale's anon to express the utmost sorrow for my conduct." Johnson: "Do so, sir." Boswell: "And yet, dear sir, if you consider, there appears nothing very singular in the course which I pursued. What gentleman of quality can say he has never been the worse for good wine? And who is there would wish so to declare even if he could?" Johnson: "This is not regret for an offence, but rather a rebellious attempt to palliate it." Boswell: "Then I will never drink wine again if you so advise me." Johnson: "Sir, this is the puerile irresponsibility of a babbling infant. Yet, if years be the standard by which we estimate your age, you are no longer a child. At least, I am not your schoolmaster." Boswell: "I would you had been, sir, then I should have been a wiser man." Johnson: "I know not that; but you might have been a sorer boy." Boswell: "Nay, sir, chide no more. I am heartily sorry for my misdeeds, and my punishment is severe enough, for it chiefly lies in the thought that I have given you pain." Johnson: "Only the pain, sir, of seeing my own species reduced below the level of those lower orders of beasts whose control was given to humanity at creation." He proceeded to whine about the profound depression of his spirits and the particular depths of misery in which he always discovered himself to be plunged after consciousness of having played the fool in a public place. JOHNSON: "Repetition will blunt the edge of most emotions. If folly publicly displayed occasions you such uneasiness, you should be accustomed by this time to the mental condition you describe. But I will scold no more. Come, sir, let us take a walk down Fleet Street." BOSWELL: "It rains, sir." JOHNSON: "What then, sir? Does too much wine make a man afraid of water?" We walked out to the tavern known as "The Cheshire Cheese," and it afforded me some entertainment to observe, despite his recent utterances, that Mr. Boswell's first mandate to the drawer was a pint of red wine. We ate of veal and prunes, and during the progress of our repast he invited me to express an opinion on a certain individual who enjoyed high office as the result of interest rather than merit. JOHNSON: "Sir, I entertain no opinion of him." BOSWELL: "Is that to say, sir, that you hold a bad opinion of him?" JOHNSON: "No, sir, it is not. Had I held him in bad opinion I should have so expressed myself. To entertain no opinion of a man is to deny the mind all consideration of him." He left me soon afterwards, but had evidently forgotten his penitential visit to Mrs. Thrale. I, however, restored the matter to his memory, and he thanked me with effusion, and went his way.

*Wednesday.*—Mr. Boswell called and drank tea with Mrs. Williams and me. The propinquity of my cat evidently occasioned him some discomfort, and I reproved him. JOHNSON: "How vain is it in you, sir, to let a poor dumb beast affect your ease and interfere with your comfort!" BOSWELL: "But it is *not* dumb, sir; it mews and shows in a dozen ways that it desires my friendship." JOHNSON: "Why, then, deny it such a simple boon? If the cat is worthy of the intimacy of Samuel Johnson, surely James Boswell need not scorn its society." Mrs. WILLIAMS: "I'll wager you know many bigger rascals, Mr. Boswell." JOHNSON: "Nay, madam, we are not concerned with morals, but breeding. This cat is a gentleman. After a friendship extending over a considerable portion of his life, and no small fraction of my own, I find that the epithet of 'gentleman' may be bestowed upon him without offence to truth. He can hold his peace, and he never bores me with ill-timed reflections on human or feline affairs." Boswell, though the condition is rare with him, was moody, a state into which the presence of my harmless tabby hath aforetime thrown him. He either failed to appreciate my humorous treatment of the beast and sly allusion to himself, or, of set purpose, overlooked both. Such conduct in my presence is unlike him; for, though apt to hold his place in most conversation, and ready enough with comment and quotation (of a sort usually obvious enough, scarce to escape the charge of superfluity), yet he willingly suffers occultation in my presence, and rarely exhibits to my observation any mood other than one of obsequious reverence and studious attention. Upon my dismissal of the cat to that private or nocturnal phase of his career which he conceals from his master, yet which is not of such an esoteric nature but that the flight of human imagination may create a phantasmagorial image of it, Boswell recovered a little of his customary high spirit. He pressed me as usual to accompany him on a journey to the islands of the Hebrides, and expatiated, not without elegance, on their savage situation and the ferocity and nobility of Nature as there exhibited. BOSWELL: "You must see me kilted on the mountain-tops, sir." JOHNSON: "If that is your primary inducement to the enterprise, I would as willingly remain in town." Truly, the spectacle of this man, so exuberant, so hyperbolic, so volatile, while a mild stimulant, viewed on level ground and clothed after the modes prescribed by a high civilisation, must have become at once intoxicating, bewildering, and perhaps disgusting, if displayed, as he suggested, within the barbarous circumference of a Highlander's petticoat upon some conspicuous elevation in the Isles of Skye or Mull. He talked of various matters, uttered no word whose original wisdom or exceptional folly rendered it worthy of commemoration, and then took his leave.

*Thursday.*—I saw nothing of Mr. Boswell, and was none the worse.

*Friday.*—He carried me to Drury Lane Theatre, where Mr. Garrick was playing to an audience of the scantiest possible dimensions. The piece, a wretched one, accounted for this, and we witnessed it upon the final evening of its representation. Langton and Beauclerk joined us in the pit, and Boswell loudly animadverted on Garrick's lack of perspicuity in lending his genius to such a poor poet. I pointed out that, so far as Garrick was concerned, the piece was very well, in that he had the lion's share of heroic passages, and, indeed, all that there was worthy an actor's attention. JOHNSON: "His ability lends a meretricious significance to a creation which, if examined in the closet, would be found poverty-stricken as to ideas, futile and faulty in construction, and remote from art or nature as truth is remote from falsehood." Forgetting that we were in a public place, I made this assertion with greater sonority of intonation than the occasion demanded; and some person in the gallery flung half an orange, which was unquestionably designed for myself, but struck Mr. Boswell. BOSWELL: "Zounds! this passes belief, that a clown should dare—I will go up this instant and chastise the rascal!" JOHNSON: "Nay, sir, he was in the right. He has paid, as we have, for his entertainment; and be it noted that the fellow expended his money in order to obtain a view and enjoy a hearing of Mr. Garrick, not you." BOSWELL: "He meant to hit you, sir; that is what enrages me." JOHNSON: "Ay, and had the correctness of his aim equalled the ardour of his indignation, I——" BEAUCLERK (*interrupting me*): "Nay, sir; let me pray silence. The players are bending sour looks upon us." JOHNSON: "They have reason on their side. Silence! Silence!" We then turned our attention to the drama, followed tragic circumstances of death and disaster with all proper sobriety of demeanour, and upon the completion of the act, went within the precincts of the stage to see Mr. Garrick. I observed without difficulty that he suffered from a mighty ill-humour; and, indeed, his first remark, addressed to myself, left us in no doubt as to his irascibility. GARRICK: "You are to know, Dr. Johnson, that people come to my theatre to see *me*." JOHNSON (*smiling*): "Nay, Davy, not always." This allusion to the extremely slender proportions of his audience was not taken in that spirit best calculated to lessen the force of the jest. To state the player's exact reply appears unnecessary; let it suffice when I assert that Mr. Garrick was rude. But a worse concatenation of events followed. Mr. Boswell came upon us at this moment, from some interchange with one of the ladies of the stage; and with ill-timed pleasantry, very characteristic of his bad judgment in matters of taste, jested openly upon the poor audience, and wondered what might be its financial equivalent. To say that Mr. Garrick surprised Mr. Boswell by the



"MR. GARRICK SURPRISED MR. BOSWELL"

vigour and fire of his retort would be to state too mildly the case. The tragedian, assuming a look of extreme ferocity, bade Mr. Boswell henceforth mind his own business, and never again dare to present his person behind the scenes before he was bidden. BOSWELL: "This is unmannerly, sir; I did but jest." JOHNSON: "Nay, sir; a quip levelled at the private concerns of an individual, a jest which depends for its point on another's ill-fortune in the affairs of his business or profession, is not of that humour which a gentleman should at any time permit himself. Enough of this. Mr. Garrick is right and you are wrong." MR. BOSWELL (*permitting his anger to assert a regrettable supremacy over him*): "Damn it! I am always wrong." JOHNSON: "Then, sir, mend your obstinate persistency in error, and strive to be sometimes right; and know also that an oath has an ill sound always, and never more so than when uttered in the company of those whose position or piety——" Here the business of the stage demanded our sudden silence and departure. We were, in fact, hustled from our place with an abruptness which cut the thread of my discourse. What thereupon became of Mr. Boswell I know not. For myself, I returned no more to the auditorium, but left the theatre and returned home alone. Upon ulterior consideration I perceived that I had erred, and took an early occasion of acquainting both Garrick and Boswell with the fact; and I added to the information those expressions of regret proper to it.

*Friday.*—We took dinner at the house of a worthy silk-mercer. The company was in no sense literary or intellectual. Talk indeed we had, but conversation if reduced to a monologue perforce perishes. Boswell broke a lance or two with me for the benefit of those present; but there was no man there of a calibre to awaken my interest, no opposing material of a surface rough enough to rub a spark from me. We returned in a chaise, and Boswell appeared so elated that I asked him the reason of his high spirits. BOSWELL: "Well, sir, I have rarely enjoyed conversation so much." JOHNSON: "Words were uttered, even to weariness, but I heard no conversation." BOSWELL: "Why, sir, they hung on your every utterance." JOHNSON: "Ay, as they would hang on the actions of a contortionist, of a rope-dancer, or the voice of an Italian singer." BOSWELL: "True, there was nothing to call out *your* powers." JOHNSON: "No, sir."

BOSWELL: "Yet I felt myself talking a great deal and confuting the city people with ease." JOHNSON: "If it was within your power to confute them, there can have existed but little need for me to speak." BOSWELL: "But I am glad you did not oftener take the other side, and so turn my victory into defeat."

He came with me to my dwelling, and we sat late, for he was about to return to Scotland, and there seemed no probability of another meeting between us for extended periods of time. As the moment of our parting approached Mr. Boswell relapsed into silence and sighs. JOHNSON: "Nay, sir, have done with these futile expressions of an artificial emotion. We have enjoyed each the society of the other, and now the tide of human affairs renders a parting of greater or less duration necessary between us. Heed your business; recollect the advantages of your education, the exactions consequent on your position, and the duty you owe to your God, your father, and your king. Write as the occasion serves, but let me have no more unmanly outbursts of imaginary low-spirits or simulated misery. You are as yet young, and the world lies before you; seek, therefore, to be contented; remember your friends and be grateful for small mercies.

These precepts duly followed will rob evil of half its sting, will fortify your soul against the world, and enable you, with a mind conscious of right, to look your fellows in the face and fear no man. Now farewell." He made a reply, which combined expressions of regard and an incoherent assembly of ill-assorted adjectives. He then pressed my hand fervently, and went upon his way.

Whether I shall see the man again is known alone to the Mysterious Contriver of human meetings and partings. There is much good in him; he hath fair measure of scholarship, and a heart not readily turned to ill. Small indeed he must be confessed, but against his limitation of mind and narrowness of horizon may be set a busy, bustling, inquiring spirit, not apt to be offended, and not readily rushing into enmity. He has, despite his frivolous affectation of gloom, the cheerfulness of a caged lark, and may, indeed, be likened to that sprightly songster at many points. There is a riotous joy of life in him, as in the bird, which, exhibited even in a prisoned fowl at all seasons, becomes irritating, but which, displayed in a human creature, must cause first amazement, then annoyance, and finally contempt. That he will have the energy and industry to complete and publish such a life of me as my friends have declared he designs is difficult to believe; while as for my own hasty annotations of a week in the society of Mr. Boswell, they may well terminate upon this page. And as the subsequent perusal of such a trifle would give neither pleasure nor edification to my fellows, this idle fragment shall now be relegated to the recesses of my waste-paper basket or the inflammatory embraces of my hearth.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—Dr. Johnson doubtless selected the waste-paper basket; hence our ability to publish this unknown fragment from his Titan pen.

# THE NINE MUSKETEERS

TWO draped figures stood at the entrance of the Criterion Restaurant, and the electric light played upon the huge feathers in their hats, glittered on their trappings, and touched their gilt spurs. One was an enormous man, nearly a foot taller than those about him; the other, though of medium height, appeared to be made of Damascus steel.

"'Tis the hour, D'Artagnan," said Porthos, as a church clock struck six.

"And the men!" answered D'Artagnan; whereupon two other romantic figures leapt from a hansom-cab.

"Athos!"

"Aramis!"

"God be with us all!"

The friends embraced, then entered the restaurant.

For a few brief hours they had secured leave of absence from the Stygian Fields, and before pushing on to Paris, had determined to visit a scene precious by reason of its manifold memories.

Porthos ordered dinner.

"Come hither, lackey," he roared in a voice that made the china jingle. "The best—the best of everything—and champagne; no baser wine."

He flung down his sword, and made his chair creak and groan.

"What thoughts of Milady and dear Lord Winter rise up in memory!" mused Athos.

"Of Buckingham and the Court," said D'Artagnan.

Aramis read the evening paper.

Suddenly he became violently agitated and transported with feverish excitement.

"Behold!" he cried, "the mummers have us! the mummers have us! At the playhouse named 'Her Majesty's' *The Musketeers* fret their hour nightly to crowded houses!"

D'Artagnan frowned, and sought the face of Athos; Porthos looked furious, and twirled his huge moustaches; Athos lifted his eyebrows, and the habitual melancholy of his noble and patrician face became much increased.

"What say you to this, friend Athos?" inquired D'Artagnan.

Without a word Athos took the *Globe* from the hand of Aramis, and studied it.

"One Beerbohm Tree essays your part, dear D'Artagnan; but be calm, be calm! He may mean well."

D'Artagnan drank a bumper of champagne, but his hand trembled, and a terrible light gleamed in his eyes.

"And we—we are all in the play," continued Athos. He started, and grew pale. "And Milady also," he hissed.

"And Richelieu?" inquired Porthos.

"They are all there."

Porthos shut his teeth like a rat-trap.

"It will be like old times," he said.

Aramis answered nothing; he merely drew his blade and made it glitter thrice through the air, then put it up again.

The diners were much surprised, and the waiters also showed uneasiness.

"I perceive the play is alleged to be by one Sydney Grundy," observed Athos, his melancholy increasing.

"Bon Dieu!" observed D'Artagnan.

"Bon Dumas!" said Aramis.

"Speak, Athos," continued D'Artagnan; "deliver your opinion, and we four will execute it in the face of this city. One thing I am determined upon. This profanation must cease. We owe it to the Master."

"Dumas would certainly will it so," declared Porthos. "His mighty shade must not be troubled by these puppets. I have my muscles still, Athos has his brains, Aramis his priestly cunning, D'Artagnan his matchless blade."

"This passes belief!" cried Aramis, suddenly shaking the *Globe* aloft. He started to his feet, and his friends, moved by that close, mysterious sympathy which at all times united them, likewise leapt from their chairs.

"What now?" cried D'Artagnan, his dark eyes gleaming with Gascon fire.

"Another travesty! Another *Three Musketeers*—this time at a house of entertainment named the 'Garrick,' and executed by one Hamilton!"

"'Sdeath, this passes belief!" murmured Athos.

A tear stood in his eye, but he dashed it away, gripped his companions by the hand, and put one foot on the table. The others instantly followed his example.

"For auld lang syne!" cried Porthos, and, raising his bull-like voice, he made the electric-light fittings shake in the roof.

"So be it; Athos is right," said Aramis.

"He is always right," declared D'Artagnan.

"His word shall be obeyed to the last letter, by ——!" swore Porthos.

"I have not spoken yet, however," said Athos.

A roar of laughter greeted this sally, then the friends resumed their business and their meal.

"Briefly, in a little affair of this kind, expedition is the main factor," declared Athos. "We are, of course, agreed," he continued, "that these exhibitions must cease?"

"Agreed!" they shouted like one musketeer.

"Then the only question left is that of the penalty."

"Let them die; it is the reward of sacrilege!" said Aramis coldly.

"Nay, they mean no evil; they probably know not what they do," said Athos. "These poor knaves must live."

"And I say they must die!" repeated Aramis.

The eyes of Aramis and Athos met, and both turned deathly pale.

"A quarrel?" asked Athos, with the delicate intonation of a royal prince.

Porthos and D'Artagnan waited in breathless suspense for the answer of Aramis.

"Heaven forbid!" cried the musketeer. "'Twill be time for that when we are back again on the shores of Styx. Duty first, pleasure afterwards."

Athos bowed, and all four friends caressed each other warmly.

Porthos ordered more wine.

"To your plan," cried D'Artagnan. "The night wanes and the playhouse opens its doors ere long."

"We must be there at the rise of the curtain. We will disguise ourselves."

"Nay, no disguise. There is nothing to fear."

"So be it, then. We will take our place among the spectators, and at a given signal from D'Artagnan we will force a way to the stage. Then each man must draw and put a quarrel on the mummer who is impersonating him. If they do not instantly yield, their fate be upon their own shoulders."

"I pray they may draw their weapons," said Porthos.

"Pshaw! What glory comes to us from spitting of players? 'Tis as easy as toasting cheese," said D'Artagnan.

They had now dined well, and Porthos called aloud for the reckoning.

"Hasten, lackey!" he cried, "or I shall lace thy black, frowsy jacket in a new pattern."

The musketeers buckled on their swords, and D'Artagnan spoke to Athos.

"Our adventure, then, is bloodless—a mere farce, nothing like the good old times?"

Athos shook his head.

"Alas! I would it were so. But blood must flow. It is ever our fate to spill it. Two gentlemen must die to-night; we owe it to the Master."

"Their names?" cried Aramis.

"Messieurs Sydney Grundy and Henry Hamilton."

A look of terrible meaning flashed from eye to eye, and the avengers clasped each other's hands.

Then Porthos flung two pistoles upon the table, and arm-in-arm the musketeers clanged and clashed out of the Criterion, to the relief of everybody present.

Their lackeys awaited them.

Mousqueton and Grimaud were directed to go into the pit of the theatre and join their masters on the stage at the critical moment;

while Planchet and Bazin were to have the horses in readiness at the stage door.

"And now?" said Porthos.

"*Pardieu!* To Her Majesty's Theatre!" answered D'Artagnan.

A flash of lightning flickered over Panton Street as the immortal four moved stealthily in that direction.

Among the first to enter Her Majesty's Theatre on the night with which we are concerned were Athos, Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan. Porthos flung three pistoles into the box-office, and demanded four seats near the stage, while the clerk in charge regarded the coins with some suspicion.

"They are each worth sixteen English shillings," said D'Artagnan shortly.

"Then I shall want another of them if you require a box," replied the young man.

Porthos produced the money, and soon the four friends were comfortably seated in a stage-box.

"It is well," said Athos. "From this place we may make our voices heard among the players, and work our will without shedding of blood; at least, it may be permitted to hope so."

"Let me see," answered Porthos; "what lies before us?"

"'Tis simple. We must put a stop to the performance, and we must secure the person of Sydney Grundy. One does not wish to slay him here in a place of entertainment; but he must be captured and removed," declared Aramis. "We may safely leave that task to D'Artagnan."

With increasing interest the warriors regarded the incoming audience, and marvelled at the changes Time had wrought upon human costume.

"*Pardieu!* Look at the men!" said Porthos. "They are all attired even as the lackeys at the eating-house."

"The English will never learn how to dress," declared Aramis.

Then the band struck up, and the eyes of D'Artagnan, ranging through the theatre, met those of Mousqueton and Grimaud. He made a secret sign, which they showed was understood by an intelligent gleam in their eyes. Meantime Aramis and Athos carefully studied the programme. Presently the drama began, and from the very commencement roar upon roar of deep, lion-like sound thundered and echoed in the stage-box of the Musketeers.

It was Porthos regarding his double on the stage.

"It is too droll—these English. Behold the worthy fellow! Look, dear friends, at the English Porthos! Inspect his thews and sinews. *Sang bleu!* I could eat him like a French roll!"

Loud and indignant cries resounded through the theatre, and Mr. Tree, taking the centre of the stage much against his will, gazed inquiringly at the box from which rolled the huge voice of Porthos and drowned those of the performers. The actor-manager's eyes met those of D'Artagnan, and he turned pale.

"They are there, the three Musketeers—the others!" he whispered to Milady in a voice swept by the deepest emotion.

"Not Hamilton's?" asked Milady, her eyes flashing as much with indignation as natural feminine curiosity.

"No, no, Dumas'. And D'Artagnan is also there."

"That is different," she said, and manifested an inclination to retire to her dressing-room. Order was restored, however, and the play progressed. With characteristic bull-dog British courage the gentlemen of the stage struggled through their parts, drew their swords, and fretted their hour, each with an uneasy eye upon the stage-box.

But the Musketeers were not patient men, and a moment came, about half-way through the second act, when their eyes sought each other's faces, and Aramis, without being asked to do so, rose and gathered the four swords, which were placed in a corner of the box.

Athos could not conceal the nobility of his character even at this moment.

"Consider," he said, "that these good people may have wives and children dependent upon their efforts. They are probably doing their best."

"And we must do ours," said D'Artagnan sternly. "We owe it to the Master."

"We are three to one, Athos," said Porthos. "Aramis, D'Artagnan, and I are all of one mind. Regard your double upon the boards. If he cannot spur you to action, nothing can. For my part, I shall not draw my sword against any man here, because it would be murder, but my namesake on the stage must be whipped — that is, if he shows fight."

"I shall try a pass with this Beerbohm Tree," said D'Artagnan, "for he numbers twelve good inches more than I do, and would appear to have some slight familiarity with his weapon."

"And I shall prick this Aramis of Sydney Grundy also," declared the Aramis of Dumas.

"Are you ready?"

"We are ready."

"Then follow me."

In a moment D'Artagnan had bounded on to the stage. After him came Athos and Aramis, while a moment later, with a sound like thunder, the enormous bulk of Porthos followed. As ill-luck would have it, the giant miscalculated his distance, and fell into the footlights. The shock extinguished half of them, and frightened the orchestra to such an extent that every member of it, with the exception of the conductor, dived like a rabbit and became invisible.

"Your swords, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, advancing with a polite bow. "You will hardly refuse. I see by your looks that you know us."

"Make way! make way!" shouted Mousqueton and Grimaud from the pit. Giving and receiving hard blows, they finally reached their masters' sides.

Mr. Beerbohm Tree was in a tight place,

according to the modern phrase. The house hung upon his words, and roared with savage delight at the unexpected spectacle. Mr. Tree, we repeat, was in a fix. Should he fight or call for base aid? Pride indicated the first course, prudence prompted the latter.

He made a sign to the pretended musketeers behind him.

But Aramis and D'Artagnan observed it, and leapt forward with an ancient expletive on their lips.

"Treachery! treachery! Then guard yourselves, gentlemen!" they cried.

There was a deathlike stillness. Only one sweet female voice cut the heated air like a knife. It was Milady calling for the police.

Whistles sounded and the hurried tramp of firemen and mechanics was heard behind the scenes.

"A breath of the good past times," panted D'Artagnan, pinning Mr. Tree to the left upper entrance.

"Spirit of the old king!" cried Aramis, as the unfortunate gentleman who impersonated him fell pierced through the left lung.

"May we meet in heaven, my unhappy friend," ejaculated Athos, while the actor who played his part expired in his arms from twenty mortal thrusts.

"But where is Monsieur Sydney Grundy?" cried D'Artagnan.

"He has escaped!" hissed Aramis. "A vehicle has just hurried from the stage-door."

"We must follow to the world's end if need be."

Athos wiped his blade. There were tears upon it as well as blood.

"Where is Porthos?" he inquired.

Aramis stamped furiously and pointed to the bar.

Porthos was drinking bottled beer at the expense of the Haymarket Porthos.

"Traitor!" gasped Aramis.

"Not so!" said Athos sadly; "he teaches us a lesson. Had we done likewise these good men would not lie where they do."

"Had Monsieur Tree offered me anything to drink——" said D'Artagnan thoughtfully.

But at the same moment Grimaud pulled at the sleeve of Athos, and said a few hasty words in the deaf and dumb alphabet of the fingers.

"We are surrounded," said Athos quietly.

"Fifty policemen stand between us and safety."

"Porthos!" shouted all the others.

"Monsieur Porthos!" cried Mousqueton and Grimaud.

The giant drained a third bottle, then, shaking hands with his impersonator, returned to the stage.

"Forward!" cried D'Artagnan.

An illumination, in some respects resembling summer lightning, flashed along their blades, and police constables fell before them, mowed down like the grass of the field.

A groan of despair rattled in the dying throats of 29 B, 44 D, 83 X, 221 Z, and 339 T. Porthos had spitted them like a row of larks on a skewer!

The stage-door keeper was the last to fall. Behind them the roar of a maddened audience, deprived of half its money's worth, sounded like the cry of fiends.

They gained the air at last. Their horses awaited them, each with a lackey at the stirrup.

"We have done our duty," said Aramis.

"Only half of it," answered D'Artagnan.

"What next?" inquired Athos. "No more blood, my dear D'Artagnan."

"The 'Garrick,'" answered the young Gascon, his eyes aflame.

Porthos laughed joyously. "This beer of England is good," he said.

# THE GAME OF LIFE

IN the spirit I saw a strange pastime not long ago; but I did not know or guess the nature of the entertainment. At first it seemed no more than a big cricket-match, with all the world looking on and humanity playing against its enemies. But as I looked again, I perceived that the audience was a thing of shadows, a mighty, misty crowd of ghosts—those who had played each their innings, and now watched the Game of Life and the living play it.

'Twas a single-wicket game, and a mighty balcony overlooked the field of play. Recording Angels scored, Time umpired, Death bowled tirelessly and unchanged through the ages occupied by the Game of Life; but the fielders moved and came and went like a demon-dance. Vile red and black things were they, the very outcome of delirium as it seemed; and now one rose into hideous prominence, and Cholera or Small-pox snapped ten thousand players, and sent men, women, children to the shades; and now another showed deadly activity, as War or Sudden Death made havoc with the batsmen. A hideous crew they were, all tentacles and hydra-heads; they thronged the earth and the air around each player, and no stroke seemed safely out of their reach.

Consumption kept the wicket, and caught or stumped cruel numbers of promising players before they were well set; Fever stood at mid-on; Cancer fielded deep and fielded sure; Heart Disease was at point; Apoplexy at cover-point; and all the other fell things that rob man of life stood round—a seething, twisting mob of black and scarlet devils leapt out of a nightmare or a picture by Salvator Rosa.

Few batsmen were clean bowled, but many were run out and still more caught. Now and then, however, Death found his way to the wicket after a long innings, and sometimes an old man who had long defied the hungry field went down to the Grey Bowler himself. If a child came in, Croup and Scarlet Fever, and Whooping-Cough and Measles crept up to the wicket. Diphtheria was a deadly customer to the children, and at such times Death made an Englishman feel angry, for he bowled harder at the little ones than their stouter elders. But it has been pretty generally admitted, I believe, that Death, whatever else he may be, is no sportsman.

Despite their claws and fangs, their million eyes and million hands, the red fielders and the black missed a good few chances, whereat Death grinned. His average never troubled him; he knew it must come out well enough in the long run. Often a batsman profited not a little when thus let off, and many an innings was a treat to watch in its patience and skill, while others, on the contrary—most of them, in fact—wearied the spectator by their feebleness. Sometimes a ghostly roar greeted the fall of a wicket; usually great indifference marked the event; not seldom the onlookers manifested absolute relief.

Full of monstrous surprises is this game. The weakling defies Death for over after over, and gets the ball past all the claws and long arms to the boundary; the stout and brawny giant, who looks good for a century, tumbles pitifully into the first trap, and puts up a ball weakly to Rheumatic Fever or Pneumonia, as though he had forgotten that such fielders existed for him.

The Recording Angels suffered me to glance over some score-sheets, and I found them very interesting and astonishing reading; for in the Game of Life, unlike most games, it is not the spectator who can best judge of a man's innings. It needs a recorder possessed of power more than human to score correctly. I found, for instance, that not a few batsmen who had played a very showy innings and kept up their wickets well, and afforded the crowd plenty of entertainment, had in reality added little or nothing to the Score of the World. Of course, in the Game of Life every ball counts; but the peculiarity of it is that a man may put on runs against himself. Every stroke is recorded in one of the score-books. There are two, but these never tally.

And then, in the spirit still, I found that my turn had come, and the great circle of grey spectators stretched round me and I walked forth alone to play my innings. Now the aspect of affairs was mightily changed for me. The fielders in their liveries of blood or ebony had all quite vanished away; Death himself had dwindled into a mere remote shadow; and as the ball came, it rolled so feebly and so weakly that I laughed and smote it, and marvelled that such bowling had ever proved difficult to anybody. I performed with confidence; I hit hard; I surprised myself and seemed to be playing a glorious game; but no applause reached me; the grey ghosts all had their backs turned; for many a time had they seen great innings played; and mine offered no shadow of interest to anybody but myself. Presently Death bowled a little straighter; but now I had got a good sight of the ball, and it seemed as big as a balloon, and I felt I could do what I liked with it. Suddenly, however, a delivery broke in, as I tried to cut it, and out of the invisible there started a livid monster, and stretched a huge hand that darkened all the sky. My heart grew cold, and my head sank between my shoulders, and I glared at the loathsome thing thus suddenly loosed upon me in my secure hour. For a moment the onlookers were interested; then a murmur like the wind in a winter wood ran amongst them, for the ball was dropped, and the hideous fielder again vanished. I had come back to my innings by a short cut, and, settling down once more, I played with a caution new to me, for I could never again forget the invisible terror waiting so close.

But this Game of Life grows harder and harder as a man keeps up his wicket. The bowling, so easy at first, increases in difficulty. To get the ball away is more and more arduous; the light grows bad so quickly; and a man is often hit by the ball towards the end and robbed of his nerve and courage. Those deathly charnel things in the field, too, creep nearer and nearer at the finish, and when once a man sees them waiting—waiting, watching, whispering—he knows he can score no more, and that the duration of his innings is now but a question for Death and Time.

In the gathering darkness I stood, and the ball was lost, for I could neither time it nor even see it any more. And I knew that I was not playing with a straight bat. Then a murmur of many voices rang in my ear, a sound of waters flowing, and a sensation of such weariness as only the dying know. Finally, there came a ball of terrible swiftness to me, and it struck the shoulder of my feeble bat and went into the darkness. Then followed the sound of hands upon it and of remote laughter; so I knew that my innings was ended. I strained to see what fiend had caught me; I yearned to know my score and in which book it should be found. But I could do none of these things, for Death, whose voice I had never heard until now, cried: "How's that, Umpire?" And Time answered, "Out!"

# "ALAS! POOR GHOST"

IT is quite enough in this materialistic age that I say I am a ghost to make people turn up their noses at me; and when I add that I am a very second-rate spirit with the most mean spectral privileges, it will be readily gathered that my position in phantom circles is more or less a painful one.

To be plain, I am not an awe-inspiring apparition in any sense; I am not even passable; I never raised the hair or froze the blood of anybody; adults gaze unmoved at my most fearsome manifestations; children like me.

But I am a right ghost for all that. Time and space possess no significance for me, and hundreds of people have mistaken me for luminous paint after dark. Against these advantages, however, must be set the unhappy conditions of smallness and stoutness; for as in life I was of diminutive and plump habit, so do I now remain. I am, in fact, a short, fat ghost—a combination of qualities that promised from the first to be fatal to any spectral procedure on a high plane.

Thus, though I have haunted in all the best middle-class families, and once or twice taken a *locum tenens* among county people; though I have foretold deaths, indicated buried treasure, pointed out secret staircases, corpses and so forth; though I have gone through the regular mill, my spirit has yet failed of acquiring even a reasonable reputation among men.

For the past fifty years I have dwelt in Herefordshire with some pleasant, self-made folks who suit me very well. Capon Hall is a very roomy mansion, possessing architectural advantages from my point of view, and situated in a somewhat densely-haunted district. The original owners got themselves destroyed in the time of Charles I., and the property, after many fluctuations of fortune, was ultimately purchased by Mr. John Smithson, a Manchester man. Here he resided, developed into a good old Squire of the right sort, and grew popular. He was a widower, and had two children, Ethel, a girl of eighteen, who lived with him, and William, a son of two or three and twenty, who entered the army and went to India. This youth married, became the father of a daughter, and sent the infant home to Capon Hall. Now, love may often appear where there is no respect, and when an element of real human affection entered into my ghostly life, I found it a comfortable and pleasing thing.

This baby Smithson loved me, and her regard was returned. Our attachment must be allowed platonic to a degree perhaps never before imagined, for Winifred has just attained to the age of three years, while I am above three hundred. She is a golden-haired, sunny little soul, making all the music and laughter of her home. I am an old, grey ghost, to whom the western wing of Capon Hall has for fifty years been consecrated.

With an accident to the Squire's daughter, Miss Ethel Smithson, upon some occasion of fox-hunting, this narrative properly begins. She suffered an awkward tumble, and the young man who came to her aid had the good fortune to please the girl immensely. Squire Smithson, upon the narration of Mr. Talbot Warren's bravery, could not for the life of him see anything to make a fuss about. "If a woman falls into a ditch, is it asking much of the man nearest at the time to pull her out?" he inquired. But Miss Ethel explained that the circumstances were of a very terrific nature, and how her hero, not content with seeing that she was safe and sound, had foregone all further sport, sacrificed his day's pleasure, and insisted on riding with her to the nearest farmhouse.

She met Mr. Warren again soon afterwards, and continued to find peculiar pleasure in his society; while, finally, through mutual friends, the young man secured an invitation to Capon Hall for a week's hunting.

He and his horse arrived. He proved uninteresting, and a sportsman of mean capabilities; but Ethel Smithson, blind to the youth's colourless and negative nature, fell violently in love with him. Being, moreover, a wilful little soul, who did pretty much what she liked with a most indulgent parent, matters went nearly all her own way from the first.

But the Squire and Mr. Warren had nothing in common, and at times their manifold differences of opinion might have produced serious results save for the younger man's caution. Talbot's physical nerve was weak, he wanted pluck—a lack that Mr. Smithson quickly discovered, and made the boy's life a burden to him.

Ethel always supported the weaker side in the many arguments arising from this question of bravery; and, on one occasion, after the Squire had made some allusions more pointed than polite to his guest's rapidly acquired knowledge of gaps, gates and like aids to the judicious Nimrod, Miss Smithson thought proper to drag me into the conversation.

"How can the wild, reckless courage you admire, papa, compare with the cool mental nerve which may be shown to some purpose in the useful affairs of life? How many of the men who jump over hedges and ditches, and risk their stupid necks before the gaze of farm yokels, would sleep night after night in a haunted room, for instance, as Mr. Warren does here?"

"Our ghost!" roared the Squire. "Our little plump, roly-poly of a ghost! I'd make a better bogey with a sheet and a turnip!"

The man meant nothing; his remark was not intended offensively; but I chanced to be in the drawing-room at the time (on a little footstool by the fire), and I confess I felt hurt. People should be careful what they say in a haunted house. I have a friend doing some haunting about half a mile from here, who would come over and punish these folks horribly if I wished it. He belongs to the

Reformation period, works between three and four in the morning, and during that weird hour can make a noise like china falling down a lift. But I am not vindictive. A phantom rarely reaches the age of three hundred without learning to control his temper.

"Physical bravery may be shown to greater advantage than in the hunting-field," said Mr. Warren, answering the Squire.

"It may, I grant you, but that is a right good school for it; and a man who loses nerve at a critical moment there will, in my judgment, be likely to do so all through his life."

"Are there no brave men who do not hunt?" asked Ethel.

"Thousands, my dear. You give us a beautiful feminine example of begging the question," answered the parent. "Moral nerve is, I allow, a greater thing than physical bravery at its best; but courage of both kinds, according to my old-fashioned notions, should be the hall-mark of a man."

Talbot expressed a hope that some opportunity might, ere long, be given him.

"I trust a chance of showing you that I do not lack either one sort of bravery or the other will come in my way, Mr. Smithson," said he.

Then the company retired, and on the following day private business took Mr. Warren to Hereford for an hour or two. He returned, however, before luncheon; and that night transpired the monstrous event I am now about to relate. Although he slept in an apartment particularly associated with myself, I had not, I may here explain, vouchsafed an interview to our visitor, for reasons sufficiently sound. In my opinion, no good would have come of it. Mentally, Talbot Warren was not a coward; and the knowledge of this fact, combined with a certain underbred cubbishness in the young man's treatment of inferiors, led me to suspect something derogatory to myself did I appear to him; but, after the recent conversation, I felt I had no choice.

As the clock struck twelve, therefore, on the night in question, I made my way through the wash-hand stand in the Russet Room and stood before Talbot Warren. I am nothing by gaslight, and to my surprise and irritation Warren's gas still burnt. He was dressed and sitting by the fire examining a huge lethal weapon with two barrels. He looked up and caught my wan, weary eyes fixed upon him.

"Oh, you're the ghost, I suppose?" he said rather carelessly.

I approached him and endeavoured to touch his brow with my icy forefinger; but he arose from his chair, regarded me insolently, and—I hate to write it—walked straight through me. I was never so put out in my life. I should have hardly conceived such a thing to be possible; I nearly choked with indignation. For sheer, unadulterated vulgarity, the man who intentionally walks through a ghost may fairly be said to stand alone. You tangible, ponderable people who read cannot remotely imagine my feelings; but any spectre will. Revenge was my one idea.

Having by this outrage convinced himself of my unsubstantial nature, the little cad looked me up and down critically and contemptuously. "Then," said he, "*you* can't upset my plans, anyhow."

The knowledge that he had plans comforted me somewhat. That they were nefarious I gathered from the pistol which he carried; and that I would confound and outwit him at all costs I also determined.

Not until two in the morning did he prepare for action. Meantime, rendering myself wholly invisible, I sat on a chest of drawers and watched him. At the hour named he shut his book, partially unrobed, put on his slippers, produced a "jemmy" and a dark lantern, picked up his weapon, and silently crawled downstairs.

The hideous truth flashed upon me. He was one of some gang of burglars, and now intended throwing open the house to his accomplices! What was to be done? Our household lay buried in sleep. Warren stole to the butler's room. Once within it, a stroke or two from his detestable apparatus would put the plate at his mercy.

For one brief moment I lost my nerve. The responsibility of my position was terrible. Then I strung myself to the struggle, and attacked him. But in spite of my frantic gesticulations, aerial gyrations, and supernatural manifestations, the ruffian kept on his evil way unmoved. I dashed about, and tried hard to make him get excited and worried, but he was as cool as a cucumber, and told me to "keep my hair on"—whatever that might mean. Then, realising the futility of this course, I sped away, faster than thought, to alarm the house.

Squire Smithson was slumbering noisily on his right side as I loomed through the fireplace of his chamber and laid an icy digit upon his brow. He leapt up instantly, but laughed when he saw who it was.

"Hullo, Fatty! Feeling lonely, eh? Don't worry me, my boy; I've got a busy day before me to-morrow. Stick to your own room, and get a rise out of that booby Warren. If you can't frighten him, you'd better give up the business and go back where you came from."

Then he turned with his face to the wall, and was asleep again instantly. That is the world all over. You may be breaking your heart about it; but it only laughs, and tells you to mind your own business, and not make a fool of yourself.

I went and woke the butler. I waved my drapery and pointed downstairs with actions that spoke louder than words. He sat up in bed and forgot himself altogether, and used language I shall not soil this page by repeating. It appeared that he was suffering from gout—the result of dishonesty in the wine-cellar—and had only managed to get to sleep a few moments before I roused him.

"'Ere 'ave I bin torn to pieces with agony for three mortal hours, and just drop off, and then you come with your beastly cold paw and wake me and bring back the torture a thousand times worse than ever. I'll give warning; I won't put up with you and your tomfoolery for any master alive. Why should I? Get out of this room, you little brute. Don't stand there waving about, like a shirt on a clothes-line. Get on, get out of it, or I'll strangle you."

I went. It was no good stopping. He couldn't strangle me, of course; but it is impossible to explain a difficult thing like burglary, in pantomime, to a man who can hardly see straight for temper. I almost wept ghostly tears. Never before had the pathos and powerlessness of my position been so impressed upon me.

In this sorry plight I sought my little friend Winifred, the Squire's grand-daughter before mentioned. She was lying wide awake, silent and speculative, as small children will. I loomed through a screen, covered with pictures from Christmas numbers, and she arose from her cot, a wee, comical white figure, faintly illumined by a night-light.

"How is you, dear doast?" she inquired. My mystic presence always gratified her.

She chuckled and chirruped in baby fashion while I beckoned and moved towards the door.

"You funny old doast. Stand on 'oo little head, doast, like yesterday in de torridor."

But I wasn't there to fool. I wanted to get her out into the passage, then alarm her nurse and so the entire house.

"It's too told to do playing to-night, doast," she said.

"Cold!" I doubt if ever a phantom got up to such a temperature anywhere as I did on that occasion.

Then the nurse awoke, peeped two angry eyes over her counterpane, and gave me some plainly-worded advice.

"Shame on you, ghost! Ain't you got nothing better to do than scare childer and wake decent women-folks? Be off with you, you fat old blackguard, or it's a bell, book and candle I'll fetch."

I only wished she would fetch a bell—and ring it.

"Dood night, dear doast!" cried my small friend, as I sank through the floor into the footman's chamber. Here further failure awaited me. I could not so much as wake the man. His was no natural sleep, but some species of loathsome hibernation peculiar to male menials and entirely beyond my power to conquer or dispel.

And downstairs the inexpressible Warren was filling a sack with choice spoil and drinking dry sherry from the decanter.

I dashed out of doors to see if anything could be done with the watch-dog, a massive brute, judged without sufficient reason to be ferocious. He was asleep, of course, but came forth from his kennel when I touched his nose, recognised me instantly, wagged his idiotic tail, and showed an evident desire to be patted. I couldn't pat him, but I should like to have kicked him, and I'm not ashamed to say so. I tried to rouse the dog's spirit; I threw imaginary stones, and frisked about and pretended to steal its supper; but the lumbering brute regarded me with that good-tempered glance bred from conscious superiority, and then went back into its kennel.

If ever a spirit was more utterly crushed, sat upon, scorned and smothered by the flesh than I that night, I should like to learn the particulars.

Warren had now taken his sack into the dining-room, had cut two window-panes out with a diamond (why, I could not at the time understand), and then, opening the window widely, lowered his booty into the garden. I fled out again to strike terror, if possible, into the hearts of his vile accomplices, but found, to my surprise, that there were none. Single-handed he was effecting this dark deed.

Then a final desperate resolution came to my mind; I would rouse Miss Ethel Smithson herself, and show her the man she loved in his true colours.

Even then my natural kindness of disposition caused me to hesitate. But if you see, as I did then, love's young dream drifting into a nightmare, you are justified in shattering it. No burglar could bring true and lasting happiness into a gentlewoman's life. That, at least, is my view.

"Why, ghost," said Ethel, rubbing her eyes after I had waked her, "I don't think it was kind of you to spoil a beautiful dream I was having about—but never mind, it won't interest you." I beckoned mystically, and she showed a little interest. I retreated, inch by inch, to the door, waving her after me. Hamlet's father's spirit never did anything better or more solemn and impressive. By all the curiosity of young ladies, she rose! She put on a dressing-gown and slippers! She said, "Whatever is it? I do hope there's nothing happened to Talbot." My heart bled for her, but I was firm, and she followed me out on to the dark landing.

A dim light flickered from a doorway far below. This Miss Smithson instantly observed, and deducing a theory therefrom with marvellous celerity, had the good sense to cry

"Thieves!" as loud as she possibly could do so. Then she bolted into her father's room, made the same remark, and finally retired to her own apartment, locking the door behind her.

Disorder was thereupon the order of the night, while the behaviour of the outrageous Warren passed belief. At the first sound of the tumult he deliberately fired off his pistol through the top of his hat, and discharged the other barrel into a rather valuable hunting picture which hung above the sideboard. He then leapt through the open window into the garden, rolled himself in the mud, rose and galloped off into the darkness, shouting "This way! Follow me: I've got the scoundrels! Help here, help!"

I need not point out that these expressions were calculated to give an utterly false impression of the situation and circumstances. I had been grossly deceived, as the rest of the family were now about to be.

Squire Smithson came down the front stairs with a life-preserver, and my hibernating footman rushed down the back stairs with another. The Squire kicked an umbrella-stand with his naked foot, and stopped a moment to talk to himself. This gave the hireling some advantage of ground, and when the head of the house reached his dining-room window, he found a man half-way out of it. It was too dark to distinguish friend or foe, and Squire Smithson, making a dash at the figure, brought down his life-preserver with considerable brute force. I cannot pretend to say I was sorry for this. The injured domestic screamed, and was about to beg for mercy, when a mutual recognition occurred, and he contented himself with giving warning. Then they tumbled out of the window together, and hastened to where great shouting arose from a distant shrubbery. A tramp, hearing the riot, got over the wall of the kitchen garden at the back of the house to help, and fell through the roof of a vinery. There he was ultimately discovered, cut to ribbons, and it took him all his time for an hour to explain his intentions. The dog, of course, began barking now as if he had known all from the first, and only waited the right moment; the maids were screaming in pairs from the different windows, and some fool in the house (the page-boy, I imagine) was beating the dinner-gong—doubtless to conceal his own cowardly emotions. For my own part, I was in twenty places at once, whirling through the dark air, issuing directions, explaining everything in dumb show, and making the entire concern as clear as daylight.

But nobody paid the very slightest attention to me.

Warren at length returned, breathless and bedraggled. He recovered with great apparent effort, gave utterance to a succession of dastardly falsehoods, and became the hero of the hour.

The scamp related how a noise had awakened him; how, seeing a light in the hall, he had crept downstairs, to find two ruffians with black masks lowering a sack of valuables out of the dining-room window; how he had hurled himself upon them with the courage of an army; how they had twice fired point-blank at him, and then fled; how he had followed them, seized one, and struggled with him; how, finally, uniting their efforts, they had succeeded in escaping from him.

And there was an end of the matter; for of course it appeared impossible to question the truth of the story, or raise any further doubt about the moral and physical pluck of a young man who could do these things.

Next morning the pistol was discovered in the garden; detectives wandered about, lunched at the Squire's expense, found clues, and took the address of the tramp who had fallen into the greenhouse. This man had departed a physical wreck, swearing that he would never put himself out of the way again for anybody as long as he lived. I confess my ghostly heart went out to him. The local paper published two columns of sickening adulation upon the subject of Talbot Warren; Ethel's father consented to her engagement, and—bitterest blow of all—thought it proper and decent to censure me at breakfast, before the servants, for the part that I had played.

"What's the use of a paltry shade that cannot even scare burglars away from a family mansion?" he asked.

"The poor little chap tried his best," said Ethel.

"Yes, after it was all over and the mischief nearly done. If he'd had the pluck of a mouse, he would have gone down to help Warren, instead of fluttering about making faces and doing nothing, and getting in the way. Why didn't he speak up like a man?"

The brute Warren said he thought that most spectres were cowards at heart, and the butler ventured to agree with him.

I am leaving Capon Hall. These incidents have knocked all the spirit out of me. I wish to say no bitter word of anybody; it is more in sorrow than anger that I write; but misunderstanding so humiliating, coupled with loss of self-respect so complete, can neither be lightly forgiven nor forgotten.

Change, repose, lapse of ages are all necessary to the renewal of my shattered moral tone and vital principle. It may be many centuries before I revisit "the glimpses of the moon." If I had my way I should never haunt again. In my case the game is not worth the phosphorescence. There obtains an idiotic belief among men that "all appearances are deceitful"; but that such a rule has many exceptions I can only trust this narrative will sufficiently attest.

# GREENSMITH'S CHARADE

CANDIDLY, if you were to ask me what I think of amateur acting generally, and charades in peculiar, I should tell you that in my opinion there is a very considerable compartment down below devoted exclusively to this peculiar form of torment. There the amateurs will do great things on a fiery stage; and the misguided people who have encouraged them during this life must make up their minds to sit solidly in red-hot stalls, without backs, through an eternity of indifferent acting. It is a source of satisfaction to me that I only helped to perform one charade in my life—which I ruined. And yet it seems rough to be jubilant about it, because that particular entertainment did two really great things for me—one in the little affair of Millicent Warne, the other touching Greensmith.

You don't know Greensmith? Thank God

for it; but let the thought that he still lives, and is loose, and may on some occasion cross your own path, chasten you when you are going strong and feel inclined to get above yourself. The time of these events being Christmas, I will not say what I think of Greensmith here, but merely hint that he is the smallest man and the biggest hound that ever cast a black spell on a pleasant party. His conceit is gigantic, his manners are loathsome, his ancestry runs into a Jew pedlar in the second generation and stops there. He has more opinions and less information than a Board School teacher. He is, moreover, a worm, and also a bounder. He lies, and he would break all the ten commandments every week of his life had he the pluck to do so. But if he may be allowed a strong point, it is cowardice. He wears an eyeglass with difficulty, waxes the points of an indifferent moustache, sports a red tie by day, diamonds by night, and is, to conclude, within the bounds of charity, the most unutterably deplorable parody of a human being that Nature ever turned out during a moment of weakness. So much for a mere judicial summary of Greensmith. If you want my private opinion concerning him, you can have it when this present blessed season of peace and good will has passed into limbo. I can't blackguard a man at Christmas-time.

Greensmith and I joined old General Warne's house-party about the third week in December. How Greensmith got in nobody ascertained with certainty, but I fancy his purse had something to do with it. Retired army men, with plenty of energy and nothing to occupy their minds, either spend their time in religious enterprises or mercantile ones; they dabble in missions and Church work, or stocks and shares, according to the bent of their genius. General Warne was one of those who go off to play in the City. There he met the ineffable Greensmith, and with some lack of wisdom invited the thing to spend Christmas at his place in Warwickshire. Now, mind you, I judge of every Johnnie by himself, and I was utterly unprejudiced in the matter of Greensmith when I first met him. I knew by the number and nature of the rings on his hand as he held it out that he wasn't a gentleman; still, I told myself, this might be his misfortune and not his fault. A mere error of taste in jewellery is nothing. But when he opened his mouth, the horrible inner nature of the person appeared. He had the start of me by two days; yet his manners must have led you to suppose that he had enjoyed the privilege of knowing General Warne, his daughter, and his wife since they were born.

Now, I really did enjoy such a position so far as the General's family was concerned. At five years of age I had proposed marriage to Millicent Warne and been accepted. Later on, when I was ten, the engagement was broken off by mutual understanding; but four years afterwards, when I had reached the age of fourteen, she twelve, and when we were both pretty well alive to the hollowness of the world, the engagement was renewed. I only mention this trifle to show what my relations with the Warnes amounted to. At the beginning of this narrative Millicent and I had been for many years detached. Our friendship was still sincere, but platonic, and we could discuss our romances without emotion. Indeed, on the very occasion of this house-party we had a conversation upon the subject of marriage. I was now twenty, Millicent two years younger, and we drew bright pictures of the single state, and encouraged one another to be resolute in our lofty ambition of sticking to it.

Well, you can see for yourself what I'm coming to; the Greensmith, with an amount of indecent haste impossible to a human being of any refinement or judgment, fell head over heels in love with Millicent Warne. His pretensions were merely those of the pocket; his appearance would have made the most ancient and amorous spinster think twice; his age placed him upon the confines of sere and yellow, for he was thirty-four. How he lorded it over everybody on the strength of his five thousand a year! How he explained that he was better mounted, groomed, dressed, educated, and mentally equipped than any other man at that time within the confines of Warwickshire! And all the time I knew that when I came of age, next year, I should be able to swamp him even in the matter of filthy lucre, as I did now in the matter of brain power. Not that I am anything worth mentioning mentally; but the man with one eye is king where all else are blind, and I at least had sense to know that I was not much better than a fool, whereas Greensmith was that pitiable spectacle, a fool who thinks himself a wise man.

Of course, I saw the growing intimacy and the barefaced way in which Millicent tolerated him, especially in my presence. I spoke about it more than once, and to my surprise, Miss Warne took up an attitude of indifference. We did not quarrel, because I am a man with whom it is impossible for a woman to be on bad terms; but we differed, and I watched the flirtation, for it was hardly less, with some discomfort. Here was the best girl I had ever seen or heard of deliberately encouraging a sort of man one did not like to see in the same hemisphere with her.

Greensmith's charade brought matters to a climax in a way beyond human power to foretell. Of course, when the thing was proposed he took up the running. What he didn't know about charades wasn't worth knowing; so he undertook to write one, arrange the parts, paint the scenes, and stage-manage. Millicent, to my amazement, threw herself into the project very heartily, and seemed much disappointed when Greensmith said he should not act himself.

"The author never does," he explained. "You are my puppets for the time being. It will take me all my time to rehearse you and lick you into shape."

To hear Greensmith thus talk about licking county people into shape made my blood boil. It took Millicent two hours by the study clock to get me to promise to play a part. But I did it, chiefly that I might have an excuse for being present at rehearsals and so forth. A hard frost came at the critical moment, so hunting was suspended, and we had ample leisure for the charade.

Greensmith said, when he read his drivel to the company: "There are three syllables, and then the whole word; four scenes in all, and each depends upon the others. I've given a taste of Gilbert's epigrammatic style in the first scene; the second suggests the robust manner of Jones; the third recalls Pinero."

"And what shall you give us last," I said, "Shakespeare?"

"No, myself," he answered.

The word was 'innocent,' which Greensmith divided thus: 'Inn,' 'No!' 'Scent.' I really forget all the details, and they don't signify now; but my part and Millicent's stick in my memory, as well they may. Why, I shall never quite understand, but Greensmith arranged that Millicent and I should be lovers, that I should send her a letter proposing marriage in the first scene, that she should forward me an answer refusing my hand in the second. How little the idiot thought of what he was doing! What absurd and Satanic conceit he had, not to see the horrid jeopardy to his own private arrangements involved by this manner of planning the charade!

I chucked up my part four times during the first rehearsal; I chucked it up thirteen times in all before the night. Greensmith was entirely responsible for the chucking; Millicent's marvellous tact so worked upon me that, against my better judgment, I resumed the character. He said once:

"If you'll only be natural, old man, you're all right. The part fits you like a glove. It was written for you."

Now, seeing that the character I impersonated was a silly fool who didn't know his own mind, and fancied he was not in love when he was all the time, this seemed hard enough to bear without being called 'old man' by a person like Greensmith. So I threw up the part again. That was the tenth time, or it may have been the eleventh. Anyway, Millicent so far prevailed with me that I found myself acting on the night. The first week in January it was; and the concern being in mediæval times, we were all got up in costume. Greensmith wanted to have everything archæologically correct, but they weren't by long chalks, because everybody would wear what he liked, and the girls too. We had a stage and scenery out from Birmingham, and a man to paint our faces, and another to do limelight effects on us. I remember just at the last minute Greensmith asking me if I thought the big audience which crammed General Warne's hall would call for the author. I said:

"If they do, you can get away through the hall window and hide in the park." This stung him into retort.

He said:

"There'll only be one target for brickbats, my boy, while you're on the stage. Your solitary chance is to speak my words. I don't believe you know your part a little bit."

"I'm going to put some fun of my own into it," I said, just to get his wool off.

"They'll laugh all right without that," he said, looking nasty. "You'd make a cow laugh in those things." I had on an old fancy-dress ball costume representing something out of Shakespeare; and I know I looked jolly well, because Warne said so himself, but this vulgarity of Greensmith's set me thinking. I am the most soft-hearted brute really, and somehow the spectacle of Greensmith in evening dress, with the prompt-copy of his drivel in his hand, with a red silk handkerchief sticking out of his shirt-front, green clocks to his little socks, a bunch of violets in his buttonhole, and diamonds stuck on him wherever the same could be placed without absolute absurdity, made my heart bleed. I wept inwardly—not for him, but for the sweet, innocent woman he was slowly luring into his toils. Pity is akin to love, and now I actually found myself head over ears again! Millicent happened to be a very pretty girl, beautifully English, with sweet eyes and a very poetical way of walking. Besides, there was the background of romance. At any rate I must propose once more, though somehow I felt it was too late. Then that blighted Greensmith gave me the very idea I required. He said:

"Well, thank goodness, the best thing in your part is the letter you're supposed to send proposing marriage. You can't ruin that because it's all type-written. Remember you gave it to the girl in the first scene. Don't go on, for mercy's sake, and then find you've forgotten the thing."

"It's here," I said, showing him the letter tied up with a bit of red silk. Then an inspiration of the sort that only comes once in a lifetime and sometimes never at all, rolled into my mind. I cleared off into the library, which was approached from the stage in the hall. I then opened the letter, put P.T.O. at the bottom of Greensmith's idiotic stuff, and wrote on the blank sheet which followed it. What I said is no business of yours or any other man's. Suffice it that I touched lightly on the past, hinted that, in my opinion, Millicent was running frightful risks, explained that I loved her too well to see her throw herself away on a foreign body whose name would readily occur to her, and finally explained that my views on matrimony were changed, and that if she thought it was good enough—well, you know the sort of letter. If you haven't written one, you've said the same thing by word of mouth; or you will; or you ought to. The reason for my haste was that I had already seen a proposal on Greensmith's lips every time he caught sight of Miss Warne. I also knew that he would have opportunities, denied to me that night, of seeing her at the wings and elsewhere. I hoped to get one word after the first scene was over, however.

Millicent looked grand. Every man in the room was in love with her. Greensmith ate her with his eyes, and forgot all about prompting until I stuck almost immediately after my first appearance. Then he allowed himself to swear at me in a voice which could be heard to the back of the hall; and I told him out loud that it would be all the same a hundred years hence; which got the best laugh in the piece.

I gave the letter to Millicent and went off, while she read it in face of the audience. Then she turned over and read my own little piece to herself.

"There is a postscript," she remarked, but did not turn a hair or show anything excepting the deep sorrow she was supposed to feel at having to reject me. Millicent did this part so jolly well that I felt uncomfortable. She avoided me like poison after the first scene, but kept it up hot with Greensmith; and once I half thought she might have told him the truth. That decided me to destroy Greensmith if my own affair fell through, and I went on in the next scene feeling about as little like acting as you can possibly imagine. It was the aching heart and the green-eyed monster, and all that, hidden beneath the jester's motley. Then I remembered that in the course of this scene she had to send me a letter, and for the first time in my life I felt what it is to have nerves. Could she? Would she? Was there any chance? I felt that there was not. Why, the brilliant and exquisite Millicent might have captivated the noblest in the land that night.

I did not act well. I know it, and admit it frankly. Everything was in a haze until I sat alone on the stage. Millicent had taken the letter from her pocket, regarded me with a look of divine pity, dropped the communication at my elbow, and departed. I just saw Greensmith through a sort of mist. He was looking venomous, I thought. One eye flashed malignant hatred, the other scintillated triumph.

I heard him say, "Read it, you fool!" Then I opened the letter and I shook. It wasn't acting, though it must have looked jolly real and pathetic, don't you know, from the front.

Well, I have said a thousand times since that I was very sorry. I have apologised to everybody concerned, even Greensmith. These things will happen. I forgot all about his precious charade in the excitement of opening the letter; and when I saw at the bottom of a lot of typewritten rot the three letters P.T.O., just as I had set them down myself, I forgot everything in the world excepting Millicent. I am a man who can usually keep his nerves in a crisis; but I didn't then. I just sat down in a chair and read to myself:

"*Yes! I think it is quite good enough.*

"*Your loving Milly.*"

And then I laughed out loud, and banged my feet on the ground, and thumped the table, and cheered, and said "Holy Mouse! She thinks it's good enough! God bless her!" Mind you, I should have done just the same if the King and all the Royal Family had been in the audience. I forgot there was an audience. I forgot my part, my costume, my name—everything. As for Greensmith, he might never have lived. The audience applauded like anything, *because they'd seen Millicent write the charade letter and knew she'd chucked me.* They thought it was so jolly natural for a girl to change her mind like that and send another letter. But Greensmith here made it clear that he lived.

He was boiling all the starch out of his linen with rage, and trying to destroy me with his beady eye.

"Read the letter, you miserable, long-legged fool!" he hissed under his breath.

"I have," I answered, and the audience roared.

"You have not!" he said, coming round the wing in his excitement. "She's refused you! Now you've ruined everything, you stupid ass!"

This before everybody; and still I couldn't grasp the situation, and turned on Greensmith. "Run away, run away, my little man," I said, with calm superiority. "Refuses me! It's here in black and white. She's *accepted* me, and I'm the happiest Johnny alive."

He flung down the book, gnashed his teeth, and forgot himself so far as to try and strike me in the face. I was too happy to hurt him. I just took him by the back of his neck somewhere, and called him a silly little cuckoo, and slapped him and let him go. Of course the charade ended there. It couldn't proceed because Millicent had utterly dislocated the plot by accepting me. A thing like that in the middle of a drama can't be repaired. So they dropped the curtain—and only missed Greensmith himself by a hair. And the best judges always say it was the finest amateur performance that they ever saw in their lives. General Warne sat in the billiard-room and cried with laughter all the next day; and I went about saying I was awfully sorry half the night. Everybody in the house frankly forgave me, too, excepting only Greensmith.

He left the next morning and sent me a serious challenge to fight a duel soon afterwards; which I've got framed in oak and gold to this day.

# THE MATE OF THE "BUNCH O' KEYS"

IN fifteen hundred and eighty-eight—
  Name a braver year if you can—
'Twas a caravel, as the legends tell,
  That passed from the sight of man.

Southward away, like an ocean bird,
  On the breath of a northern blast,
Sailed the *Bunch o' Keys;* and following seas
  Laughed loud as they thundered past.

She struggled from moon to moon again,
  While a hurricane round her leapt;
Till her master and crew aweary grew,
  And murmured their Maker slept.

Then many an angry and fearful eye
  Bent aglow on the vessel's mate,
Where he moved in dread, with a hanging head
  And a mien disconsolate.

This pitiful, haunted, haggard wretch
Was as friendless as man may be;
And upon his face lay the ugly trace
Of a secret agony.

When day departed they heard his cry
To the God of all power and might,
And his hollow groan, as he moved alone,
At the darkest hour of night.

He told his crime to the Evening Star
And a wandering wild sea-bird,
"They will bear my tale on the angry gale,"
He whispered when no man heard.

"They will cry my deed to the icy wind,
And the wind to the white-capped wave;
They will tell the sun the thing I have done
Far under his western grave.

"I slew a friend in his hour secure,
While a woman pointed the way;
And I saw the flood of his good heart's blood
Leap red as the Judgment Day!"

That terrible deed they knew alone—
God and the Devil and the Dead—
Then a morning came, upon wings of flame,
And deluged the world with red.

"O, who shall tell?" cried the sailor-men,
"What this vision of woe can mean,
Filling sea and air with a gory glare
And the lurid clouds between?

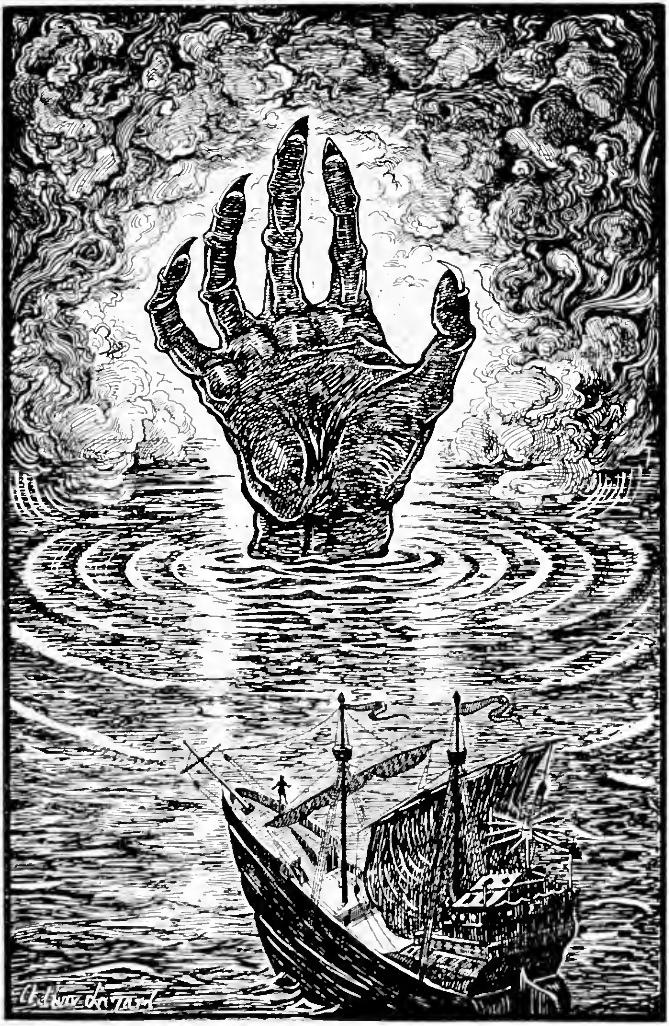
"Red, as at rising or going down,
Reels the sun at the hour of noon,
And the stars by night are like sparks of light
From the bale-fire of the moon.

"Red are the hungry and steel-eyed sharks,
Where they swim in these crimson seas,
And horribly red, to her top-mast head,
Is the luckless *Bunch o' Keys*.

"Now mad we grow, as a beast grows mad
When his eyes the red shambles see,
And it is not well that we suffer hell
For another's villainy."

Thus did they threaten, those sailor-men;
But the master cried, "God of grace!"
And pointed away to the dying day,
Where the sun sank down apace.

And there, from out circles of liquid flame,
Spread abroad on the ocean's breast,
Ascended a Hand, like the sight of land,
From under the shining west.



“ASCENDED A HAND, LIKE THE SIGHT OF LAND”

Crooked, gigantic, and lean and gaunt,
And ebon, and naked and vast,
It hid the skies from the terrified eyes
Of those who beheld aghast.

Sombre and grim as a blind man's night,
It arose like a mountain peak;
Each finger-bone was a pillar of stone,
Each claw was a dragon's beak.

All the black malice of deepest hell
Did the palm of the monster show,
With passions sore, full many more
Than human natures know.

Its pulsing wrist made the waters leap,
Where it moved through that blood-red sea;
While the caravel, like a rocking shell,
Awaited her destiny.

As a herd of frightened flying sheep
Ran the sailors, with cry and groan;
But their cursed mate met the fall of Fate
Where he stood, on the poop alone.

From the inky mass of that awful Hand
Did the thumb and finger bend,
And, as crawling ant from the leaf of plant,
They plucked him unto his end.

They plucked him aloft and they held him high,
Then, under the sea of gore,
To his torment dire of eternal fire
He vanished for evermore.

* * * * *

A northern wind, like the breath of God,
Leapt forth from the sky to the sea;
And the hideous stain off the rolling main
Was lifted right speedily.

A clear sweet night of diamond stars,
And a crew on their bended knees,
For the precious boon of a silver moon
That shone upon silver seas.

# THE TRANSMIGRATIONS OF TARVER

## I

I SHOULD never have thought it of a man not only called John Robinson, but who looked the name so completely. True, he had been born abroad in a land of mystery, but with that he had nothing to do. Owing to a series of circumstances over which Robinson exerted no control whatever, he first saw daylight on a Thibetan tableland, and, what is more, did not return to his mother-country until he was one-and-twenty years of age; but there was little to suggest these facts about him. He had the most purely British middle-class manners, instincts, appetites and mould of mind that ever I saw. For ten years I knew him intimately, and never guessed that anything in the least uncommon lurked beneath his fat exterior. I even respected him. He dwelt alone with an unmarried sister but little older than himself and he went to business in the City daily. After travelling upon the same omnibus with him every morning, winter and summer, for five years, the English reserve of the man thawed, and we grew acquainted. He was a giant in stature, I am undersized; he had an extraordinary amount of physical courage, I possess none; he, indeed, differed from me in a thousand ways, and that was doubtless the reason why we became such firm friends. Our political opinions, moreover, were tinged by the same morning journal, and when similar views on great questions of the day bind men together, it often happens that warm if not lasting friendships are the result. Of course, I never asked for the key of Robinson's mystery; I did not so much as dream that he had a mystery. Once only might I have read some indication of a side to his character that I had not guessed at; but I never really grasped the significance of certain remarks uttered by him on his way to town one morning, though they surprised me at the time. Having read, with some interest, a leading article on occult theosophy—which approached that belief in a disrespectful spirit—Robinson spoke.

"What fools men are!" he said. "How can this poor penny-a-liner possibly know what he is talking about? Just listen: 'Mahatmas are a figment to bolster a cause which human wisdom has agreed to pronounce unsound.' There's bosh for you!"

I recollected his early life in Thibet.

"You, who dwelt in a Mahatma country, ought to know," I said.

"I do," he answered. "Mahatmas may not be as common as rabbits, but they exist, and what's more, they can do a great many remarkable things."

"But," I said, "nothing to the purpose?"

"On the contrary," he answered, "they achieve much good in a quiet way. The secrets of Nature are in their grasp. It argues something in their favour that they have not turned the world upside down years ago. Their self-control is the most remarkable thing about them."

"You astound me, Robinson," I replied. "Is it possible that you harbour friendly opinions towards esoteric Buddhism and kindred fantastic conceits of vain men?"

"Nothing fantastic or vain about it," he answered. "I am an esoteric Buddhist myself."

I nearly fell off the omnibus from sheer surprise. Robinson had all the outward appearance of a churchwarden or sidesman. You might have wagered money that he wore a frock-coat on Sundays, and got the people nicely seated in some place of modern worship, and handed round a plate or a bag at the appointed time. And yet he turned out to be an esoteric Buddhist.

"You never told me this," I said.

"Why should I?" he asked, very reasonably. "Wise men don't blaze abroad their opinions for nothing. I don't know what you are for that matter, and I don't want to."

Nevertheless, I told him, and he said that I might as well pursue that idea as any other. Then he resumed his newspaper.

Time passed, and I forgot the matter, and was contented to feel that Robinson had high morals and even refined instincts for such a large man. I came to know him well and went home with him to tea and made the acquaintance of his sister. He told me privately that she was a saintly woman who had seen sorrow and just missed matrimony by a hair's breadth.

"But," he said, "I am anxious to see her married. She is only hovering on forty now and will make a good man happy yet."

For my part I doubted it. Miss Robinson was a painfully plain person, and so abundantly proportioned in every direction physically, that I was conscious of cutting a figure almost ludicrous when sitting beside her. Personally, though Robinson always declared that she "hovered near forty," my opinion rather inclined me to suspect that she was fluttering past forty-five and that rapidly. She wanted a husband and hope was not dead. I saw nothing saintly in her myself. She struck me as being a trifle vulgar. I could not imagine a man was living in London or the suburbs who would have married her in cold blood.

After I had visited at their little house near Regent's Park on two or three occasions, Robinson came to smoke a pipe with me at my bachelor diggings. During that evening our friendship advanced by leaps and bounds. We were both communicative and emptied a bottle of whisky and called each other by our Christian names for the first time, and gave each other a great deal of sound advice. By the way, can an esoteric Buddhist have a Christian name?

"You should marry," said Robinson.

It wanted only fifteen minutes of midnight when he said it. I laughed.

"Bless you, John," I said, "such good things are not for me. Why, I'm nearer fifty than you'd guess, and a confirmed bachelor, sir!"

"What's your opinion of Primrose?" he asked abruptly.

Primrose was his sister. I think I never heard of a woman with a more unsuitable name. It made me uncomfortable to observe how Robinson thus coupled the suggestion of my taking a wife with this question as to my opinion of his sister.

"You are fortunate to have such a sister," I said.

You cannot tell the truth to a comparative stranger about his sister, unless the truth is polite.

"I'm glad you think so," answered Robinson. "I happen to know she entertains a very genuine admiration for you. She marvelled only yesterday at tea that no woman had ever won you. She said you must have made a good many hearts ache in your time."

As a matter of fact I was refused, unconditionally, by a stock-jobber's second daughter when I was thirty-two, and that is the only glimmer of romance which ever crossed my path. But I did not tell Robinson this. I merely said that his sister was a kind soul.

"Can you picture her a wife?" asked Robinson.

"Very easily," I answered, which was untrue.

"Can you picture her *your* wife?" asked Robinson.

The bad taste of such a question appears upon the surface of it.

"No," I said, and then added like a fool, "Miss Robinson will aspire to a younger cavalier, and one worthier of her than I. She'd never look at an old fossil like Thomas Tarver.

"Yes, she would," said Robinson, winking. "Faint heart never won fair lady, you know. Go in and win, my son!"

I attributed it to the whisky, for Robinson was usually refined up to a certain point. To fling his own sister down another man's throat in this way struck me as being not nice.

I fought to change the conversation, and ultimately succeeded. Presently he went home, and on the following day asked me if I would meet him that evening with his sister at the Zoological Gardens. We often went thither in summer-time to drink a cup of tea and gaze upon the various wonders of animal creation gathered there.

"The Lion House at six-thirty," said Robinson, and I replied that I would not fail him.

How little I foresaw my evening's amusement! How far from the wildest nightmare flights of my imagination was the nature of that entertainment which the man John Robinson arranged for me at the Zoological Society's Gardens.

## II

When I arrived he was waiting in the Lion House, and I felt a relief to see that Primrose Robinson had not accompanied him.

"Sit here," he said. "I want to talk to you seriously, Tarver."

Now, the great beasts in the Lion House always affect my nerves. I know they cannot get out and all that sort of thing, but the unexpected so often happens; accidents will occur; and besides, as I explained to Robinson when asking him to step with me into the air, the spectacle of lions and tigers at feeding time is anything but pleasing to the possessor of a delicate appetite.

But Robinson said the spot would answer our purpose well. He was moody and preoccupied; he showed no interest in anything. Then, when I had grown weary of trying to make him talk, he suddenly began on a painful subject.

"Primrose was bitterly disappointed not to come. She always counts the days and hours between your visits. I won't disguise the fact, Tarver; she's grown to be very fond of you."

What could I say? While I was reflecting he proceeded:

"She'd make a grand wife. Her interests are at my heart too. It's a great opportunity. Why don't you take your luck and thank your stars for it?"

I here broke into a perspiration.

"My dear Robinson," I said, "you must really forgive me, but these affairs cannot be arranged like a transaction on 'Change."

"She loves you," said Robinson. "Her heart has gone out to you."

"But, my dear fellow, love wants two hearts to beat as one."

"Blessed if I know how anybody can help loving her," said Robinson.

"You see, no man has the power to direct another's feelings in the matter," I explained.

Then he made a most extraordinary remark.

"Well, it's no good beating about the bush, Tarver, so I'll be frank. My sister wants to marry you; I want you to marry her and make her a home——"

"And let you be free of her?" I interrupted hotly.

He felt the thrust and winced, but proceeded:

"I wish you to marry her. What is more, I insist upon it. You *shall* marry her."

I lack pluck as a rule, but a worm will turn at times. I said I would be eternally lost if I did.

"Bad language won't help you," he continued quietly. "Listen and judge for yourself if I threaten without power. You will recollect that I did not leave Thibet until I came of age. For one-and-twenty years I studied the wisdom of the land. Briefly, a Mahatma, whose pretensions and learning it would be idle to question, took a fancy to me, and imparted not a little of his knowledge on absurdly easy terms. I never counted to employ it. Self-control, indeed, was the first great lesson he taught me. But all information is useful. I wish you to marry my sister. Will you or will you not?"

I thought he was merely trying to frighten me, so dared him to do his worst. I purposely expressed myself with some severity.

"Don't think I fear your tomfoolery," I said. "If you're a Mahatma, you ought to be locked up with all the other wild beasts. That for you! You won't alarm me, I promise you!"

Here I snapped my thumb and finger under his nose.

Hardly were the words out of my mouth when Robinson, looking round to see that nobody was within earshot, made use of a word of some twelve syllables, which I had never heard before. A second afterwards I found myself, to my horror, inside the bars of the Bengal tiger's house. This was not all. Looking round wildly, I observed that the tiger had disappeared, and, on raising my voice to cry for help, a hideous roar thundered through the building, but no human sound left my lips. Then I realised what had happened. *I was the tiger!* Robinson had transferred my *ego* into this brute beast. I, Thomas Tarver, found my immortal soul shut up within the frame of the most savage monster an inscrutable Providence ever designed. I looked out of its eyes; I strode here and there; I lifted giant paws, and, raising myself on my hind legs, gazed through my bars at Robinson. He was sitting where I had left him, and there opposite, limp in its chair, looking more like a respectably dressed Guy Fawkes than anything, reposed my mortal shell.

"For God's sake come here!" I said; but only a tigerish whimper sounded through the den. However, Robinson understood it and stepped to the bar.

"You do look a fool!" he remarked. Then he explained the fiendish thing he had done.

"You see, a tiger doesn't run a soul, Tarver, so I've just drawn yours out of your wretched carcase and popped it into this creature. Now, for all practical purposes you're a Bengal tiger, and you'll have to remain one until you grow reasonable. I rather fancy you'll be fed at four."

If I could have got out at that moment, Mahatma or no Mahatma, Robinson would have had a painful experience. I was, honestly, as angry as a man or beast can be. I spoke hotly. I said things I should not have said under any other conditions. Robinson understood me, but other visitors saw nothing but a big tiger in a raging temper.

Presently my poor shell fell off its chair, and a crowd collected and Robinson explained to the people that my heart was weak. Then I saw myself carried away under the direction of the demon who had called himself my friend. Nobody paid any attention to me myself. I was left with nothing to do for twenty-four hours but reflect upon my position and eat a piece of dead horse. Why I did not go mad I shall never understand. Presently a tigress came out of the inner den, and I felt myself trembling in every limb. She took little notice of me, but finding I made no effort to eat my dinner, consumed it herself when my back was turned. Heaven only knows what she thought had happened to me. But she left me alone, for which I thanked her. I walked up and down for long, weary hours; I tried to speak to the keepers; I impressed several spectators with my hopeless appearance. The infant mind often sees deeper than an adult intelligence, and a little girl it was who read my anguish in my eyes.

"What a poor, dear, unhappy old tiger!" she said, and flung me a currant bun.

"You little fool!" exclaimed her mother, "that was for the elephant. Tigers don't eat buns!"

But they do under some conditions. My tiger's appetite was keen. I ate that bun, and

I even regretted the dead horse before closing time. That night I found myself driven into a small sleeping-den—alone I was thankful to see—and when silence fell I put my paws over my head and tried to grasp the situation. Here was I—a reasonable human soul—chained in this awful living prison. I might have been back in Bengal too for all the use my fellow-creatures could be. Then a grey rat hopped into my den. It came fearlessly up, cocked its whiskers and spoke. Needless to say that this rat was Robinson, or rather Robinson's astral embodiment.

"Well," he asked, "how do you find yourself? Variety is charming, eh? But you're a poor thing in tigers."

I put my paw on him.

"Now," I said, "restore me instantly, or I'll crush you."

"No," answered Robinson, "you won't; you'll crush a grey rat—that's all. You can't touch me, any more than they'd hurt you if they shot this tiger. You may like to hear the news. We've taken your carcase back to your diggings. Several doctors have examined you, and they are divided in their opinions. Some say you are dead; others fancy it is a case of trance. Primrose went down and wept over you, and kissed your pallid cheek. She says it doesn't matter now who knows her secret passion, as you have gone. A devoted woman, Tarver!"

Nothing annoyed me more on that terrible day than the mental spectacle of Primrose Robinson dropping tears on me and fussing about my bachelor rooms.

"I suppose you'll marry her all right now?" asked Robinson.

"I won't," I answered. "I defy you and your devilish accomplishments. Providence isn't going to let this outrage go on for ever. Something will be sure to happen, and the moment I'm restored I'll summon you, if it costs me every farthing I've got in the world."

"The only thing that can happen," said Robinson, "is this: I shall hurry you on. There are worse tenements than tigers. You'll have to give in; it's only a question of time. You'll go to sleep presently and when you wake you'll find yourself the adjutant stork. He happens to be moulting just now, too—a sight for the gods, my boy! I'll look you up again in the course of a day or two. Till then, ta-ta, Tarver."

He was gone with a whisk of his tail, and despite the bold front I had put on before him, I broke down, shed bitter tears, and I suppose finally went to sleep on my sawdust.

Next morning I woke to find Robinson's prediction verified. I gazed gloomily at my hideous future through the eyes of an adjutant stork—a bird in poor feather—a piteous, comic object that made even the professional attendants laugh as they passed me. The public poured forth their wit upon me; the human misery in my eye merely served to accentuate the proportions of my beak, the length of my legs, the general air of ruin and decay which characterised me. I tried to talk again, believing all birds possessed the power; but I found that an adjutant stork does not. Doubtless Robinson knew this. He did not manifest himself that day, but on the following evening, after office hours, he arrived in the form of a house-sparrow and sat upon the edge of a bath where I was standing on one leg—that being, so I found, the most comfortable position.

"Great Scott!" he chirruped, "you look as if you'd seen trouble and no mistake! How goes it?"

"Devil!" I answered. "Tell me how long this loathsome tragedy is to last."

"All depends on you, Tarver. Primrose goes down every day to look at you and weep over you. The doctors are still undecided. Two hold out that you are alive, but all the others say you're dead as a herring. I tell them I think you live."

"Is there no alternative except a union with Miss Robinson?"

"None, Tarver. I've no hesitation in saying this: the marriage was made in heaven."

"In Thibet, more likely," I replied, not without acerbity.

"Has Providence taken any steps yet?" he asked civilly.

The question gave me fresh courage.

"No, but do your worst," I answered; "I still have hope. You cannot rob me of life; you cannot alter my destiny."

"True," he admitted, "I cannot; but I can give you about the worst time in these Gardens any man ever endured even in imagination. The day after to-morrow is Bank Holiday. Just you wait and see where you come in then!"

After which threat he flew off.

## III

I may as well say at once that on the August Bank Holiday of the present year I was a camel—one that carries children about. How many enjoyed exercise at my expense I cannot say; I only know that the tortures of the day appeared endless. I had lived a thousand years of physical anguish before the sun set. Then I was marched back to my stall with a sore hump and a sick heart. The ingenuity of my tormentor was more than human. I shall shudder to my dying day when I hear esoteric Buddhism mentioned, and it ages me even now to read or hear the name of Robinson. After the camel episode I had comparative leisure as a kangaroo, and then, upon the sudden arrival of an Australian ornithorhynchus at the Gardens, Robinson transferred me to this uncanny nightmare. On the occasion of my becoming the infant hippopotamus he accosted me again in the shape of the new giraffe, and told me that all the doctors, save one only, now considered that I was a dead man.

"There's been a deal of correspondence in the *Lancet*," he said, "and the consensus of scientific opinion now inclines to the conclusion that you have passed away. The Directors of the Westminster Aquarium wanted you for a side-show, but your executors declined to accept the terms offered."

"I should hope so!" I answered.

"Primrose has lost two stone and a half since your extinction," he proceeded. "I need hardly tell you that she is ignorant of the truth."

I made no answer and he became personal.

"You're going strong, I suppose?"

"I'm going mad," I answered.

"Providence not much to the front yet?"

"No," I replied. "The ways of Providence are beyond our comprehension. But one thing has struck me, that come what may to me, *you* will not go unpunished. I'd rather be in my fix than yours. You'll probably have all eternity in which to regret this abominable performance."

He showed no dismay.

"You are an obstinate soul, Tarver, and a pluckier man than I thought. But you'll have to cut it—you'll have to cave in. We'll try what a few hours in the python will do for you. And all this fuss because you won't marry a good woman."

"You call it fuss!" I screamed indignantly.

But then, thinking that my excitement was caused by hunger, the keepers came and led me to my parent, by which I mean the maternal hippopotamus.

There are things that cannot be written.

As a python I ate live rabbits and lived the ordinary disgusting life of that reptile. The animals into which I migrated, having no conscious existence of their own, were powerless to resent their visitor. Not one of my hosts appeared aware of my presence, not one showed the least concern about me. From the python I passed on to the tarantula, and after abandoning that atrocious insect, I became a monkey. This was a last refinement of cruelty on the part of Robinson, for he had heard more than once my openly expressed dislike of these beasts. Moreover, I was very unattractive; and yet a gleam of hope animated me under this affliction, for I conceived that with a pencil and paper I might now explain my position to some sympathetic third person. But though the public offered me many things, a pencil and paper were not amongst them. My companions, seeming to know that something was amiss, bullied me, cuffed me, pulled my tail, pretended to catch fleas on me, and generally made my life purgatory; while, to crown all, an ape's intelligence being apparently superior to that of most other animals, the beast I inhabited evidently felt that he was out of sorts. I cannot say what he thought was wrong with him or how he explained the problem, but he had a will of his own, and evil passions, and a bad disposition—all of which I found myself powerless to keep in check. After two days of this infernal life Robinson dropped in again and I was thankful to hear him speak from the throat of a spider monkey; for my spirit was broken, I could wait for Providence no longer. I had, in fact, determined to yield.

Robinson sidled up to me with a nut in his cheek, winked wickedly, put a paw on my shoulder and spoke.

"Gay doings in this department, eh, Tarver?"

"We needn't discuss them," I said. "I give in. I will marry your sister."

"That's awkward," he answered. "In fact, you've run the time too fine, old man. You can't now. Why, when I came home from town to-day and kissed Primrose as usual and asked her what she'd been doing, d'you know what she said?"

"It doesn't interest me."

"Yes, I think it will, Tarver. She answered, with a sob, that she had been strewing pale lilies on your grave."

"On my *what!*" I screamed.

"Your grave, dear old boy! The last doctor gave in three days ago, and as the whole committee were then of one opinion, there seemed naturally nothing to do but to inter you. The people at your office sent a wreath of cheap hardy annuals, and your executors told me to-day that you had cut up rather better than they expected. You notice I choose to appear in this black monkey; that is a compliment to you. In fact, you're dead, Tarver—dead as a door-nail. It's your own fault, and be blessed if I know what programme to arrange for you now."

Of course I saw that it was no good asking to go back to my earthly tabernacle if the wretched thing was six feet underground. That must simply mean being buried alive. I looked at Robinson speechlessly, and I think my expression touched him, for he spoke again.

"Poor old bounder! No, no; I'm getting at you, my son. It isn't as bad as all that, really. I wouldn't let 'em bury you. But the position must come to a climax pretty soon. Your landlady's getting sick of it, and your nephew—the youngster to whom you have left everything—is simply clamouring to have you buried."

Even marriage with Primrose Robinson presented a bright picture compared to the last.

"I tell you, then, that I will give in; I will wed Miss Robinson; I will do as you desire; only let me get back. I'm evidently wanted at home. I shall lose my official appointment and everything," I said.

"All right," answered Robinson, cheerfully. "They're going to measure you for your last resting-place to-night, so if you start sharp you'll be there in time to see some fun. Are you ready to go?"

Before I had replied to this ironical question, I found myself at home in bed, while several medical men were in the room, all talking at once.

"It's murder, I tell you," said one.

Whereupon I sat up and asked for brandy and water.

* * * * *

I should write no more, but it is only fair to explain how matters ultimately fell out. As a man of honour I offered my heart and hand to Primrose Robinson in due course; and she refused them! She admitted that she had loved me once, but even she drew the line at catalepsy, and she declined absolutely to marry a man who might fall into a trance at any moment. So her brother's esoteric machinations on her behalf really defeated his own object. At least, thus it appeared to me. Providence seldom really fails, only it takes its own time, and from the point of view of a business man, is dilatory and too casual. Providence, in fact, exhibits those faults that attach to any monopoly.

Six months after these unparalleled events I met Robinson in the City, and he asked me to lunch with him, an invitation which I accepted, feeling it better to run no more risks. He talked of the past, and said:

"I suppose you thought that when dear Primrose declined you she gave you the true reason for so doing?"

"Yes," I answered, "it struck me that Providence came in there."

"Not at all," he said. "She had found another and a better man. They were thrown together during the period of your temporary extinction. In his case it was love at first sight. A fine young fellow. I like him."

"Who?" I asked with interest.

"Your nephew, the young man who will inherit your little property."

"Never! He raised heaven and earth to have me buried. I have cut him out of my will," I replied.

"Yes, I know," said Robinson, "but, if you think of it quietly and take my advice, you will put him back again. As my brother-in-law he will have claims on me."

Of course I put him back, but I didn't go to the wedding; and when they sent cake I flung it into the dustbin; and if Robinson dies before I do, I shall change my will again.

So let there be no more nonsense about not believing in Mahatmas. The things exist, and nearer than Thibet too. There is one of them on the Stock Exchange, at any rate, and his name is John Robinson. Tax him and he will probably deny it; but don't push him too far, or you may find out the truth of my assertion to your cost.

# THE FIRST WORD

UPON my honour, some married people don't deserve to have a baby at all. Take my parents. Here am I just about to celebrate the first anniversary of my birthday, and, candidly, at times I feel disposed to give up fighting even here, on the very threshold of a career which many experts have agreed to consider most promising. If it were not for my bottle-holder, I should have thrown up the sponge long ago. My papa and mamma, to be frank, get on my nerves and age me; my nurse alone has power to calm the storm. The truth is, that with a first child the average inexperienced young father and mother expect a jolly deal too much. The parents of a long family take new babies as they come, and don't worry about them and boast about them, and look for signs and wonders before a chap is weaned. But your beginners! What my people expect I don't know. I try to oblige, but there is always something wrong. If they would only leave me to my nurse—who is a particularly pleasing, competent person, and knows her business—it might be better for everybody concerned. And that is true, because I have heard her say so a dozen times in private. Moreover, they—I mean my father and mother—might give Nature a chance. To hear them you would think that Nature had overlooked me altogether. For instance, it cannot be denied that she was a trifle behindhand with my first teeth—the four little front ones. Well, what then? It merely amounted to a question of a few days. *I* didn't want the teeth. My whole life stretched out before me, and a fortnight more or less without them made no practical difference. I knew—nobody better—that they were on the way all right. But my parents had read somewhere at what time the teeth were due; or else my doctor, like a fool, had been worried into giving a definite date; and when the day arrived and the teeth didn't, my mother cried and my father poked about in my mouth with his forefinger until I felt I would have given something for a tooth or two, just to remonstrate with. I couldn't say what I thought about it, but my nurse could, thank God, and did. And then my mother said she had produced a horrid, toothless freak of Nature, and my father went away to town with a face from which all joy in life had departed. It was the same look which he wore for a week during my vaccinating troubles. It is not too much to say that he added a pang to the horrors of that circumstance. I "took" badly, and came out speckled one morning in consequence. My medical man was sent for, and said it was a "noble arm," and seemed pleased at what he had arranged. Well, that was good enough for me. The man had brought me into the world, and I trusted him. But my father declared that he had never seen vaccination speckle a child on the stomach in his life (which was doubtless true) and he murmured something about a second opinion. The doctor was good-natured about it, fortunately; many practitioners would have thrown up the case; but when the speckles went off my father wrote and apologised.

Babies hate fussiness. But who realises that? Every morning it is, "How has he slept, nurse?" "How is his little inside, nurse?" "How is his precious outside, nurse?" "Has that mark where the cat scratched him gone, nurse?" "Did I hear him crying at half-past four, nurse?" "Isn't he strangely silent this morning and puffy under the eyes, nurse?" and so forth, and so forth. I often wonder why my nurse hangs on at all. My nursemaid asked her the same question once, when she and my mother had differed about some little matter involving magnesia; and the nurse explained that she stopped for two reasons: because she got thirty pounds a year for doing so, and because she felt it would be next thing to murder to leave me until my mother knew her business. But, mind you, I want to be just to both my parents. My mamma can sing me to sleep with considerable skill; my papa can pick me up and fling me towards the ceiling with a nerve and strength that causes me infinite gratification when I am in the vein. But even upon a simple thing like that he exercises no discretion. There are occasional times when a chap doesn't care to be flung up to the ceiling. How would he like it, for instance, the next moment after he had drunk his bottle, or whatever might be the equivalent with him? Then my mother will interfere with the temperature of my bath. She has a conviction, amounting to mania, that some day I shall be boiled alive or scalded to death. Her idea seems to be that I should sit quietly and patiently while this painful operation was being performed, and suffer nobody to hear anything of it until I was cooked to a turn. The result of her alarm is that I rarely get my dip at a tidy temperature, though everybody likes a real hot bath now and again. Thank Heaven, they will grow older, these parents of mine. With years must surely come experience and wisdom and patience. At present—and I say it without the least animus—I would not give a broken rattle for the united knowledge of the pair of them.

It was of my first experiment in language that I set out to speak, when other grievances came between me and my subject. At ten months, or a shade over, I had amassed a vocabulary of three words—not that three words were of the slightest use in dealing with a woman like my mamma; but I did my best with them. The second and third were more or less trivial expressions of good feeling depending for their result on my inflection of voice; the first, of which I want more particularly to speak, created some sensation in its way and, indeed, produced a sort of result so startling that I have never to this moment entirely fathomed the significance of it. The matter fell out thus. After my ninth month had passed and nothing but my own language of laughter and tears had broken the silence, my father had a gloomy inspiration that I must be a dumb idiot, and that he and my mamma were jointly responsible for a being unlikely to add to the fame or repute of either. To calm their poor, foolish fears as soon as possible was obviously my duty under these circumstances, and I set about it. A brief, jocund monosyllable commended itself to me in this connection. I had heard my father use it under somewhat humorous circumstances, after falling over a chair on a night when he crept into my room to see me asleep. I was not asleep and we both laughed heartily at the time. He doubtless went away and forgot the incident; I, on the contrary, thought over it, practised the word, and tried it as a simple exclamation on my mother, doubting nothing that she would glory in it and perhaps reward me. Judge then of my surprise when she regarded me with horror and fear, almost dropped me back into my cradle, and burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh, baby! how could you?" she asked, between her sobs. "I've been praying for you to talk for months and months, and now—oh, it can't be true—it can't!"

Suspecting that my pronunciation was at fault, I uttered the word again with the greatest distinctness, whereupon my mamma became hysterical and fled from the nursery. She brought my father up when he came home, and I observed she was still in tears.

"Such—such a dreadful thing," she said; "he's spoken, James."

"Good business!" exclaimed my father. "The little beggar isn't dumb then, thank the Lord. What did he say? I'll bet he tried to lisp your name."

"He didn't lisp at all—he spoke only too clearly. I don't know how to tell you. He—he swore!"

And my mamma broke down entirely, while my papa gazed upon me with frank amazement.

"He swore?" repeated my papa, blankly. "What at? Why should he swear? I'm sure no kid ever had a better time."

"To think that the very first word which has passed his lips——!" cried my mamma.

"But what did he swear at?"

"At me, his own loving mother. I just woke him up and danced him and cuddled him and asked him when he was going to bring joy into my life and prattle sweet baby words into my ear. Then, without any warning, he said—he said, 'Damn!' And when I dropped him into his cradle and began to cry, he said it again!"

"Such a thing was never heard of in the whole history of infancy," declared my father. "I see how it is; he's picked it up from nurse. Nurse must go!"

"He might have heard you," said my mother, reproachfully. "You *do* say it oftener than you think. But what will the career of a baby be who begins swearing before he can even walk straight? It's horrible—it's ruined my life!"

"I should be the last to swear before a child," said my papa.

And then they went wrangling off. Not a jump to the ceiling did I get, not a smile, not a word of affection. Perhaps ingratitude in a parent is as painful a spectacle as a family furnishes. I kept my mouth shut for two months after that fiasco, but it made them mad to hear of the good things I said to nurse when they were not present. I will affirm of nurse that she is a capital listener, and lets me use what language I like, and never questions either my statements or conclusions. But there, when all is said, a really capable nurse is a luxury, whereas parents appear to be a grim necessity, as far as I have yet been able to understand.

# "STAR O' BOSTON"

HE was a very elderly merman, and he had lived in one cave under the Caribbean Sea for seventy submarine years.

"It's hard," he said, "cruel hard at my time of life to be turned out after all the rent I've paid. If I'd only gone to a Building Society I should have bought the blessed place ten times over by this time."

He wept a senile tear, which added one drop to the waters of the Caribbean; then he drew his black seaweed covering round him, put out a phosphorescent lamp, and went to sleep. The morrow would see him and his merdaughter turned away for ever from the home of their fathers. And all about a paltry matter of two years' rent.

"San Francisco" slept peacefully despite the pending eviction. His coverlet of living seaweed rose and fell regularly; once he turned and smiled sadly and uttered the name of his dead mer-wife. "Alas! my fair 'Moonflower,'" he said; "it is well-nigh over with us now, for 'Lord Aberdeen' refuses me tenancy of the old cavern any longer, owing to my natural and increasing disinclination to pay rent. For how can I pay what I myself lack? His only alternative offer is that he have our little 'Star o' Boston' to wife; and she with a mergirl's unwisdom loves elsewhere, her affections being wholly fixed on the penniless but personable merboy 'Theodore H. Jackson.'"

From these dreamy utterances of the venerable merman you will learn certain interesting facts. First, it becomes apparent that the merpeople are faced with like problems and plagued by emotions similar to those within human experience; while secondly, as to the matter of nomenclature, the submarine system differs widely from any other. Every merchild is in fact named after a sunken ship; and as the mer-folks are not a numerous race nor yet a prolific, maritime disaster sufficient for the purpose occurs annually, and mer-babies receive their names in order. Sometimes the wrecks are in excess of the sea-children, then the names of the ill-fated vessels are preserved until those are born who will bear them.

"Star o' Boston" sat and watched her father sleeping his last sleep in the old home. Her hair was the colour of the red-brown seaweed torn from the rocks in times of storm; her eyes were aqua-marine and reflected the cool, green, eternal twilight of the deep. She was fair to see even for a mermaid, and mystery shared her face with beauty. She drew her wonderful hair over her bosom, murmured the name of "Theodore H. Jackson," and sighed. Love and duty struggled in her heart; she swayed her golden tail idly and drew conventional designs on the sand with the delicate coral-red fins at the end of it. Little fishes swam about her and rubbed themselves lovingly against her fair body; an octopus, who served the purposes of a chandelier, stretched down three or four of his arms and stroked her; a hermit-crab sat upon her shoulder, and there was a pathos in his black, beady eyes as they poked out of his head on stalks and looked at his mistress. Thus her pets—the poor dumb creatures of the Caribbean—showed their humble sympathy; but they could not help "Star o' Boston" to a decision. She thought of "Lord Aberdeen" and shivered. He was a wealthy sea-owner, and lived in a cave of pink coral gloriously illumined by electricity stolen from a cable. He was old and ugly; he had been married three times and divorced twice. He had lost an eye in a fight with a sword-fish, which he was torturing from a mere love of cruelty. He habitually used the vilest language, and his temper was soured by the sea-snails which are the mosquitoes of the ocean, and cannot be kept out of a house. Many a bald-headed merman has been driven mad by them.

"Star o' Boston" pictured her fair person in the grasp of this marine satyr, and pressed her little pink hands over her face to shut out the hideous scene. Then she imagined her father limping away from the old home to return no more.

At the same moment a mer-page in mother-o'-pearl buttons brought a note from "Lord Aberdeen." It was written in verse, which he constantly employed with indifferent success, and in the effusion his lordship made a last appeal, and reminded "Star o' Boston" that the offer would not be renewed.

The mergirl dropped the oyster-shell on which the letter was written from her hand, then with a gliding and almost snake-like motion swam out of the cavern. She designed to consult "Anna Bailey," a vivacious but shrewd mer-widow who knew life and who usually wore the blue coat, with gold braid and brass buttons, of a dead sea-captain. This she did, by the way, from motives of vanity, not delicacy, for the mer-people have never eaten from the Tree of Knowledge and are clean of mind as the sea in which they live is clean. Of course there are exceptions amongst them. "Lord Aberdeen," for example, was a notorious libertine, with the morals of a porpoise.

"Marry him," said "Anna Bailey." "You take my advice. He cannot live long. And afterwards you'll be among the wealthiest in the sea and able to marry again where your heart suggests. There he is. Mark my words: he's nearly run his course. Blessed if he hasn't got a face like a dog-fish! But what does that matter? You needn't look at him."

"Lord Aberdeen" rolled by in a huge conch shell drawn by two sharks. His wicked little eyes glittered and he waved a pearl-laden hand to "Star o' Boston." Hardly had he disappeared when "Theodore H. Jackson" came along, swimming thoughtfully. He was a god-like merman, mighty of size, with hair as crisp and emerald green as sea-endive, with a fine forehead, a straight nose and ruby eyes, of a colour like to the red sea-anemones.

"Come, 'Star o' Boston,' my own little green-eyed love," he said. "Leave talking with this worldly widow and follow me and take the air, for there is nothing like a whiff of the strange, pure fluid of the air-breathers at times of sorrow and anxiety."

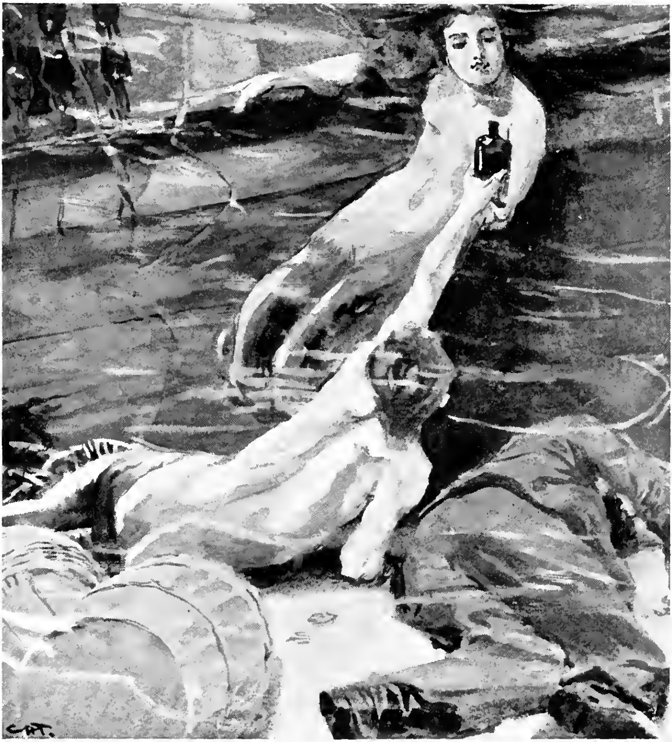
He put his Titan arm round her, and they swam away to a little coral island in the Caribbean—one of those uprising islets not known of men and not marked in the charts of ships until some vessel has perchance found it in the dark, and gone down.

Even so it was now; and as the merman and his maid approached along the dim-lit floor of the ocean to where the coral island swelled like a mountain through it, they saw, beside the great achievement of a million generations of coral insects, a lesser object lying unsightly, black and alone.

"It is a new monster. Let us go speak with it," said "Star o' Boston," who feared nothing but "Lord Aberdeen."

"Nay, golden-tail, 'tis a human wreck! Of such are the ships that sail the face of the sea. This is Fate, and we are the first to find it, save the fishes. Heaven grant there is bullion aboard, then all may yet be well."

It will be news to the reader that the sub-



"'OLD TOM RUM,' READ OUT 'STAR O' BOSTON'" marine currency depends on nautical mishaps. Their coinage is silver and gold. It explains a point which often puzzles quite well-informed people. Why do the Marine Treasure Recovery Companies never recover anything but old cannons and similar rubbish? Because the mer-folks take the money and use it for their own purposes.

"Star o' Boston" likewise hoped that she and her lover might chance upon some bullion.

"I'll catch a torpedo fish," said "Theodore H. Jackson," "then we'll burst open the ship's safe and see."

But there was no bullion apparently. The vessel proved to be only a little coasting schooner called "Flying Fish." She was laden with cocoanuts, and as the merman broke open the imprisoned bags, the nuts rushed up to the surface of the sea, like balloons. Then "Star o' Boston" found a dead sailor with a big black beard, clasping a bottle. He had broken into the spirit locker as the ship went down, but had not found time to drown his death agony with alcohol, for the bottle was apparently unopened.

"Old Tom Rum," read out "Star o' Boston." "What's that?"

"A drink of the Upper People. We will

carry it with us. It may perhaps serve to cheer the desolation of your parent."

"Theodore H. Jackson" drove off the great grey shark that glimmered sulkily at him out of wolfish eyes; then approached the dead sailor and wrenched the bottle from his grasp.

"Now I come to think of it, I have heard 'Lord Aberdeen' speak of this same rum," declared "Star o' Boston." "He told my father that once, long ago, he became possessed of a bottle and that it was like glorious fire in a merman's veins."

"By Neptune! then this liquor may prove as valuable as bullion after all—in fact more so. Money won't buy rum as a rule, excepting on dry land. He shall pay for this."

Clutching her treasure, "Star o' Boston" swam back as fast as her fins would carry her.

"I believe," she said, "that it will be possible to make any bargain I like with him."

"Then don't let it go too cheaply. Let him pay heavily for his luxuries. He wants you much; I only hope we may find he wants the rum more."

"There are plenty of mermaids, but only one bottle of rum that we know of. I swam all through the sunken ship and drove the fishes from the dead men, and a drowned woman with a baby in her arms. There is no rum left there. Air-breathers must love the liquid also, for they had all rushed to drink before their drowning. Only this one poor wretch had no time. Hence our happiness now."

"I will come with you, my green-eyes, for the rascal may prove too much for you."

So "Theodore H. Jackson" supported his love and together they entered the pink coral abode of "Lord Aberdeen."

That old scamp's black eyes glittered strangely as he saw the mermaid, but when he observed what she carried with her, his excitement was terrific and burst all bounds.

"Great Serpent! Rum, as I live!" he screamed.

But for the paucity of opportunities his lordship had long since drunk himself to death. His spirit was willing, but alcohol proved too rare a thing. He remembered rum in the past; he was getting old; and he felt that the treasure displayed before him now was worth half his fortune.

"Rum it is," said "Star o' Boston," "the last bottle left from a wreck. The air-breathers drank all the rest before they were drowned. I thought you'd like to see the bottle."

"Ay, mergirl of the crimson fins,—and more than the bottle; this must be mine!"

"Not so, 'Lord Aberdeen,' it goes to cheer my dear father, 'San Francisco,' in his desolation. He much wants this warm, delicious stuff to strengthen his sore heart. Remember, to-morrow he and I are homeless."

"Circumstances alter cases," said "Lord Aberdeen." "Rum is a luxury, and you are not justified in giving your parent luxuries in his present financial position."

"Nevertheless, he will drink this bottle," said "Star o' Boston." "Every luscious drop will go to cheer his failing spirit."

"Sit down," replied the other. "This is a matter which cannot be settled in a moment. Recline on yonder velvet sea-moss and listen. I am willing to offer reasonable terms for that bottle."

"'Tis the seller's place to dictate the terms," said "Theodore H. Jackson."

"Well, perhaps so. At least let us be reasonable. Not that I am myself particularly anxious to buy the stuff," answered the old merman, growing cautious. Nevertheless his mouth watered as he looked at the squat, four-sided bottle; he passed his hands nervously over his round bald head and licked his lips in spite of himself.

"Then we need talk no more, for my terms are high. But I will not abate them. You must first undertake to let my father dwell in his cave for the remainder of his life; and you must next give to me rent free another cave suitable to a young couple beginning life—a four-caverned cave handsomely furnished. And I don't want it more than twenty fathoms deep either."

"Quite right; it's very important in the case of mer-babies that they have ample light, with occasional visits to the sea surface for air," declared "Theodore H. Jackson."

"All this for one bottle of rum?" asked "Lord Aberdeen" indignantly.

"A thing is worth what it will fetch. Now I come to think of it, I shall want six strings of good orient pearls and fifty pounds in English money as well," replied "Star o' Boston," with admirable coolness.

"Death and the Kraaken!"

"And—and—I shall also want——"

"Done on the last bargain!" screamed "Lord Aberdeen." He knew that the longer he waited the worse the position would become from his point of view.

"Very well; 'Theodore H. Jackson' is our witness. You are going to give me a nice new home and let my dear father stop on in his old one. Then six strings of good pearls and fifty pounds in English money. I, in my turn, shall yield up to you this beautiful bottle of rum. I may say that my dear ruby-eyed merboy here and myself design to marry at no distant date. A little memento on that occasion will increase our regard for you considerably."

"I'll see about that when the time comes. Now we will adjourn to my solicitor's office. I shall demand that this bottle of rum be placed in a safe position before I go further. It makes my blood run cold to see the careless way you hold it."

Thus did prosperity and unlooked-for happiness crown the last days of "San Francisco," and brighten the wedded life of "Star o' Boston" and her mer-husband. But, unfortunately for himself, "Lord Aberdeen" came badly out of the transaction after all. He made good his promises, acquired the bottle of rum, and reached that supreme moment when he opened it to have his first nautilus-shell full. Then a strange thing transpired, for though the bottle was labelled "Rum" in large letters, its contents resembled neither rum nor any other liquor. There was only a piece of crumpled paper inside it with words written thereon.

"Lord Aberdeen" gazed blankly at the scrawl, then gave full play to his vile and varied vocabulary.

"'*Flying Fish' struck on unknown rock or wreck. Going down fast. God have mercy upon us! John Ladywell, Master.* (*Wife, child, and six hands aboard.*)"

Three mer-judges tried the action brought against "Star o' Boston," and the defendant won her case and costs. It was argued, you see, that a corked bottle labelled "Rum" might reasonably be supposed to contain that liquid. The bargain had been carried out in good faith. "In fact," said the President of the Tribunal, "'*Caveat emptor*' sums up the position. 'Lord Aberdeen' has been unfortunate and is the victim of chance; but it cannot be considered or justly argued that any criminal attempt was made to obtain from him money or property under false pretences. As to the real contents of the rum bottle, it would appear that one John Ladywell, finding his ship going down under him, and knowing that death lay hidden in the deep water and the grey sharks which live beneath it, conceived the idea of recording the sudden end which he saw was now to fall upon himself, his wife, child, and the six seamen of the 'Flying Fish.' Had the bottle not gone down with him, clenched to his breast in his last agony, it might have floated away and reached some shore whereon the Upper People congregate. But it sank instead. Hence a natural and unfortunate confusion."

So that is the end of this mer-story, and I shall only add that "Star o' Boston" and "Theodore H. Jackson" lived mighty happily ever afterwards, though "Lord Aberdeen" sent no wedding present. Anon a mer-baby was born to them, and they called her "Flying Fish" in memory of a great experience. Their narrative is perhaps interesting from some points of view, for it shows that deep-sea researches are as yet quite incomplete, so far at least as the Caribbean is concerned; and it also indicates that, assert what people may to the contrary, fiction is still frequently stranger than fact.

# THE SACRIFICE

A WISE man has said that of the inward senses Phantasie alone is free upon occasion to escape from her sisters Common Sense and Memory. In time of sleep it is that Phantasie can so break the meshes that hold her when the reason is waking; in time of a man's sleep she wings whither she will, "producing many monstrous and prodigious things, especially if she be stirred up by some terrible object, presented to her by Common Sense or Memory."

And in my experience the scenes of her most active effort lie not in the depths of sleep, but about the portal of it. Then, and chiefly at the dawn, shall Phantasie be found to wing her wildest flight.

In such a morning hour, on the turn of reason's tide, my airy theatre of dreams was lighted by a blaze of high noon sun, and I, standing upon a green hill, looked down at vast plains where they stretched beneath, and an infinite multitude that thronged them. A people in number like the sands of the shore swept through the great plain, and the sound of them was the sound of a stormy sea.

The Kingdoms of the Earth had sent hither these legions, and all Christendom streamed beneath me. To vanward great armies gleamed, and the sun made a shining fire of their steel; the companies of the workers also thundered forward together — the industrial millions that are the circulating heart's blood in the veins of Nations. Workers in iron and brass; wielders of the hammer, the axe, the spade; diggers and delvers; the men of the soil and the men of the sea—all were here assembled; and the earth shook beneath the tramp of them; the round earth groaned under the accumulated weight of the Nations.

In the forefront of this unexampled multitude shone pomp and pageantry, for there—to the peal of trumpet and the bellowing of great ordnance—marched mighty ones: kings and rulers of the earth; monarchs and those that led them; the symbols of power and the banners of power; the keys of all mundane principalities and creeds held in the hands of such as Chance throws crest-high on the tides of human authority and earthly fame.

Forward swept the kings of the earth and all the hosts of them, whilst I approached a little nearer and became conscious that before the great wave of this advancing army, walking alone in solemn, solitary state, there moved three maidens. They led the myriads, as it seemed, and their white raiment shone like the snow where they went before, and heeded not the roaring host behind them.

August and queenly they passed together, and their wonderful eyes were lifted to heaven and full of the dawn; but though their hands were not free, and I perceived that heavy chains hung upon them, yet moved they with the bearing of ministering angels; and their feet were light; and their soft voices were full of joy; while they swept forward as though to happiness rather than sorrow. Infinitely fair were the three maidens—pearls before the dusty rabble and rout of humanity that followed them. Only the very old and the very young wept for them.

The first was clad in white, and her face was pale, yet lighted by an inner radiance of the Seventh Heaven. She moved with silent step and answered not when her sisters sang. In her hands, clasped close upon her breast, was a cross fashioned of one diamond that shone like the morning star. And so she went in silence, with her grey eyes uplifted and Peace upon her forehead.

The second was clad in white, and her face shone like the morning, and the blue harmonies of her unconquerable eyes swept sky and earth. Life and eternity were wrought into the hem of her garment; immortal was she and she moved as an Immortal, singing such music as the lark sings in upper darkness above the first horizontal glimmer of low silver dawns in spring. Her hands were also clasped upon her bosom, and they held fast between them a little anchor of gold.

The third maiden was clad in white, and her head was bent, for her soft hazel eyes swept earth rather than sky, and warm blood throbbed in her cheek while she spoke with a mother's music of voice to little children that ran beside her and wept and lifted their small hands to hers. A ruby heart was all the adornment that she wore, and it gleamed between her breasts and rose and fell there.

Concerned to know the meaning of this matter, I descended from my standpoint, approached the drifting throng, and asked a loud-voiced son of the people to enlighten my ignorance.

"What," said I, "is this brave array of the Generations of the Earth? Whence go they, and who are these Daughters of Light that lead them?"

The man stared with great amazement, and in his turn asked a question.

"From what trance have you awakened?" he inquired. "From what lengthy sleep have we aroused you that you have yet to learn the meaning of these armies, and the rite they march to celebrate? Know that you behold the spectacle of Civilisation about to sacrifice to the new-born Century. The Age of Utility now dawns, and mankind have agreed that this world-shaking event shall be celebrated worthily."

With growing terror I asked the nature of this ceremonial.

"An Age of Utility would surely give to its mechanic gods that of which itself stood least in need," I said, not without irony.

"Even so," the artisan replied, ignorant that I spoke in satire. "See yonder maidens: we go to immolate them, to burn them and destroy them. Their work on earth is done; we need them no more; there is no place for them in the years now about to unfold."

"Yet they are very fair," I said; "your fathers weep to see them in chains; your mothers pity them; your little children hold their hands and love them."

"Nevertheless, the adult working world has done with them, and knows them no more," he answered. "Their thrones are empty; their time is past; their subjects are the ancient, the senile, the anile, and the little ones; but man in the might of his noon-day acknowledges them no more, for he pays suit and service to new sovereigns."

"The maidens' names?" I asked, yet knew full well.

"Faith, Hope, Charity," he answered. "With the first will vanish rainbows, and the songs of birds and the colours of flowers, and all manner of vain things not needful to the welfare of man to-day; with the second we shall leave idle dreaming and building of cloud castles, cease from vain climbing on mountain peaks to see the sunrise, hide our eyes from the unneeded light, and burrow deep in the mud of which we are made; with the third we shall forget the weakling and the laggard, the sick and the sorrowful, the halt and the blind. Henceforth only the Fittest survive, and the race will go to him whose breath is steam, whose muscles are steel, whose eye flashes with electric secrets, whose heart is safely frozen under the icy armour of Utility!"

They passed forward where three great pyres arose upon the plain; and the sky was overcast, while men said that it thundered. But I, in my dream, knew those awful and remote reverberations now echoing and re-echoing behind a dawn that had turned to darkness were the laughter of eternal Nox and primal Chaos, who watched mankind from afar, and waited for the sacrifice, that they might loose their lightnings and mighty winds, and take Earth back again to themselves, that ill deed done.

# THE DIARY OF A PERFECT GENTLEMAN

THERE is to be a break-up in the family, and I gather that my future address will be Peckham Rye. Never heard of the place, and never wanted to, but begin to take interest in it now. I travel in a hamper alone. It seems I was advertised in the *Exchange and Mart*, and my people have sold me for thirty shillings. Thirty shillings for a pure-bred Persian tom kitten! Their business instincts must be paltry. I am worth five pounds if a penny. Not sorry to go. Only regret leaving my mother. I am two months old now, and she has been a great comfort to me since I was born. However, I can lap all right, so she's no more use. My people tie a ribbon round my neck, pretend to regret my departure, then take me to the station. Thus I enter the world.

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Two maiden ladies have secured me. Might have been worse, for they are a soft-hearted couple. They tell one another that they have a bargain and think themselves clever to have acquired me for £1 10*s*. They laugh when I am introduced to their wire-haired fox-terrier and put up my back and get ready for him. But it seems he has lived with cats all his life. He wags his tail and makes friends. He appears to be a lumbering, well-meaning fool. His nose will be out of joint in four-and-twenty hours. The old women like me, and stuff me, and decide I shall be called "Shah." So far so good. They talk a great deal about me, and watch me walk around, and quarrel as to where I shall sleep. It is to be a toss-up between a tool-shed and the kitchen. They decide for kitchen. But, when they have gone to bed, the cook decides for tool-shed. Never trust a servant. They are time-serving wretches. They pretend to like a cat about the place. But not one mistress in a hundred knows what we have to put up with behind her back.

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Distinct score off the cook last night. She left me in the tool-shed, and during some excursions I fetched down a board with a variety of gardening trifles upon it. Of pots there were broken two score. Gardener annoyed. This man will be my thorn in the flesh, I fancy. He dares cook to put me there again. I am left in the garden while they argue. Dog has a kennel, but I don't like it. He invites me to join him at breakfast. Cold water and stuff he calls biscuit. I explain I shall take my meals with the family. He hopes I am not home-sick, and tells me that he will do all he can to make things pleasant. Snub him. Explain my origin, and let him plainly understand that there is a social gulf fixed between us. He is humble and apologetic. A good breakfast indoors. The cook assures my mistress that I slept in the kitchen and didn't behave well. I knew she would. Always be on your guard against a liar.

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When a man interferes with my amusement he suffers for it sooner or later. The gardener has told me to keep off a bed of mignonette seed. Fool—he ought to have commanded me to keep on it! A deliberate invitation to do anything in particular always annoys me; a command angers me. I spend much time upon the mignonette. The dog is rather impressed. I invite him to join me, but he refuses, and explains that the gardener dare not touch me, but would not hesitate in his case. Unpleasantness to-day. Was having a game with some stuffed birds in the drawing-room when my old ladies rang for the parlourmaid to remove me. I scratched her hand, and my old ladies laughed and applauded my spirit. But when she got me on the other side of the door, that parlourmaid rubbed it in pretty stiffly. I shan't forget it. When I'm a grown cat, there will probably be a day of reckoning.

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A niece has come to stay with the old ladies. She is very wealthy and engaged. We get on well. But the man, who calls twice a week, is a failure. The first time he came he slighted me, saying that Persians had no spirit or "go," and were always sleeping or eating. Later on I went round to his silk hat, which was on the floor, and when he came back from a stroll round the garden he knew all about it. My strength is such that I can now jump through the drawing-room window; and when I had made it clear that I was responsible for the hat, I jumped. Tree-climbing very good for the claws; gives strength and tone. Relations strained all round now, because I caught a bee off a white lily yesterday, and broke down the lily. Moth-hunting of an evening is tidy sport.

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The niece is called Ethel. She is to be married from here. My own opinion is that the man only wants her money, for he is a low-looking brute, though the servants say he is the younger son of somebody distinguished. The girl talks to me about him. The dog does not like this man either. A trustful animal, a dog. Gives everybody credit for best motives as a rule. But still, this dog bars this man; he cannot tell me why, but says it must be instinct. Have made a friend—an elderly tabby tom from four doors lower down the terrace. He has seen a good deal of the seamy side of life, and gathers his roses where he can. Well up in dustbins. Is called "Jim." His moral views are elastic. I believe nothing at present, but Jim's code will suit me well enough. Convenience is its principal beauty. Jim makes a good deal of me. He says I have gifts, and he assures me that it refreshes him and causes him to think deeply when I talk. I have made him free of our dustbin and introduced him to the dog. Henceforth he is safe here. He hates the gardener, too. He had a brother the gardener caught in the fowl-house. Jim knows where his brother was buried—in a tomato bed. Murderous man, the gardener.

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Of course I'm not under Jim's thumb. Yesterday we were walking together in the cool of the evening on the croquet ground, and my old ladies saw us, and rushed out as if I was taking a stroll with the devil. Jim had to hurry, and they picked me up, and told me he was a bad companion and would teach me all sorts of wicked things. What fools women are! I fancy I know a bit more than they think already. And as to Jim—why I teach *him.* He says that I'm always well worth listening to, and constantly asks my advice. Am growing quickly now, and begin to see a little society. Ethel's wedding comes off this day fortnight. I shall give my first party on that evening. A quiet wedding it is to be; but probably a noisy party. Jim is asking the cats. He says I cannot be too careful about invitations. No doubt he is right. Good fellow, Jim, and worships me. Learning to sing a little. The ladies like it—not my old ladies, but the young ones of my own species. We are badly off for ladies in this terrace; still, I have my eye on a pretty little thing—black, with white paws. She is coming to the party. No catch socially, but love levels all—so Jim says. (Ethel's wedding breakfast will include salmon. I heard the cook say so.) Row with the oldest of my old ladies. She can't understand that a cat gets beyond the cork-on-a-string stage. I'm growing up fast. Not that I don't have a game on the quiet sometimes, but never before people. They turn me out at night now. Much pleasanter. Supped with Jim down the road at his own place. A fair bit of haddock, but no style. There are children in the house.

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Wedding went off very well. A number of strange people about. Naturally I watched with some interest to see what went into the dustbin. Rather disappointing. Servants are the deuce in a case like this. Can't keep their hands off anything. Managed to get a tail of salmon myself, while they were hiding a few bottles of champagne. Secreted the salmon in the garden. It will come as a pleasant surprise to-night. Ethel cried when she started. My old ladies cried too. The man seemed pleased at what he'd managed. I'm afraid he's a blackguard. My party begins about half-past eleven. There are about ten of us. The black girl with white paws is called "Tottie"—pretty name. Very shy and retiring. Pleasant voice. Jim and a grey cat, called "The Colonel," have a rather unseemly row over an old tortoiseshell dowager. I wouldn't have looked at her. No accounting for tastes. Music sets the dogs barking for miles. Our own dog chained up. Not that he would have interfered. Cook, or some other damned menial, flings a pot of pomatum into the very middle of the conversazione. Nobody hurt, thank God, but a good deal is said about it. Of course I make it clear that the fault is not mine. Fine moonlight. Hide-and-seek in the geraniums. Wish the gardener could see us. I seem very popular. Get a chat with Tottie, and take her off to where I hid the salmon. Gone! I had only mentioned it to Jim. So much for friendship. In another month I shall not be afraid to stand up to him. Then he'll possibly wish he'd never been born. Party over at dawn. See Tottie home. She says that to meet a real gentleman is refreshing nowadays. True enough. They're growing scarce.

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Very cheap next morning, and my old ladies see I am. Unpleasant remarks and an inclination to withhold my saucer of milk. Some talk of giving me away. *Giving* me away! How insulting human beings are. And then they turn round and say *we* have no gratitude! Caught a young thrush in the afternoon. It was sitting with its back turned waiting for its mother. Mother came back with a worm, and when she saw what I'd been and done, she spoke her mind. Gardener noticed me too and seemed rather gratified than not. I shall go on catching young thrushes—not to please the gardener, but because I like them.

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We are engaged. I sang to her for an hour in the moonlight. Henceforth we live for each other. Everybody is saying she angled for me and caught me. I am a catch and I know it; but, in a place like this, where there's not another Persian within a radius of five hundred yards, we must do the best we can. And Tottie worships the wall I walk on. A very good, trustful, domesticated, little thing, and knows her luck. Am growing devilish handsome. My old ladies talk about sending me to the Crystal Palace Show next autumn. Had it out with Jim last night. He said I was ungrateful and never looked at him now that I was getting in with a better set. I knocked him out of a rain-shoot into a water-barrel; and when he came ashore we fought four rounds. He had some fur out of me certainly, but I took half his right ear off and hall-marked his nose for life. Now we pass on the same flower-bed and don't know each other. A low-bred animal Jim, and blood will tell. After our difference my old ladies changed their mind about sending me for exhibition.

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I am a father. Tottie has a fine family. Rather a bore. But of course there are no obligations. Two days later she meets me with a face as long as a chicken's thigh-bone.

The family has been drowned to a kitten before her eyes. Well, well, we must all die. Surprised to find how I bear this blow. Tottie hard to comfort. Of course, the murderers did not know that I was the father. Those kittens cannot have been worth less than five shillings each. I feel angry when I look at the matter from a business point of view. Tottie rather a nuisance about it. What's the use of crying over dead kittens? I tell her not to try my patience too far. Females are so exacting. She is hurt. What does she expect? She surely doesn't suppose that I am going to cry about it? She goes and gets one of her dead babes and lays it at my feet. Very harrowing, of course; but if the others were like this one, I am glad somebody drowned them. These mixed marriages are a mistake.

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Ethel has come back to my old ladies. The dog and I were right about that man. Only been married six months, and he is tired of her, and has been brutal; and she must go through some legal business to be rid of him. What devils these men are to the weaker vessels! Tottie has gone off in appearance a good deal lately. Her spirit is broken. To see her crawl along a fence, you would think she was five years old. Her temper is soured too. There has come a blue French cat to the house next door but three. I introduced myself. She is young and attractive, and, thank Heaven, a lady of elegant extraction. Inclined to be extremely exclusive. Tell her she is right. Her name is "Sally B." Pretty name. Has some English, but not much. Is teaching me French. Chic—very chic indeed. Had half a brickbat within two inches of me yesterday, next door but three. Her people are as exclusive as she is. Faint Persian never won fair French puss yet. Tottie growing quite impossible. Sorry, but had to speak. She fainted. You can only live your life once; therefore never let sentiment come between you and your ambitions. Sally B. says ours was a case of love at first sight. Very possibly. We are engaged, anyhow. Haven't mentioned Tottie.

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They are saying in the house that Ethel is going to die. If she does, they certainly ought to kill the fiend who is responsible for her misery. I'm sure I can feel for the poor girl. Sally B. has thrown me over for a lop-sided, yellow cat, with one eye and no tail—a paltry Manx thing that would disgrace Seven Dials. Oh yes, the beast can fight, I know; but I was dead out of training at the time. Not that I care. I might have known what to expect from a French cat. There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.

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Shall give up keeping a diary. The thing only makes people laugh at you after you are gone. Besides, you often think of things you can't even say to yourself, let alone write in a book.

* * * * *

Resume my diary after several years. I've felt very seedy lately and been getting worse every day for a year. Shabby and old. Don't create any sensation as of yore. Vet comes to see me, and the case evidently interests him a good deal. He says a pinch of arsenic is the only thing for me, and my old ladies both begin to cry. I suppose it's expensive. Still, as this is the only cure the man can suggest, they are bound in decency to allow me to have it. They agree to the vet's proposal, though reluctantly. Disgusting to see meanness at such a time. However, it's all right : I'm to have the arsenic to-morrow.

# INOCULATION DAY

I HAD been reading far into the dim avenues of night, and when finally I cast from me the *Lancet*, with all its marvellous chronicles of the eternal battle between Science and Death, I passed into a dream-survey of therapeutics; wherein the subject, touched by a liberated imagination, launched me upon visions so real, so tremendous, that, waking once more, I arose and set them down in the dawn-light.

I seemed to wander by that road along which our mighty sons of healing will march in time to come. My phantom survey traversed the far past, the present, the remote future; it bore me through the whole history of medicine and surgery, of human diseases and their discovered remedies. From the science as indicated in Homeric poetry under the ægis of Æsculapius, to the system of Hippocrates; from the Alexandrian school and great empiric doctrines, to Roman methods—to Pliny, Galen, Aretæus, and other early lights—I progressed. I saw also the schemes of Arabic medicine; glanced at the science as expounded and practised in the Middle Ages; saw Paracelsus in his laboratory; Van Helmont, the mystic; and Bacon, the philosopher. Still sweeping forward upon the lightning pinions of a dream, I passed from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century and beheld new ideas, new theories, new systems plentiful as the sands upon the sea-shore.

A mechanical theory of disease was then the favoured conceit, and I noted Cheyne writing his survey of fever upon that basis; I saw Mead putting forth his treatise on *The Power of the Sun and Moon over Human Bodies;* I examined Keill's application of Newtonian principles to the explanation of humanity's physical machinery. Then arose that mighty Boerhaave and his school; Hoffmann of Halle, with his notion of a universal ether permeating all regions of the body; Stahl and his "animism"; Haller, Morgagni, Cullen, Brown, and Avenbrugger—a genius of Vienna, who invented the method by which ailments of the lungs were first investigated by percussion.

Then, through that astounding age of miracles, the Nineteenth Century, I passed, although to elaborate that spectacle of accumulated achievements were vain in this place. Suffice it that at length I reached the point whereat I closed my *Lancet* before sleeping; and yet, contrary to my expectations, the panoramic vision still unrolled, still swiftly sped onwards and onwards to strange matters as yet hidden within the void of Time to come.

Now indeed might the unfolding phantasmagoria arrest my senses, for the Nineteenth Century was past, the Twentieth also (marked by a horror in its midst), with many successive ages—whose tremendous records were written and sealed — mere foundation stones, deep buried beneath the river of the Past, for the fair structure of the Present uplifted upon them.

I stood before a vast and imposing erection —an edifice of prodigious dimensions towering skywards, yet without one touch of imagination or trace of beauty. It was evidently well adapted to some enormous utilitarian needs; but a mud-heap or modern prison had been as fair to see. Squat as a toad it lay, yet the amazing size of it even its unlovely fabric and ungainly mass could not conceal.

Now from this pile my attention was attracted to the crowds of young persons who were streaming thither. The youth of the whole earth seemed to enter its enormous gates and vanish within them. Costume had clearly come upon a period of simplicity and earth colour. Dull beyond description, therefore, were these tremendous processions under the noon sunlight.

Then came one of the race of men and stood beside me and eyed me curiously; and I inquired of him the nature of this universal festival, and of these crowds of young men and women who entered the palace in orderly legions.

He seemed surprised.

"Truly, you have journeyed from a far country to ask such a question," he answered; "and indeed your speech and raiment mark you for one from beyond the pale of civilisation. This is Inoculation Day—the highest festival and fête of the human year; and these you behold—the young men and maidens—are about to receive this vital rite, each according to his or her requirements as heredity's archives indicate. But there is a talk of giving all up as needless now, for the evils to be eradicated have almost disappeared from human nature."

"For God's sake don't give it up," I said. "They did at the beginning of the Twentieth

Century. A cowardly crew, with an irrational dialectician at their head, made Vaccination optional to catch votes for party purposes in the House of Commons. One generation of fools passed and were allowed to bring up their offspring unvaccinated. Then came the Day of Reckoning. That was in the Year of the Lord 1950. Britain suffered what she deserved; but it was an awful lesson—shade of Jenner!—an awful lesson."

The stranger smiled.

"That is one of the few human names still cherished from a remote antiquity," he observed.

"Then the great law has triumphed and of course you inoculate for every human ailment now—is it not so?" I inquired.

He smiled again.

"Ailments? No. The need for that has long since vanished. Humanity has no ailments now. The extremity of human life has been proved to stand at one hundred and forty-five years, three months, two weeks, one day, four hours, six minutes, and thirteen and two-fifths of a second. Everybody attains to that age as a matter of course. Then we stop, or cease, or, as you might say, die. Inoculation, pursued through the centuries, has banished every physical ill but Death itself; and that has no terrors at a hundred and forty-five. The hour of extinction once known, an orderly exit naturally follows. But surely you must have wakened from or be walking in a dream? I shall hear you speak of small-pox presently—indeed you have done so—and those other long-vanished curses bred out of the black night of man's first ignorance. To-day, however, Inoculation has climbed heights beyond your primitive imagination, my friend; to-day—upon this glad anniversary—the rising generation, after having been from childhood subject to the study and scrutiny of our wisest ones, receives its finishing touch, its crown, its keystone—each man, each woman according to their need. *We inoculate for character now!* Think of all that means, if your intellect has a power sufficiently vivid to do so. To-day we celebrate the stupendous discovery that rose naturally out of Jenner's sublime achievement. Evolution, proceeding through the ages, has brought us face to face with the fact, and thus, having counteracted heredity and stamped out disease, man proceeded into the subtler psychological field of human character and temperament. To-day we create disposition and mould mind. Education has done all that education can do for the generation you behold passing in its youthful glory before you; now the necessary correctives of character will be administered by inoculation."

"You can add or subtract, give or take away!" I cried; and he admitted that it was so and gazed curiously at my enthusiasm.

"You are excited," he said. "I am fortunate to have witnessed such a phenomenon. The emotion of excitement has been removed from human nature for three or four hundred years. Yet I warn you: it shortens life."

"Never mind that; tell me more, much more!" I begged.

"Well," he continued kindly, "the truth is that man begins to know a little here and there. He would seem to be on the right track—but only just groping at the beginning of it. Of course you can perceive how Mental Inoculation works. Given a character, the problem is where to improve it. For generations all physical cowards were inoculated with Courage: therefore physical cowardice is practically unknown; a rash soul we tinge with Caution; one prone to hoard, receives the diluted virus of Thriftlessness; a fanatical character is dosed with Common Sense; and so forth. Indeed, Common Sense is a panacea.

It is certain that we should again relapse into the chaos of a thousand years ago but for our stock of that. I who speak to you was inoculated with Charity. There were fears that by some streak of atavism I might repeat the errors of a selfish great-great-great-grandfather."

"Do you inoculate with Truth?" I asked.

"Ah! the truth about Truth is at last determined; but only quite recently. Human Nature has not reached the power to grasp Absolute Truth. It exists, but no psychological chemist has ever succeeded in securing it. A race of empirics still seek for it in secret; but they are as mad as the alchemists of the prime. No, when Truth is reached, æons hence, the world will come to an end and the chain be completed. From the amorphous life-cell, from the protoplasm to Truth——but we need not pursue that. Let me return to Inoculation Day. Upon that notable anniversary each young human life receives a sort of compensating balance to character; and the result is such a high level of understanding, patience, self-control and general regularity that the human race already begins to approach the blissful perfection of a machine in its regularity and rapid progress."

"And we used to say that, come what come may, human nature still remained unalterable!"

"One of the funny persistent fallacies of the old folks in the Nineteenth Century. It has been proved otherwise. Nothing happens now but the expected and anticipated."

"It is glorious—magnificent—the supreme triumph of the human mind!" I ejaculated.

But he shook his head.

"A step in the right direction—scarcely more. Besides, there yet linger among us people who dare to declare that there exist objections to machine-made character. These poor weaklings seem to be the survival of a sort of madmen common in early times. They represent the aborted mental condition that went in its former dreadful development to produce poets and prophets and other unbalanced creatures, including all 'great men,' as they were called."

"Geniuses, in fact."

"That was the curious word. Great men are now not possible. A minority of twaddlers still pursue these shadows—not in the sane spirit of the antiquary, but with the affectation that the history and the rhymed nonsense of those dark ages may still be read with profit to-day."

"Then Art is dead!" I gasped.

"Happily," he answered.

"Romance?"

"Defunct long ago. Fiction in any sort is now practically impossible, because all life has been reduced to the glorious precision of mathematics. Given the starting-point, the rest admits of no two interpretations."

"But, pardon me, I live by story-telling. It is all I am able to do. At this moment I am putting the finishing touches to my very best——"

"Your labour is in vain," he answered civilly. "Such things only occur under glass in museums. Irregularity of conduct does not now enter within the bounds of the possible. Why, even the fame of the people who wrought your stories and rhymes is dead. We cannot understand the dreadful and chaotic conditions in the early morning of history where they worked."

"Then smother your Inoculation Day!" I answered warmly. "Let me get back into yesterday, when people had imagination, and knew a good thing when they saw it, and—and—there, I cannot argue with you; and I cannot change my century, like my boots."

The man very nearly showed astonishment.

Recollect that I stood before a being who had never known hate, or love, or any sort of intellectual excitement. Yet he came as near to a surprise then as ever he did in his oyster-like life.

"You are very interesting," he said. "I wish you would stop here and permit your passions to go on mastering you until I call some of our scientific men. It has for hundreds of years been a great speculation as to what was the appearance of a human being when he loses his temper. We might inoculate——"

"Oh no, you don't!" I roared. "D'you think I'm going to have my character tinkered with at my age by a lot of perfect, passionless puppets?"

But here my emotions first choked me, then woke me, and I opened my eyes, not without thanksgivings, on a pleasant morning still very nigh the romantic dawn of the Twentieth Century.

# A STORY WITHOUT AN END

## I

ON a fine day during the Cambrian Era bright sunshine flooded the best that our old Earth could do in the way of scenery at that remote period. Huge mud-flats extended for thousands of miles on every hand, and between them stretched shallow oceans. Humble forms of vegetation flourished in the mud and a heavy atmosphere, dense as steam, covered all. The air was full of noble rainbows, probably the most beautiful phenomena known to Cambrian times.

Absolute silence marked the scene. No feather made music in the air; no fin rippled the water; no beast or herd of beasts moved upon the face of the earth to break the terrific monotony of that prehistoric picture.

Suddenly upon a steaming mud-flat there appeared a little lobster-like creature of many joints, large eyes, and various feelers arranged like whiskers around his jaws. He was twenty inches in length and carried himself with conscious dignity, albeit mud knocks the dignity out of almost anything but a trilobite. But this trilobite, for such he was, surveyed that Cambrian noon pensively, curled his whiskers with thought, and wriggled his shining joints in the sun. Presently a hen trilobite appeared and squatted beside him placidly.

"When I survey this spectacle," said the trilobite, "when I reflect that the world is empty but for us, I am often tempted to wonder."

He rolled his goggle eyes towards the zenith.

"Wonder? What at?" asked his lady. "Surely, as the lord of creation, you have a right to everything here? You're the most wonderful thing in the mud, after all; you can walk about and talk; in fact, you're alive—a live creature—Nature's masterpiece."

"It would be easy and pleasant to think so," mused the trilobite, "but sometimes, in rare fits of modesty, I almost fancy that I am not the best that Nature can do. I even picture something bigger, better, more beautiful than a trilobite. It may be morbid, but I do."

"This is nonsense and stuff, my dear. You're fishing for compliments? Bigger? Good heavens! you're twenty inches long; isn't that big enough for anybody? Better? Well, you're a good husband and father; what better could any trilobite be? And as to beauty, I shouldn't have married you if you had not been about the handsomest gentleman trilobite that ever sat and curled his whiskers. Nature never made anything better than a trilobite. Why? Because she can't. Can you picture anything different? Can you imagine any creature with more convenient limbs, more exquisite joints, more perfect claws, better eyesight, better senses, better manners, or more self-respecting? You know you can't."

"I actually cannot picture the creature, but I can picture the possibility of such a creature."

"Twaddle!" said Mrs. Trilobite. "We're the best and last, so there's an end of it. The world was made for us." She had the final word, very properly, and the trilobite shrugged his shoulders and waddled off to his family. Still he doubted.

## II

Some millions of millions of years having passed by, we find ourselves, upon a bright afternoon of Mesozoic times, in the company of that genial and gigantic Deinosaur, Brontosaurus Excelsus. The monster, despite pleasant climatic conditions, was ill at ease. He sat upon his haunches, swayed his enormous neck to the right and left, and listlessly chewed off the heads of six lofty palm-trees.

There was a crash—a boiling, seething explosion as of a torpedo in the river at his feet—and forth came the Deinosaur's bride, an enormous being, much like himself, though somewhat smaller.

"Ah, my little dear, back again?" he exclaimed, and, smashing off the palm-trees like cabbage-stumps, sank down beside her.

"You are unhappy, my own Bronto," she said, with the pretty solicitude of a young wife.

"Not unhappy, merely thoughtful, my love. This good world—the lakes and rivers, the trees and groves of club mosses—all; I sometimes think it can hardly have been created for us."

"Not for us!"

"Not for us and our friends alone. Perhaps some day something greater, wiser, better even than Brontosaurus Excelsus may browse here, and swim these rivers, and lift its head to the sun."

"This is mere moonshine, my dearest. Greater than you! Is it possible to be greater than a hundred feet long? Is it possible to be heavier than fifty tons? And, for the rest, who should know your goodness and wisdom better than I? No, no; you let your humility run away with you, my sweet. You are the first and best—Nature's masterpiece, her joy, her unutterable delight."

"There's Atlantosaurus," said Bronto dubiously.

His wife frowned, and her huge lizard eyes were clouded.

"There is Atlantosaurus," she admitted, "the hulking, bloodthirsty, ignoble wretch! A thing that eats other live creatures—a debased, degraded, distant relation—a cannibal! Nature blushes when she thinks of him and his kind; but we, we are upon a plane apart; we eat the green grass, the juicy cane, the young fronds and ripe fruit of the palms; we——"

A shadow hid the sun. High above the trees rose a dreadful head with eyes like bicycle-wheels and teeth that glittered and dropped blood.

"It's Atlanto—this is no place for us!"

Two simultaneous splashes cast a huge column of water upward as Brontosaurus and his better half vanished beneath that Mesozoic river.

## III

Again some odd millions upon millions of years have swept by in the eternal procession of Time, and we find Professor Jebbway, F.R.S., etc., etc., sitting disconsolate at his desk, with a review of his last monumental work in his hands.

The reviewer was absolutely uninformed concerning Professor Jebbway's recondite subject; he had therefore been wise enough simply to gush and gloat through four columns of his journal, and declare that no such achievement of the human brain could be recorded since the stupendous life-work of Darwin.

Mrs. Jebbway brought in a cup of tea and rated the Professor.

"I'm sure that's nothing to be so precious glum about," she said. "The man's all butter, from start to finish. If his blessed paper mattered, it might do you some good. I read it yesterday."

"It isn't that. From this gentleman, praise or blame are equally unimportant. I'm a little overburdened with my own limitations to-day. I wish I'd come later, when the world knew more."

"It never will know more. It knows too much already, thanks to men like you—that is if I read the Scriptures aright."

"No—we're only at the outset. A man's such an unfinished, incomplete, futile, short-lived machine. Just the dawning of a few senses done up in a poor, puny envelope."

"We're nothing of the sort, and if you'd only let all this nonsense out of your head and take more exercise, and study the Bible now and again for a change from Huxley and all the rest of them——"

"A puny envelope, holding nothing of worth. If a million million years were past, and I had come then——"

"If I didn't know you," she said, "I might be cross. Surely your wife counts? At all events man is the greatest of created things—the first thing Nature ever made that knew it was alive—her masterpiece. And nothing greater than man will ever tread this planet. Mark my words, and read the Bible. Now drink your tea, and don't talk nonsense about puny envelopes. You're a well-nourished, good-looking and learned man, with a thousand a year. And if Nature ever made anybody better and wiser and more sensible—as a rule—I should like to see him."

Professor Jebbway sighed and took his tea.

"Something better is hid in Time," he said: "nothing better than you, my dear partner, that is impossible; but something better far, wiser far than your humble servant."

## IV

Another round string of million years and we reach the Latest Thing.

The Latest Thing reclined in its dwelling-house of glass, and by sheer mental effort communicated with other things afar off and exchanged ideas with them—as we to-day by wireless telegraphy. The Latest Thing was pliable and pink, with a head like an overgrown vegetable-marrow. His brain towered up into a cranial cavity lifted three feet above his face. His eyes twinkled like diamonds. He breathed through gills, and had a mouth merely rudimentary, for he lived by smell. Upon his back were wings of gauze; and when he moved, these became invisible, and he floated gently through the air.

The Latest Thing's wife wafted herself in from somewhere, and they communicated by their brains and eyes.

"Oh, if Nature would only get on a little," said the Latest Thing. "I am impatient and she is so slow. Not one of our children appear to give the least sign or evidence of advance and improvement."

"I should hope not, indeed!" telegraphed back his wife. "The females are exactly like me, and the males are exactly like you—bless the little ducks! 'Improvement!' They are the most perfect young things you'll find, seek where you may."

"Yet I hoped that they——"

"Your old craze. I tell you we are the

high-water mark, the crest of the wave, the ultimate best, the triumph of Creation—Perfection!"

But the Latest Thing shook his huge head. "I doubt it," he flashed back to her.

# THE BIOGRAPHY OF PETER PARKINSON

WITHIN the confines of that hidden state rather humorously called "the other world"—as if the worlds numbered no more than two—we enjoy a measure of knowledge which you mundane folks are but now attaining through processes both painful and slow. Thanks to our perfection in a system, towards which your "wireless telegraphy" has already made some distant approach, it is possible for me to tell an interesting tale and cast some light upon a recent literary mystery.

Now when that great and good man Professor Peter Parkinson passed out of life, his notable earthly labours very properly entitled him to a resting-place amongst our great ones, and I was among those privileged men of light and leading invited to bear his pall.

I remember that I walked next to Thomas Gridd, the little busybody who in life for some obscure reason won Peter Parkinson's regard, and who was left by the Professor as his literary executor. Even during the solemn moment of sepulchral rites, Gridd found time to speak to me.

"The only official and recognised biography will be mine," he whispered. "Remember that. Tell everybody. It is going to be a great book; and it will surprise some of us not a little."

How those words came back to my mind after the event! Perhaps the most sensational biography of the last century was that by Thomas Gridd of Peter Parkinson. In public life Parkinson had passed for a remarkable man, an original thinker, a live force in ethics, a dynamic power exercised for good, and one who, to speak generally, most surely left his corner of earth better, wiser and cleaner than he found it. His privacy had of course been probed also; and it was pretty generally conceded that no better husband or father than the Professor could well be found. His amusements were pathetically innocent and high-minded; the Athenæum was his only club; when he left England upon a vacation during later life, it was in order that his family might visit the Alps, the French Exhibition of

1900 and other improving and unique phenomena of Nature and the times.

Upon a general appreciation of the dead man's worth and virtue there burst the biography of Thomas Gridd, than which anything more sensational, outrageous and unexpected could not well be imagined. After a great parade of the necessity for Truth, of his own high motives in this matter, and of the abundant grief that his task had brought upon him, the unutterable Gridd set out upon his ruffianly way and exhibited before the amazed and incredulous vision of England the spectacle of a great reputation torn to ribbons.

Indignation raged amongst the friends of the late Professor; violent controversies burst forth in the public prints. The worst passages were denied on the one hand; while Gridd undertook to prove them to the hilt if anybody dared to have the law of him. In fact that famous romance of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" appeared to have been repeated in real life, and arising out of the Parkinson of public enterprise and honourable renown—the scientist, the philanthropist, the great sociologist—there dawned hideously within the pages of Thomas Gridd a nocturnal, subterranean and blackguard Parkinson—a man of deplorable habits and disreputable ideas—a vicious ghoul.

Of course this remarkable book sold prodigiously. Thousands of copies were purchased by the libraries alone, and a work so full of pepper and salt for the time being quite eclipsed the sale of popular fiction, of history, travel, verse, and of more amiable and conventional biography.

For myself I just lived long enough to see the scoundrel Gridd get a large fortune by his abominable book and then, in the midst of a rather promising literary career, it pleased Providence to remove me from the sub-lunar puppet-show. Overwork and a chill—but all that does not matter, as it has nothing to do with this narrative. All I need say is that I have frankly forgiven the man who finished my last novel for the press and shall meet him without prejudice if ever he comes here.

Almost the first person I met in the Elysian Fields of our order (for I am thankful to say that my modest merits entitled me to a place therein) was my old friend Professor Parkinson. He greeted me with good taste and that particular shade of sympathy proper from a happy spectre to the event of my passing in mid-career. Then, after discussing everything and everybody but himself, he said in his humble way:

"I know you will pardon my egotism, but I *should* like to know how the autobiography went."

"Whose?" I asked.

"I blush to answer," he made reply; "but I was thinking of my own."

"No such thing ever appeared," I told him. "The man Gridd, in whom you trusted—rather foolishly I am afraid—published a biography of you, written by himself; and it has been an enormous and infamous success. I should not have mentioned this, be sure, had not you invited me to do so."

"I left my autobiography complete in his hands," said the Professor, much concerned.

"It was probably a very different work to the one he has published," I replied. "In fact, not to mince matters, if all or even one half of what the man Gridd has written of you was true, Professor, you wouldn't be here. He makes you a flagrant scoundrel and worse, for in his pages you appear as the most nauseous, calculating, double-dealing humbug and hypocrite that ever played a public part on earth and deceived mankind."

"This is very disturbing," said the Professor.

"I never thought such baseness was possible. Why, I rescued Thomas Gridd from the gutter when he was a boy!"

"The usual reward of the great—well doing, ill report. Gridd was not the sort of man to forgive such a Samaritan," I said. "They've torn me to pieces since I left them—not a doubt of it. But you don't care, do you?"

"I care very much," he answered. "I care for my Institute; I care for my dear wife; I care for my family. And, what is more, I won't suffer it if I can bring our sub-committee to see the outrage with my eyes. In the interests of reputation there are certain great ones daily gathered together amongst us for the express purpose of adjudicating between the quick and dead in these affairs; and many a startling, literary Nemesis and unexplained, quick-handed and providential act of justice is the direct result of our personal interest and personal power in such matters. Where our reputations are concerned, we are in fact permitted some supernatural indulgences. This is a case in point, and if ever a literary ghost had a grievance, I take it that I who speak to you am that spirit. Come with me immediately; the sub-committee is sitting at this moment. It consists of Mr. Ben Jonson in the chair, Doctor Johnson and Mr. Carlyle. The last clamoured to be put on it so unceasingly after the little matter of Mr. Froude that we had to meet his wishes, and Virgil resigned in his favour. You see Virgil's contemporaries have come by their own now, and it was right that the recent generations should have a modern representative."

In another moment we stood before the three great shades.

"Welcome, Master Parkinson; what would you?" asked immortal Ben.

"Be brief, sir, for we are busy to-day," added Doctor Johnson. "I beg therefore that you will unfold your purpose with as little flux of words as may be necessary to its elucidation."

Carlyle did not speak, but thrust out his chin, as he does in the picture by Watts, and listened.

The Professor thereupon introduced me and related my black news.

Jonson shook his head and seemed to find a humorous side to the tragedy; Carlyle thundered his indignation and went from a generalisation upon all biography into personal matters not necessary to set down here; while Doctor Johnson defended biography with some slashing blows.

"You are to remember, sir," he said to Mr. Carlyle, "that it is most unphilosophic to frame general theories upon the trumpery foundation of a personal experience. You, sir, have permitted us to gather that you are incensed against the literary record of your own career —a very good book in the judgment of many persons. To found general principles upon this solitary example is at once short-sighted, narrow-minded and absurd. No, sir; the thing can be very well done and has been very well done."

"Nevertheless we cannot all come by a Boswell, Doctor," said Mr. Jonson.

"We do not all deserve a Boswell, Ben," answered the great lexicographer. "Many amongst us lack that congeries of flexible characteristics—the mental amalgam of humour and common-sense, weight, scholarship and piety that may be said to afford just material for a biographer. For my part, indeed, I cannot think that in life such a man as Boswell would have been edified or inspired to any great work by a close and personal intercourse with yourself, for instance. I may err, but that is my deliberate opinion, framed upon those endless personal reminiscences of which you deny us no vinous detail. Nor would the table-talk of such an one as Milton have afforded over-much delight. We should rather——"

"When you can make an end, the Professor will speak," interrupted Carlyle.

Whereupon my distinguished friend put in his plea boldly.

"Nobody, honoured sirs, has power to arrest this outrage but myself," said Professor Parkinson. "The application I make is unusual but not unprecedented. Briefly, I beg permission to visit the earth and rectify in person this grave wrong. Permit my spectre one week with this ungenerous and unjust steward of my reputation. I ask no more."

"Only a mind conscious of right would contemplate such a painful design," declared Doctor Johnson; "and yet it is a question whether the awful demonstration of a professorial apparition to one still in life be not too terrible a punishment for his crime."

"Not so," interrupted Mr. Carlyle. "Parkinson is in the right. This vile Gridd has earned the worst that can overtake him. Fury and chaos! let justice be done and an example made. Must dead lions suffer for ever from these live asses? Let Parkinson be despatched upon his errand without more ado. He is a Scotch spectre, and may therefore be trusted to use discretion and employ his powers with decency."

"I will not allow my antipathy to the Scotch, just and well-grounded though that sentiment may be——" answered the Sage; but here Ben Jonson held up his hand.

"Suffer me to put one question to our learned friend," he said, then turned to Professor Parkinson.

"Dost think all this pother about a trashy scribbler is worthy of thee? He and his lies will all go down to the pit together presently. And Truth prevails."

"But it won't prevail in my wife's lifetime, Mr. Jonson," answered the Professor. "Consider her and my family. Picture to yourself how this scandalous libel must be breaking the hearts of those that loved me. And remember my Institute."

"There struts no vainer figure in literature or rhetoric than that 'breaking of hearts,'" said Doctor Johnson. "As one not dead to humanity's tenderer emotions, I may be allowed to declare that hearts do not break. Moreover, worthy Parkinson, we have but the testimony of this new-come shade that things are in so parlous a plight with your reputation. Does he speak what he knows or what he merely believes?"

The massive spectre puffed his cheeks and looked at me.

"It is idle, most honoured Doctor Johnson, to discuss the subject of circulating libraries with you," I answered firmly but respectfully. "Nor would a circulation of fifty thousand copies convey any particular idea perhaps to your experience. But you will recollect the old trick of putting everything into the newspapers. That trick, worthy sir, has now become a confirmed habit—a part of our national system. There is to-day such machinery for scattering of news as you would marvel at. This wicked book has been read throughout the English-speaking world. If uncontradicted its end must be that Professor Parkinson's life labours are seriously threatened."

"If the edifice of his toil be fundamentally assured, this book cannot assail the issue," declared Doctor Johnson. "Nevertheless," he added, "it may be that evil has been done and cries for chastisement. I doubt nothing but that we can trust the Professor wisely to conduct his enterprise and order his apparitional manifestations alike with sound judgment and just taste."

"It will only be necessary for me to appear to the man Thomas Gridd, and that in strict privacy," declared Peter Parkinson.

"'Tis well," said Ben Jonson. "There are a sort of spectres who abuse their privileges and play the fool—a thing very vile and improper and against right feeling. Indeed the best spectres shall be found in fiction rather than fact. Take Will's ghost in *Hamlet.* Never stalked real spirit truer. Will yet stands first exemplar for ghost and man. So be it. Depart in peace, Master Parkinson. We can trust you to remember that the spectral condition has its obligations. Good luck attend ye. Ah! there's Tennyson!"

Ben Jonson rose and followed a tall black figure that floated past down a cypress walk.

"By Jove!" I said, surprised into an indiscretion; "does he know how Tennyson always declared that he found reading Jonson was like wading through a sea of glue?"

And Carlyle answered—

"Alfred told him so to his beard, with customary frankness, and Ben laughed his great thunder laugh—like roll of an Elizabethan drum—and said, 'My glue sticks, brother, my glue sticks. We shall see if thine holds on so stoutly to the literature of England after passage of centuries!'"

"Concerning Tennyson," began Doctor Johnson, "we may take him first as to his *machinery*, so-called from *θεὸς απὸ μηχανῆς*, or the occasional interposition of supernatural power; next upon his *episodes;* and lastly as to his *sentiments*, as expressive of manners. Now, in so far as I am able to judge, the man, regarded as a moral——"

I felt Professor Parkinson pulling at my sleeve and together we stole away. Carlyle had already turned his back and departed.

"Won't the Doctor be hurt?" I murmured.

"Not in the least," replied my friend. "See! There goes Boswell to him."

A jaunty shade tripped by us with his eyes reverently lifted to the Colossus of Words.

"Still at it, you see," said the Professor.

Peter Parkinson did not delay his departure and was absent about his affairs for exactly one week. Then he returned weary and cast down, but apparently well satisfied with the results of his expedition.

He was good enough to tell us the sequel of Gridd's baseness, and I cannot do better than employ the good man's own words in the narrative. Many great ghosts gave ear to him. Indeed, he enjoyed the attention of the highest.

"I found the audacious villain at Monte Carlo," he began, "and Providence so willed that our meeting came plump upon the high-water mark of his ill-gotten fortunes. For he retired to bed in high good humour after breaking the bank at the gambling house there. I suffered him to sink into a sound sleep before availing myself of our spectral privileges. Then settling myself upon the bottom rail of his bed (I spare no detail) I awoke him with his favourite word. I breathed the magic syllables firmly and at the sound of 'Royalties!' the wretch turned, gradually roused himself, sat up and beheld me with my phantom eyes fixed upon him.

"'Good Lord! It's Parkinson!' he exclaimed, instantly became wide awake and fell into a cold perspiration. Never have I seen guilt and terror at once so horribly manifested as upon that occasion. The terror we inspire, at least upon a sinner, has surely not been exaggerated.

"'Traitor!' I cried, 'unhallowed breaker of vows, base thief and cruel coward! You, who would steal a dead man's fame and fatten on your perversion of the truth, hear me! Even to the nether shades has this infamous treachery descended; each new-come spirit enters indignant with the horror of it; and so out of high justice I am thus allowed to protect my own honour, to revisit the realms of the quick and right such a wrong as all literature can scarcely match. Well may you quail, ignoble murderer of a reputation, who have requited my kindness thus!'

"Thomas Gridd scarcely comprehended all these utterances of mine, for the very madness of terror was upon him. His hair stood on end, his teeth chattered, his limbs were reflexed, his eyes glared and his hands gripped the sheet about his neck.

"'Mercy! Mercy!' he screamed. 'Mercy, avenging ghost! Be merciful, even as you were always merciful in this world. Have pity, terrible spirit!'

"'Miscreant!' I cried. 'Wretch to profane that divine word with your lips! I want my autobiography. Where is it?'

"'Burnt!' he said. 'As Heaven's above us both I burnt every line.'

"It was apparent that he told the truth.

"'In that case,' I replied, 'you will send a statement of the fact to the first daily newspaper—a statement signed and witnessed. You will also declare that your own fabrication is devoid of the bare bones of truth—a calculated and cold-blooded lie to gain your own mercenary ends. And, finally, every farthing that has accrued to you from this villainous action must be handed over to the Peter Parkinson Institute at Glasgow.'

"Now, had he defied me," continued the Professor, "I really know not how I should have proceeded. I lacked all power to enforce my directions, as you will perceive. I could only haunt the man—and that temporarily during my leave of absence—a proceeding perhaps more painful for myself than for the criminal. But the wretch was overborne by the nameless horror of a visit from the grave. His guilty conscience reeled before me, and he was physically and mentally prostrated. He had barely strength to promise faithfully upon his oath that he would do all I bid him; and then he lost consciousness.

"He was suffering from acute nervous excitation upon the following morning. He took his first meal in bed and it consisted solely of ardent spirits. I limned before his eyes while he was shaving and he shrank back and dropped his razor and screamed. Pointing to his writing desk, I spoke:

"'Delay not a moment, or the consequences will be beyond my power to describe to you.'

"This I am willing to admit was a prevarication of the truth, but it may perhaps be pardoned.

"He tottered to his writing-desk and anon I dictated a letter to the Editor of the *Morning Post*, which he wrote with trembling fingers.

"'*Dear Sir,—*

"'*I desire through the medium of your journal to declare to the world that my recent biography of the late Professor Peter Parkinson is a deliberate and calculated tissue of fraud and falsehood. I have twisted and turned the truth into a malignant fable and, upon the foundation of much private and secret work, undertaken by my benefactor in the interests of humanity, I have erected a shameful structure of mendacity. My sole reason was the desire to create a sensation and acquire wealth by it. The truth is that Professor Parkinson left with me his autobiography and directed me to see it through the press. This work would have explained all that unknown labour on behalf of mankind which I so shamefully distort into an attack upon him. I have destroyed this book. I also desire to say that I have directed my bankers in London (Messrs. Dunster and Boyle, of Lombard Street, E.C.) to pay to the*

*Peter Parkinson Institute at Glasgow ten thousand pounds, a sum representing the amount of my royalties on the biography I concocted and dared to publish. My publishers did not know the truth and are, to that extent, blameless.'*

"Then," continued Parkinson, "I bid the knave send for two witnesses and, myself invisible, saw them attest the signature of Thomas Gridd.

"Having observed him post this confession in a public letter-box, I next directed him to visit a house of business. Into this he paid the mass of gold and notes won at his infamous pastime overnight, and then commissioned the banking people to convey the money by cable to the firm of Dunster and Boyle in London.

"That done, Gridd wrote two other letters. One of these contained a cheque for ten thousand pounds, and this he despatched to my Institute in Scotland; the other was directed to his bankers and requested those gentlemen to honour the cheque when it should be presented.

"So I left him to reflect upon his egregious sins, for physically the man was now reduced to mere palpitating flesh and my continued presence must doubtless have rendered him insane. It is quite certain that no spectre could thus oppress a mind fortified by virtue.

"He slunk about Monte Carlo like one pursued by the Furies, and doubtless he expected to see my stern shadow reflected once more within his bloodshot eyes at every step. An analysis of his emotions would be terribly instructive. I could even find it in my heart to have pitied him then. But I thought of my wife, my children, my Institute, and was firm.

"He made no attempt to go back upon my commands or to evade them. Within twenty-four hours the metropolis was ringing with a new sensation, the book was recalled as far as might be, and the Parkinson Institute had grown richer by ten thousand pounds. Indeed that does not represent all the advantage accruing to the institution from my action. Numberless benefactions have sprung from this revelation and the consciences of many tender persons have been touched into practical action. Thus the right-feeling have compounded with their better natures. And what is even more to me: this terrible cloud has been lifted from off the hearts of my dear wife and children.

"My mission was accomplished within three short days. I visited Thomas Gridd once more, begged him be of good cheer, to endeavour yet to justify his existence, and to make his peace with Heaven, even as he had now made it with men and ghosts. Then I vanished from his eyes. Frankly I regret the unfortunate man's position. It is terrible, indeed hopeless, from a worldly point of view, yet a just and due reward for unparalleled perfidy, if one may say so without being vindictive."

The Professor sighed and ceased.

A week later, thanks to the arrival of an aged journalist, we learned the end of this incident.

"Thomas Gridd committed suicide after writing a most astounding confession to the *Morning Post*," he explained.

"Then how comes it that he has not joined us?" I asked, rather foolishly.

There was an awkward silence, upon which Ben Jonson, who chanced to be present with other celebrities already mentioned, broke in with his great laughter.

"It would seem, young man, thou art scarce so heedful of thy company as an honest shade should be," he said. "Know that we harbour not with such varlets here. They have their proper kennel. Ask Dante about him."

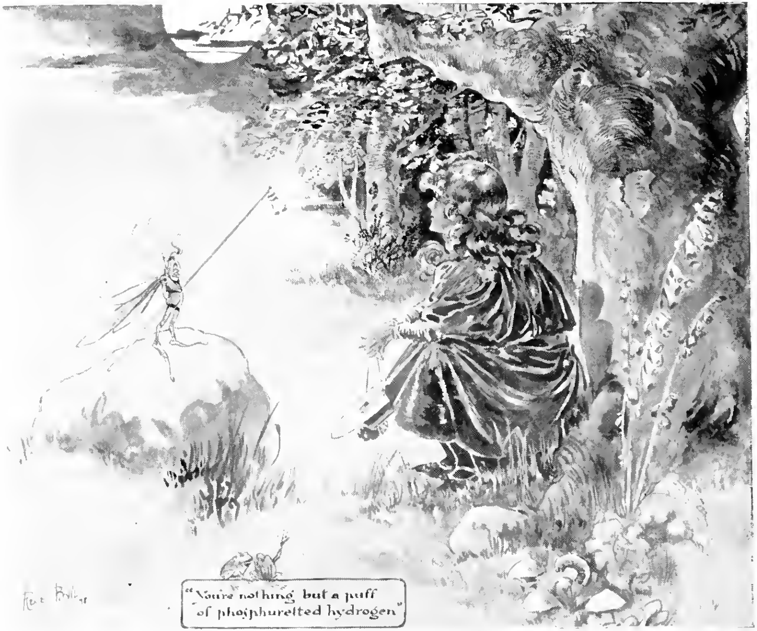
"The man Gridd now descends upon a locality of purgatorial discomfort, situated beyond the limits of our knowledge, though not of our conjecture," declared Dr. Johnson.

"In brief, Gridd goes to grid-iron," flashed a grim shadow in the corner. "Tophet has him, mad-blazing, mad-dancing with flame of unimaginable tints. Basting with pitch and fire. Thunder and bolt above; blackness of Erebus beneath. And so 'good-night' to Gridd."

# THE JACKY-TOAD

HE was sitting upon the skull of a dead horse, thinking of nothing in particular, when out of the great nocturnal silence there came the sound of a human footstep. Whereupon he leapt upright and waved his lantern frantically. This he did because the wanderer was evidently night-foundered and lost upon the moorland, and it seemed probable that, observing the light, he or she would approach it. Now that strange blue flicker of flame rose and fell and danced above a quaking bog—a hideous place where emerald mosses hid the black slime beneath, and where, at the margins of the danger, tussocks and little peat tumuli gave foothold for heather, for cotton grass, and for rushes. "I'm coming!" cried a voice. "I am so glad somebody's found me at last."

Another moment and a small girl felt the sudden uprising of deadly coldness about her feet and heard the devilish hiss and chatter of


"You're nothing but a puff of phosphuretted hydrogen"

"GORMED IF I DIDN'T THINK I'D GOT 'E!"

the quaking-bog as it sucked and shivered and opened its black mouth to swallow her. But she was light as a feather, active as a bird. She struggled back, fell, clutched a stout mound of heather, then another, and so dragged herself out of danger.

"Gormed if I didn't think I'd got 'e!" squeaked a voice at her elbow, and looking round the child saw a tiny monster, four inches high, black as coal, hairy as a spider, more horrible than any nightmare. He peered into her face with eyes like hot coals, and waved his lantern over his head.

"You horrid little cruel wretch!" cried the child. "Don't think I'm a bit frightened of you, because I'm not." Which was perfectly true, for the speaker had a father who knew everything by its name, and the reason for everything, and the cause of everything, and what everything was made of, and why. Therefore the advantage in the present instance lay wholly with her, after she had escaped; because there cannot be any real comparison between a highly-educated little lady of nine years old and an ignorant country bumpkin of a Jacky-Toad, born and bred in a Devon quagmire. And if you never heard of a Jacky-Toad, know that he is one with your Will-o'-the-Wisp, or your Jack-a-Lantern, or your Marsh Galloper, or the *Ignis Fatuus* of the scholar.

"Ban't you afeared?" asked the imp.

"No—not now. You're only a naughty, ugly Will-o'-the-Wisp."

"I be a Jacky-Twoad, I be."

"You may call yourself what you like; you're nothing but a puff of phosphuretted hydrogen, because I've heard my father say so."

"Aw! I ban't very well eddicated myself."

"I should think not! Else you'd know it was a cruel, wicked, heartless thing to play practical jokes on small girls lost in the dark. One more step and I should have been sucked down I don't know where."

"Ess fay! You'd a bin drownded in another minute."

"Well, what did you want to do such a horrid thing for?"

"Blamed if I can tell 'e 'zactly; 'tis my business."

"Then it is a very disgraceful business, and you ought to know better."

"I doan't know nothin' 'tall. I be a li'l' Jacky-Twoad. I awnly comes out the bog of a warm evenin', like this here."

"I never hurt you, did I?"

"Caan't say as you did."

"I never even said an unkind word about you?"

"Not as I've heard tell on."

"Then why were you so wicked?"

The Jacky-Toad had nothing to answer, so changed the subject.

"What might your name be, if I may ax?"

"I'm called Mabel, and I'm spending my holidays on Dartmoor; and, playing hide-and-seek after tea, I got lost. But I live in London, and I'm going back there to-morrow."

"Wheer be that to?"

"Far, far away. There are no greedy shaking-bogs there, and no darkness like this, and no dead bones scattered about, and no wicked Jacky-Toads either."

Mabel, though a clever child, didn't know everything.

"You'm a purty li'l' maid seemin'ly, an' mighty wise tu by the looks of it."

This in itself was flattering, because it is given to but few small girls to be complimented by a genuine Devon Jacky-Toad.

"The thing is to be pretty inside," answered Mabel. "My mamma tells me it doesn't matter—not much—what we look like outside."

"That's a gude job then, for 'tis allowed among Jacky-Twoads in general that I be ugly enough for a show."

"You're wicked inside too; you must be, or you wouldn't have tried to drown a little harmless girl."

"I be sorry," said the Jacky-Toad frankly. "I never looked at the question from your p'int o' view. Conversation do widen the mind amazin'."

"If you're *really* sorry, I'll forgive you; and I should like to help you to be better, if I knew how it could be done."

"Sure I'd be very much obliged to 'e if you'd larn me a thing or two," said the Jacky-Toad humbly.

"You see, I'm going back to London to-morrow, so there won't be much time."

"Damned if I won't come with 'e! Then you can larn me proper," exclaimed the Jacky-Toad.

"You *mustn't* say things like that—it's *wicked.* Where *did* you pick up such words?"

"From the moor-men, when they comed to cut peat in the bog. But 'tis awnly a figger o' speech."

Mabel thought a moment.

"Well, in your case I suppose it is," she said; "because—I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I don't suppose you go *anywhere* in particular when you die, do you?"

"Caan't say, never havin' heard tell," he answered.

So the small girl fixed her mind on a noble resolve, and finally undertook to let the ignorant Jacky-Toad accompany her to town the following day.

Then he showed her a safe road out of that lonesome waste and brought her back to the abodes of men, where everybody was naturally very thankful to see Mabel once more in safety. Of the Jacky-Toad she said nothing, but he wafted himself in at her bedroom window when the house was asleep. He explained that he could travel very easily in a ginger-beer bottle or jam-pot, so Mabel packed him up in a marmalade jar with a glass stopper. This she placed in a cardboard box full of heather, so the Jacky-Toad travelled to London next day in considerable comfort, though with little style.

* * * * *

Mabel kept her scholar in his jar. At night the Jacky-Toad was allowed to come out for instruction, and he sat beside Mabel's bed while she taught him as much as he was capable of learning. He tried hard at first to collect information, but his memory was weak, and he had little or no common-sense. He was, however, sufficiently humble, which is a rare virtue in a fool. He confessed himself to be scarcely better than an idiot, though sometimes he grew more hopeful.

"I do make way," he declared on one occasion, "though I allow 'tis blamed slow."

"Your grammar's too frightful for anything," said Mabel, "but we must be content with one subject at a time, I suppose. You chose geography, so we'll struggle on with that until you've got a smattering. D'you remember what I taught you last night about the Duchy of Baden?"

"Lemme see if I can call it home. Ess! 'Tis like this: 'The Duchy of Baden lies a'most entirely between the Kingdom o' Wurtemberg and the River Rhine. The climate be healthy, but the winters are mighty cold in the Black Forest.' How be that?"

"Fairly right—only you've left out such a lot."

"Shall 'e larn me much more geography?"

"Ever so much—tons more."

"That's ill news, 'cause I doubt if I can hold much more."

"You don't seem very happy at it, certainly," confessed Mabel.

"No nat'ral genius for it like," suggested the Jacky-Toad.

"We must think of a new subject then. Needlework's no good to you, nor yet drawing, that I can see."

"Could 'e teach me a few gude tales 'bout men-folks, or maybe a riddle or two?"

"Certainly not! I've brought you to London to improve you."

"Then why not open the winder an' let me have a bit of a run round Lunnon to larn what sort o' plaace 'tis?"

"No. I'm never allowed out myself after dark, and therefore it can't be a proper thing for a Jacky-Toad. How would you like to learn a little natural science? I don't know much, but my father knows more than any other man in the world. Natural science explains how it is you're only a whiff of phosphuretted hydrogen."

"I guess that's 'bout enough for me to knaw."

"Shall I teach you to dance? But I forgot; you can do that."

"Dance! Aw jimmery! I was born dancin'; I shall die dancin'. No, but I'll teach you if you mind to try. I'll larn 'e the 'Wildfire Gallop'—a butivul thing 'tis sure 'nough as us dances in summer-time under a full mune."

So the Jacky-Toad hung up his lamp and Mabel got out of bed and very soon mastered the "Wildfire Gallop"—the great classical dance of Jacky-Toads all the world over.

"Gormed if I ever seed a pixie do it better!" said her tutor.

"There are no such things as pixies," replied Mabel promptly.

"No pixies! You ban't so clever as I thought 'e, 'pears to me. No pixies! You'll say theer ban't no spriggans, nor elves, nor brownies, nor goblins, nor tankeraboguses, nor efts, nor Jacky-Twoads next!"

"My father has told me there are no pixies—therefore there are none," answered Mabel. "You can hardly suppose that I should take your word before his?"

"Dammy! I've *seed* 'em scores an' scores o' times," began the Jacky-Toad; but Mabel never argued with him, and always punished a bad word instantly. Whenever he swore she put him back into his marmalade jar. This she now did, so he learned no more that night.

On the following evening he apologised as soon as he was let out, and his mistress accepted the expression of regret without comment.

"I've been thinking that a little English poetry might enlarge your mind," she said. "Much of it is very simple and beautiful, and I know a great deal by heart."

"I'll do my best, I promise 'e, but I ban't hopeful."

"Well, Shakespeare would be too difficult, of course; but I happen to know a very lovely poem called 'Excelsior,' by Longfellow. That you might understand; and if you only learned a verse or two it would be something."

She recited the poem to him, and the Jacky-Toad said it was fine talk, and managed to commit one verse to memory, though not without much difficulty. Then Mabel repeated several of the "Ancient and Modern Hymns," and a rhymed alphabet, and some of Lear's Nonsense Verses. The last pleased her pupil much, but she refused to permit him to learn any of them, explaining that knowledge of this description, though an elegant accomplishment, as in her case, would not add lasting lustre to the Jacky-Toad's reputation.

Then some chance utterance reminded him of home, and he sighed and trimmed his lamp, and murmured a vague wish about moonlight and quaking-bogs.

"I believe sometimes you almost want to go back," said Mabel coldly.

"Well, you do keep such a darnation tight hand 'pon me. Home's home, when all's said, if 'tis awnly a li'l' cranny in a bog. Theer ban't no comfort here, nor yet comp'ny, savin' your presence."

"You want to go back to those other wretched Jacky-Toads?"

"Ess fay, an' show 'em all I've larned."

"You've learnt absolutely nothing yet; and I'm not going to let you go back till you know at least the Kings of Israel and the multiplication table up to twelve times twelve, so you needn't think it."

But it is to be regretted that Mabel's noble ambitions were never gratified. Of course, faults existed on both sides. She was exacting and impatient; the Jacky-Toad was obstinate. It is better to rule by love than fear if you are dealing with a Devon Jacky-Toad, but Mabel was too severe. She expected too much; she said hard things, none the pleasanter for being true; and the Jacky-Toad finally grew sullen, and refused to employ even that morsel of brain power which it had pleased Providence to bestow upon him. His health was partly to blame for this. Change of scene, night air, and the humid atmosphere of a quag are essential to the well-being of all Jacky-Toads; and this one languished under imprisonment, lost his temper all too often, and frequently swore in broad Devonshire, merely from the wicked desire to make Mabel angry. Once, when he said pointedly that she evidently had not the gift of teaching, she slapped him and dropped him head-first into his marmalade-jar. Then he turned round, said a thing not to be repeated here, and tried to bite her. Relations were strained henceforward, but though Mabel shed bitter tears over her failure to reach that nobler part of his nature which must not be denied even to a Jacky-Toad, she still had hope, and determined with praiseworthy pluck to conquer in the end.

Chance, however, defeated her resolves, and it happened that the Jacky-Toad's longed-for opportunity to escape came at last. Needless to say he seized it. During a spring cleaning, a maid found the marmalade-jar while Mabel was at school, and, believing it empty, she threw it into the dustbin. From thence it was removed to a rubbish-heap, and a boy, seeing it lying there, immediately broke it with his catapult. Thus the prisoner found himself a free Jacky-Toad, and being happily gifted with that marvellous "homing" instinct so much admired in the carrier pigeon and humble-bee, he immediately rose to a considerable height in the air, dodged the smoke from a factory chimney, and proceeded as the crow flies, or is given credit for flying, to the West of England.

* * * * *

Under a spring moon the nocturnal moor was all alive and awake. The pixies were busy measuring new fairy rings for the coming season; the elves—those "whose little eyes glow, like sparks of fire"—were entertaining the brownies; the Jacky-Toads, having danced the "Wildfire Gallop," sat and rested, and talked politics. Then it happened that their missing colleague formed matter for discussion, and an aged Jacky-Toad, by tacit understanding father of the company, gave it as his opinion that the wanderer had lost himself in fresh running water, which is, of course, death to *Ignes Fatui* all the world over.

"He was a born fule, if you remember," he concluded.

At the same moment a blue light flickered like a shooting-star above their heads, and, with the sound of a small bird alighting, the missing member of that community returned to his friends. Their welcome was, of course, hearty as need be, and from an attitude of absolute indifference one and all assumed the manner of affection, friendship and regard. Now the new-come Jacky-Toad, though his knowledge had appeared but scanty in the presence of his fair mistress, found, after leaving her and upon escaping the radius of her exceeding great erudition, that his own acquirements assumed a more important shape. A little knowledge may go far thus brought into a region where, until its arrival, there is none. The Jacky-Toad returned therefore with a sufficiently high estimate of his intellectual stores.

"Well, dear souls," he said, "here I be again, an' what I've seed and larned you'll never credit, not if I talks to 'e for a month o' Sundays."

The father of the flock, fearing for a position which he merely held by courtesy and through his own natural force of character, now set himself to discount the adventurer's information.

"You be the monkey as have seen the

world—you be," he said; "and what do 'e make o't?"

"A terrible coorious world, and as for Lunnon—well, 'tis somethin' amazin' to be sure. An' what wi' geography, an' nat'ral sciences, an' poetry, an' sich-like wonnerful branches o' larnin', my head's full."

They buzzed admiration, except the venerable Jacky-Toad.

"Let's hear what you do know," he suggested.

"Well, fust you must be told as we'm all made o' gas—the whole boilin' of us. We'm no more'n just a whiff of phosphuretted hydrogen!"

"You'm jokin'!" they cried.

"No fay, solemn truth."

"An' what if 'tis?" asked the old Jacky-Toad abruptly. "Granted—then what? Ban't no gert odds as I can see. Who's better for knawin' it? We've got to be made o' somethin'."

At this reflection the travelled Jacky-Toad was uneasy, and the more so because such an unreasonable manner of regarding the fact gained ground. Nobody—not even a Jacky-Toad—likes much to be confronted with superior knowledge outpoured in a superior manner.

"Ban't no mighty matter when you come to think of it," said somebody; and then the ancient one spoke again.

"Besides, how be we to knaw '*tis* so? Us have awnly got your word for't. That ban't proof. For my paart I'm blamed if I *do* b'lieve it!"

In about half a minute they all agreed with their venerable leader that this information must not be accepted. Then an old friend asked the wanderer concerning his geography, and from a condition of some dismay he plucked up courage.

"Well, I can tell 'e a 'mazing thing in that branch o' larnin'. 'The Duchy o' Baden lies a'most entirely between the Kingdom o' Wurtemberg an' the River Rhine. The climate be healthy, but the winters is cruel sharp in the Black Forest.' What do 'e think o' that?"

They all hummed their admiration, and several shook the geographer by the hand.

"'Tis a noble piece of information, sure enough," said one.

"Ban't that gude-fashioned larnin'?" asked the scholar in triumph. And the ancient cynic answered him:

"Be gormed if *I* sees the use of it! Knawledge ain't nothin' 'less you can put it to a purpose."

There was an awkward pause, then another spoke:

"Come to think o't, theer ban't 'zactly any *use* to it, be theer?"

"All the same, souls, 'tis a purty thing," argued the Jacky-Toad's personal friend.

"But I've got purtier," said the traveller, though in a crestfallen voice. "I'm thinkin' I shan't please 'e, but I'll give 'e a bit o' poetry whether or no."

Then he recited to them the first verse of Longfellow's "Excelsior," to which they listened with patient attention.

> "The shades of night were falling fast,
> As through an Alpine village passed
> A youth, who bore 'mid snow and ice,
> A banner with the strange device,
> Excelsior!"

"Be that all?" said the old Jacky-Toad.

"Ess, 'tis," answered the reciter, immorally concealing the fact that there were eight other verses which he had not been able to learn.

"Well, then, 'tis as silly a bit o' man's twaddle as ever I heard. Doan't 'mount to nothin' so far as I can see."

"'Tis poetry," said the Jacky-Toad feebly.

"What's rhyme wi'out reason? No better'n water wi'out mud. You've bin wastin' your time somethin' shockin'—that's what you've bin doin'. I could 'a taught 'e more in this 'ere bog than what you've got in Lunnon, seemin'ly."

"Is that all you knaw?" asked a very young Jacky-Toad, who had no ambitions of his own, and could therefore afford to be sympathetic.

"Yes—that's all," said the wanderer. Then he turned away his face, and his little eyes blinked and he wept.

"Poor fule," commented the ancient Jacky-Toad; "you never ought to 'a left the quag. What's the gude o' the like o' you gwaine to foreign paarts? Wheer theer's no brains by nature, theer ban't nothin' for larnin' to catch hold upon."

"'Pears to me I did teach more'n I larned, come to think of it," said the crushed Jacky-Toad. "Her what took me to Lunnon got to dance the 'Wildfire Gallop' somethin' butivul 'fore I left her."

"Why, theer it is, then! That's very comfortin' for 'e, for 'tis somethin' to knaw us have done more for our betters than our betters have done for us."

There was consolation in this—of a sort;

and I am glad to leave the Jacky-Toad with a smile on his extremely plain face, because this is the end of the story.

The narrative will be seen to bristle with morals, even as a porcupine with quills. Of these I have removed as many as possible; yet one seems vital to the plot, and must be unwillingly permitted to remain. This indicates, of course, that all knowledge is not useful—if you are a Jacky-Toad.

# A CELESTIAL CHAT

"WELL, old man, how goes it?" said the Comet.

"Still jogging along, old chap," answered the Sun.

"Any news since my last round?"

"Don't think so."

"I suppose you know I've been away thirty-five millions of years?"

"What's that, after all? You look as boyish as ever."

The Comet showed pleasure. He prided himself on his youth, and was wont to dress young, and talk young, and behave young. Many constellations and nebulæ invited to guess at his age, took him for not an hour more than two hundred million years old, whereas, in reality, he was nearly thirty times as much.

"It's the exercise," he said; "nothing like it for keeping one agile and youthful. I've been eighty-three trillion, seventy-six billion, twenty-nine hundred millions of millions of quadrillions of miles since I saw you last. I attribute my health and—ahem!—good looks entirely to regular exercise."

"I wish I could have a run round with you," answered the Sun, "but I can't leave the System. I stroll my modest four hundred to five hundred million miles through space every year; but, of course, it's not enough to do any practical good."

"Lord! what a sedentary life!" said the Comet; don't you find it tell on your liver? With your temperature, too, you ought to make yourself take some reasonable exercise. I'm sure you'd get rid of those spots if you did."

"Ah, it's jolly easy for you free-lances to talk! You have nothing to think of but your own tail. I'm a busy planet."

The Comet did not like this somewhat slighting allusion to his tail.

"As to that, my dear fellow, a tail fifty millions of miles long takes some watching, I can assure you. It isn't all beer and skittles going at the pace I do, and keeping clear of everything and everybody. It wants tact and a cool head, anyway."

"Why, you wouldn't hurt anybody if you hit 'em," said the Sun, rather rudely. "Everybody knows you could pack the whole of your tail into a Gladstone bag, and still leave room for your toothbrush and a change of linen."

"No," admitted the other, "I shouldn't hurt other people, but they might jolly well shatter me. I'm not a robust Comet, for all my apparent physical strength. It's a trying life, and there are dangers. Why, you yourself, though you mean well, always singe my hair and give me a sharp attack of fever every time I pass you. But never mind me and my tail. How prospers it with you? How's the System?"

"Going strong; but sometimes I am inclined to chuck the whole lot of 'em up; they're such little plagues. Yet one can't help feeling a bit proud of the inhabited ones."

"Ah! you've warmed some of them into life since I was last round?"

"Oh, yes. A few have quite interesting little things living on them. Mars, for instance; they are getting fairly advanced there. Saturn has put on frills since you were here. He found a big swarm of asteroids which had lost their way, and now wears them like a collar. Saturn's a regular child of Nature."

"How's Venus? Lovely as ever?"

"Lovely enough, but more bother than all the rest of 'em put together. She'll get into trouble some of these days—there are half-a-dozen Comets after her as it is—no self-respect, you see; so different from Jupiter."

"He was always your favourite."

"No, no, I have no favourites, unless my own little Mercury may so be called. But Jupiter has such a distinguished way with him. No folly, no giddiness. Always the same. A thousand pities he's got such a wretched climate. I'm doing what I can, but I haven't yet been able to get anything to live on Jupiter but frogs, and a few of the lower reptiles."

"How's the Earth?"

"Don't ask me—the black sheep of the System! The ingratitude of that planet! They've got a little dead cinder that circles round them, according to the laws of gravitation; and, would you believe it? they think twice as much of that cinder as they do of me! A fact. They call it the Moon and write poetry to it. The Earth people have, in fact, reached a trying stage. They are growing out of childhood, but still lie far removed from the solidity and reasoning powers proper to an adult. They are funny, too. Here's a bit of

New Humour to take away with you. What d'you think they believed till the last few years?"

"Sure I don't know," said the Comet.

"That I went round them! They thought that they were the centre of the Universe, and that Creation circled round and round them, just in the same way that their little pet cinder, they call the Moon, goes round and round them!"

"Blessed if that isn't the funniest thing I've heard for ten million years!" said the Comet. "I'll make my little corner in Space fairly scream with that!" He was genuinely amused, and shook to such an extent that he gave rise to considerable disturbances on a large scale.

"Look out, old man! you're upsetting my System!" said the Sun.

"Smother your System!" yelled the Comet. "That little pill of mud and water to think itself the centre of all things! Why don't you smash it or frizzle it up?"

"We must be patient. It knows somewhat better now. If it would only be commonly grateful and realise a little of what it owed me, I would overlook the bumptiousness. That's natural to all small things."

"I believe you. For sheer side, not to say impertinence, commend me to shooting-stars. Space is full of them, and they go slogging about in clusters, as if the Universe had been designed for nothing but their especial amusement and convenience. Little cads! They always think it a huge joke to go right through me like a bullet through a piece of paper."

"But they can't hurt you."

"No, not physically; it's the moral disgrace of the thing. One feels so powerless against the little brutes; and satire's thrown away on 'em."

"They get precious small change out of me or my System either," answered the Sun. "I burn them up in billions myself; I light my cigars with 'em. And the Planets—they've all got their own atmospheres; and when a shooting-star gets into an atmosphere, it's done for. You ought to cultivate an atmosphere."

"No time," said the Comet. "In fact, I must be off as it is. Can't stop! Can't stop! Can't stop!"

"Any news in Space?"

"Only that the Milky Way has gone sour. It's to be called the Milky Whey in future!"

The Sun laughed, but not heartily. He had heard the Comet make this same joke on many previous occasions. Every thirty-five million of years he was expected to smile at this paltry jest, and his good-nature was breaking down under the strain.

"Eclipse me, if I'm not fairly sick of that!" said the Sun. "I really do think he might make a new joke. It wasn't too funny the first time he said it; now it's grown simply wearisome and sickening. Next time he comes round I must really make an effort to shame him out of it. There should be lots of other good humour knocking about in a place the size of Space."

Then the tail of the traveller vanished round the corner of one of the signs of the Zodiac, and the Sun resumed his regular occupation, and beamed upon his System as usual.

"He has got a warm heart and no pride, for he doesn't mind what he shines on," thought the Comet, as he followed his lonely and terrific way at the usual rate of progression. "Family cares are all very well, but they do tie a heavenly body down, and frightfully increase his responsibilities. I should never think it quite good enough myself. No System for me! To remember what a light-hearted chap that Sun was in the sweet old days, before he knew he had a System! Now he's as crusty as the Great Bear, and his outbursts of temper are horrible to witness. No, my idea is the best; see Space, and cultivate big ideas and avoid all family responsibilities.

So saying, he took off his hat to a Lady Comet, and the two proceeded arm-in-arm for a few hundred thousand miles. He told her about the Earth and the Sun; and, though a Comet without much sense of humour, she laughed without intermission for thirteen centuries afterwards.

# THE ARCHDEACON AND THE DEINOSAURS

THE Archdeacon brought a neat roll of sermon paper from his pocket.

"I have here a trifle from the Mesozoic Period," he said, and I interrupted—

"My dear Archdeacon, that was thousands of years before man appeared in the world."

"Many millions," replied the Archdeacon cheerfully. "My manuscript deals with a period when Mother Nature herself was an infant in arms. As you know, my hobby is palæontology. My paper, examined scientifically, represents some knowledge of this subject taken in connection with that dangerous thing: a late supper. You see I hide nothing; and I have written the matter out here on sermon paper in order that I might do it the greater justice."

He smoothed his roll of manuscript, adjusted his glasses, and showed an inclination to begin.

So I settled down and listened to his singular story :—

"Of course, in a dream, as at a modern comic play, one must not stop to weigh probabilities and be logical, else the structure in either case tumbles about one's ears and the pleasure of the concern is spoiled. Thus, when I found myself on a fine morning starting for a day's sport and science in the Mesozoic Period, the circumstance caused me little surprise. My black gaiters, I may tell you, were changed into brown ones, on my shoulder rested a Remington rifle, and by my side walked my wife's black tom-cat, Peter. Of course my knowledge of the period led me to note the extremely Mesozoic nature of my surroundings, and I was gratified beyond measure to find myself alive and hearty so far back in the history of this planet. I did not stop to remember that Peter, my Remington rifle, and I myself were all alike unevolved ; that even palæolithic man could not appear for unnumbered centuries ; that his very flint stones were still sponges at the bottom of mighty oceans. Nor did it strike me at first that I was lonely, thus separated from my kind by gulfs of time so awful. On the contrary, I revelled in my environment ; I proved that it was distinctly Jurassic, and I laughed with satisfaction to reflect that I was ahead, by about twelve million years, of every sportsman who had shot big game with a rifle. I was generous, too. It struck me how Cuvier, or Huxley, or Owen, or Tyndall, or Darwin, or Geikie, or Marsh, or Zittel, or Hutchinson, or a thousand other eminent naturalists and palæontologists, would have enjoyed a morning amid the wonders of that period; and I wished they were all there under the protection of me and my Remington, and Peter.

"I stood upon the borders of a lake in a marshy district. The scenery was chiefly composed of volcanoes, for I could note a dozen of them upon the horizon, casting columns of smoke upwards into a cloudy sky. It was a close, thundery day, and occasionally heavy drops of rain fell, though the weather kept fine between the showers. Gigantic tree-ferns grew around me, and in the expanse of bogland along the fringe of the water rose jungles of huge club mosses and clumsy lycopodiaceæ and some coniferæ.

"About the borders of this inland sea insect life swarmed freely. Myriads of gnats, of enormous size and quite seven inches across the wings, danced with giant dragon-flies over the water. Occasionally a ganoid fish rose like a trout and consumed one; which may have been a curious thing for a ganoid fish to do, but I was not critical. These ganoids, by the way, had but a paltry time of it. Fish-lizards, or Ichthyosaurs, chased them hither and thither, devouring thousands on the surface; Plesiosaurs, with necks like swans and lizard heads, grabbed the ganoids too, and Heaven only knows what monsters lay in wait for them in the deep waters when they dived.

"Then a strange thing happened. Suddenly, without any warning, a monstrous boy's kite, with a long tail and wings twenty feet across, came flapping over the palm-tops. It was followed by another, and it struck me, on second thoughts, that they were umbrellas. A discovery of such a nature, even in a dream, caused me some astonishment. I could not instantly understand how such concerns should thus promiscuously whirl about in Mesozoic air, and I wondered who had lost them; but an instant later the truth came to me. These flutterers were no umbrellas at all, merely a brace of particularly fine Pterodactyls. Taking my chance, I raised my trusty Remington and fired. Seeing that I have never been known to handle firearms in my life, you will judge of my satisfaction when I tell you that I managed to wing the largest. It fell headlong, and Peter, with considerable lack of judgment, went to retrieve it. The faithful little beast nearly perished in the attempt. Your winged Pterodactyl, with twenty feet of flapping pinion, hundreds of sharp teeth, and a love for life quite prehistoric in its intensity, is a difficult matter to retrieve. I say unhesitatingly that fossil remains give no idea whatever of the ferocity of these flying dragons. Mortally wounded though he was, the animal showed a strong inclination to kill both me and Peter. I loaded again, therefore, and shot that Pterodactyl in the eye. Whereupon he gathered his vast wings trembling about him, and buried his head in them and so died. I marked the spot that I might pick him up on the way home. What my idea of 'home' may have been I cannot, of course, explain. Perhaps I thought I was putting up at a hydropathic Mesozoic hotel somewhere at hand, 'in a fine volcanic neighbourhood, with splendid sea-bathing, Pterodactyl shooting and lawn-tennis. Terms moderate.'

"The aspect of my first victim set me thinking. It struck me, if creatures of such size flew in the air, that the solid earth might be supporting things a good deal larger. I was, of course, aware that Deinosaurs must be about. I knew that the fine specimens sometimes stood nearly twenty feet high, that many of them walked on their hind legs, and that, though certain varieties confined themselves to vegetable diet, others were carnivorous, and would as soon lunch off an Archdeacon as anything. I trembled, too, for my Peter. I feared at every step he would do something rash and lose his life. For my own part I determined to allow no Quixotic notions of what was and what was not sportsmanlike to interfere with my safety. To show what I mean, I may say that my next bag was a Teleosaurus; and I shot him sleeping by the river. His back was turned, his eyes were shut, so that I was enabled to destroy him without the smallest difficulty. He proved to be a crocodilian trifle about twenty feet long; and he died, as it were, smiling. It struck me that this monster might work up into neat cigar-cases for friends.

"And now I knew, as I proceeded onwards, that big game was at hand. Small Deinosaurs, no larger than kangaroos, hopped freely round me, but I reserved my fire, suspecting that I might need it at any moment. My companion had long since completely lost his nerve. Of him it might be said that he was out of harmony with his environment. He figured there merely as a fragment of nourishment for something bigger than himself, and realising this he presently jumped to my shoulder, evidently determined that, if worse came to worst, we would die together.

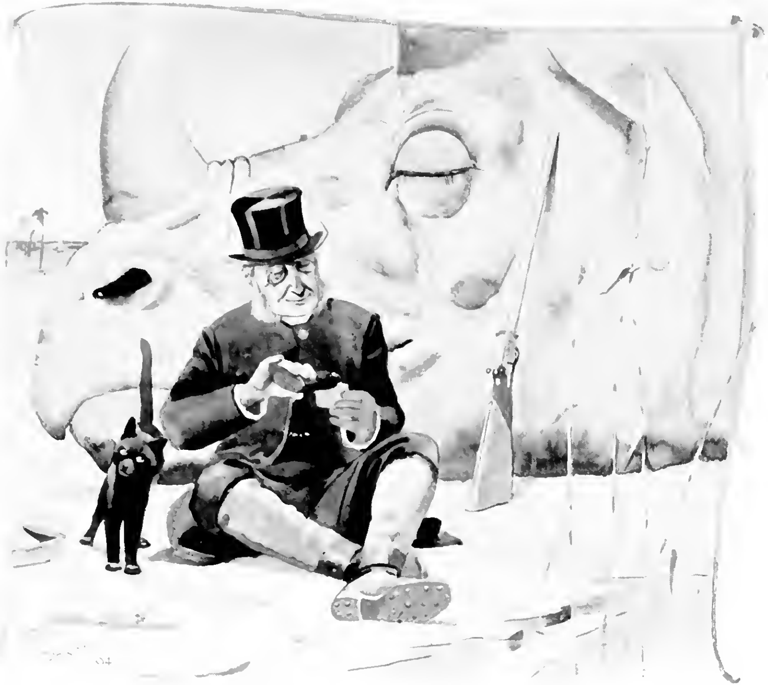
"Every moment increased the size of the fauna. Presently an armoured Deinosaur—Scelidosaurus by name—put his head out of a ten-foot patch of rushes. He had plates and spines on his monstrous back and a hungry look in his saucer-like eye. The beast, fortunately, did not see us, and feeling now that it would not be well to shoot save in the event of necessity, I stopped quietly where I was till the creature went crashing into the water. Then I visited its lair and was able to solve a problem no palæontologist has ever yet decided. I found a Deinosaur's nest with four eggs in it and thereby set a great question at rest for ever. Deinosaurs certainly laid eggs. These in question were froglike in texture, but separate each from the other and somewhat larger than big pumpkins. Having noted so much, I heard the mother Deinosaur returning, and hurriedly withdrew, not caring to risk any difference with a creature twelve feet high, covered with armour-plating and full of maternal instinct.

"Hereabout I may note in passing that my black tom at last found something smaller than himself—a hopping Deinosaur not much bigger than a rat. This he destroyed in triumph and partially ate—feeling the better and braver for doing so.

"Of course, I proposed to shoot one of these 'dragons of the prime' presently. Only I wanted a big specimen, if possible. I was too late for Anchisaurus—a giant whose footprints and tail-marks have been observed in the New Red Sandstone strata—and too early for Claosaurus, whose simple custom it was to eat off the tops of palms and tree-ferns in Cretaceous times; but I knew that those flesh-eating colossi, the Ceratosaurs, might lurk round any corner; I knew they had horns on their foreheads and took twenty feet of ground at a stride; that their footmark habitually covered a square yard of earth. These reflections made me cautious, and even nervous. Then again I remembered your fearsome Stegosaur, who also shone in Jurassic days. He was wont to take the air upon all fours; Nature had provided him with plates and spikes, a massive frame about thirty feet long, and two sets of brains; one in his head, the other in the region of his tail.

"I had a presentiment that Stegosaur must surely be at hand, and presently, coming round a corner, I found my faithful companion, with his back up, almost in the jaws of such a monster. The Stegosaur was apparently using neither his front brains nor those he kept in the rear. He simply blinked at Peter, but did not move or offer to molest him, being a vegetarian. I hesitated about slaying this great beast, and it was well that I reserved my fire, for, not five minutes after he had gone upon his way, I came face to face with another of Nature's primeval experiments, quite one of the most terrific, fantastic and short-tempered Deinosaurs she has ever turned out of her workshop. This was Triceratops—a monster with a head six feet long and no brains at all worth mentioning, but a temper like ten demons. It could not control itself, even in the presence of an Archdeacon. Indeed, it lowered its vast horns and charged me passionately; while I stood my ground and kept wonderfully cool and collected—two things I certainly should not have done outside a vision. I gave Triceratops both barrels. I hit him chiefly because I could not miss him. He filled the entire foreground of that thrilling Mesozoic scene. He dropped five yards from me, uttered ferocious expressions, and passed away without a struggle. It was a great moment, and my success inspired both of us (Peter and me) with renewed confidence. We lunched beside that fallen Triceratops, and I found that the bag slung upon my shoulder contained a flask of very passable Irish whisky, a packet of sandwiches, and some cigars. I remember wondering where those sandwiches came from and who had cut them for me, and what they had been cut off. Maybe they were Deinosaur sandwiches, or Ichthyosaur. I had a tidy pie in my wallet too. It tasted like pigeon, but must have been Pterodactyl. Peter liked this better than the sandwiches.

"Then followed perhaps my most remarkable experience. I was resting awhile after lunch,



"VERY PASSABLE IRISH WHISKEY."

finishing the whisky and smoking a cigar, while the black cat coursed about of his free will, when suddenly the weirdest sound that ever fell on mortal ear saluted mine. I never heard anything distantly approaching it before; I know not how to describe it. The sound was something between the hiss of a serpent and the coo of a dove. The primeval beast responsible for it evidently combined the vocal qualities of bird and reptile. Naturally I marvelled, for birds were still strangers to the world. And yet an element of music in the sound led me to suspect that a creature at least of semi-ornithological nature was making it.

"'Peter,' I said, for he was very excited at the noise, 'we must be in the presence of an Archæopteryx! No other Jurassic concern could make that unutterable burlesque of melody.' And I was right. A moment later I came across an Archæopteryx sitting on a fallen tree stump and singing, or, at least, under the impression that he was doing so. I stood and listened to the first dawnings of bird music; I, who knew what the lark, and the thrush, and the nightingale could produce at their best, gave ear to that cock Archæopteryx warbling according to his limited lights. It was pathetic to see how he enjoyed it himself, and how his hen enjoyed it. He was the very first thing of his kind that Nature had managed; naturally he could conceive of nothing finer than his primitive self and preposterous voice. He gurgled and hissed, and squeaked, and even tried to trill. Then Peter, who recognised in him a true bird, despite the fact that he had claws on his wings and teeth in his mouth, captured that unfortunate Archæopteryx after a tough struggle, and dragged him to me in some joy.

"Anon we walked the sea shore, threading in and out amidst prodigious tortoises and sleeping saurians, some of the latter nearly thirty feet in length. And then a misfortune befell me, and I lost my faithful Peter. The silly beast became too venturesome. Familiarity with Jurassic marvels bred contempt in his feline mind, and he went too near the water. Whereupon a hungry Plesiosaurus popped ten feet of neck out of the waves, and Peter's interest in Mesozoic matters ended. I was extremely sorry. Peter had been, as it were, a link connecting me with the future. He had belonged to my wife, and I could picture her bitter regret at this uncouth termination to his picturesque existence. And then I remembered that I was concerned with a period millions of years before Adam and Eve. This reflection sobered me and made me feel for the first time something lonely and separated from my fellow-men. I knew that I had entered my sixtieth year only a week before, and I felt that it was, humanly speaking, doubtful in the last degree whether I could exist until the dawn of the Christian era. It irritated me also to reflect that I should die twelve millions of years before my wife was born; and what was the good of being an Archdeacon of the Church of England ages and ages prior to the time when 'Britain first, at Heaven's command,' had risen from out the azure main? Two things were transparently clear: there would be no professional work for me, and no salary either, for a considerable number of æons. I distinctly remember worrying about the salary, and also about the unquestionable certainty that I should never see the cathedral again. Why, at the most generous computation, our world had only reached the twentieth verse of the first chapter of the Book of Genesis! Candidly I was discouraged; and, at this moment of depression, I met Brontosaurus Excelsus—almost the largest of the Deinosaurs. He walked on all fours, measured sixty feet, and probably weighed twenty tons. Not that I cared. He passed me by with silent contempt, and I have a recollection of sneering at him, too, as he strode to the water. I said:

"'You are not as big as Atlantosaurus for all your unwieldy bulk. He stands up on his hind legs, too, and walks about like I do, who am the King of Animals, and an Archdeacon!'

"But he paid no attention. I doubt if he even heard me. These vegetable-eaters were all sleepy, lazy, unambitious brutes. 'What,' I said to myself bitterly in my dream, 'is the good of being sixty feet long if you have no brains and no conversation? I would sooner be a tree or a rock than one of these addle-pated monsters. But Nature is still a baby girl, and these are her clumsy playthings and stupid dolls.'

"And then I came upon the spoor of something which took my breath away. I fancied it must be Ceratosaurus, and I knew that he relied upon animal food and feared nothing. His huge footprints left a deep impression in the damp soil, and between them extended a heavy furrow, as though some great plough had passed that way. This seemed to indicate the impression of a vast tail. The creature was doubtless striding about upon its hind legs, according to custom; and from the mangled remains of various lesser monsters which strewed its path, I doubted not that it was lunching as it roamed on its way.

"The clouds gathered more thickly, rain fell in heavy, solitary drops; there was a volcanic smell in the air, and I heard the giant Deinosaur cracking bones round the next corner. My pulse quickened, I looked to my Remington, and then hastened forward with what courage I could command.

"Round that clump of coniferæ was Ceratosaurus. He had just finished a small crocodile, and was looking round for another when he saw me. Never did I behold such a mighty, towering mass of life. His jaws were open, his head was vast, his teeth truly terrific. His yellow goggle eyes were as large as the wheels of a railway-train, his neck was a tower, his body greater than many elephants. Inexperienced as I was, I felt that a meat-eating Deinosaur, of even larger dimensions than any whose fossil bones have up to the present time been discovered, stood before me. As a matter of fact it did not stand for an instant. It approached with gigantic strides and shot its head forward like a snake. It looked about fifty feet high, but scientific and exact measurements were out of the question. Such indeed was the ungovernable haste of the brute that time did not allow of so much as a shorthand note on my cuff. I had just wondered two things; whether he would show any respect for my cloth, and whether, if he did not, my Remington would stop him, when he was upon me. He swayed his head sideways and came on upon his hind legs. His lips he licked with a black tongue—doubtless in anticipation. I fired my rifle at the right moment, but it made no impression, and in a second he was above me as I turned to fly. My cloth certainly had no respect from him, but he put it to a severe test, for, bending over from his massive haunches, he gripped me like a baby between his front talons, and bore me aloft fully twenty-five feet into the air. How my coat-tails and nether garb stood it I shall never know. Even at that supreme moment I marvelled why no stitch had given. The Deinosaur made a loud, guttural hissing, hugged me to his chest, bent his neck down, rolled his prodigious eyes, and drew back the lips from off his teeth. But I could make no movement, for my senses and muscles seemed alike paralysed. His head played over me, his fetid breath was on my cheek, his yellow eyes glared into my face, his hard nose pressed and poked my ribs. And then the power of action returned in some measure. I fought and kicked and shrieked, while as I struggled, the beast's awful hug against my chest relaxed a little and his outline grew dim. But the yellow eye glared on brighter every moment. Then by slow stages I awoke, and the outlines of modern things appeared, and I became conscious of a general disorder, and the ceiling of my bedroom, and other familiar sights. But the yellow eye still glared on. I gasped and panted out of that nightmare grip at last, wet with perspiration, shaking with the terror of the Deinosaur's presence. And dawn was about me and a tumble of bed-clothes, and a conviction that I was nearly standing upon my head, where my feet usually reposed in times of peaceful slumber. But the yellow eye glared on still, and not until I realised that the blazing thing was a big brass knob at my bed-foot did I grasp the facts and find myself back at the beginning of the twentieth century.

"At breakfast on that day Peter begged and implored for a sardine just as usual. But when I said, 'What about that Pterodactyl, old chap?' and 'What was it like inside the Plesiosaurus, old fellow?' he only blinked his eyes and padded with his front paws and purred as usual. Peter is a big tom-cat really, but what struck me about him that morning, after my jaunt amid Mesozoic fauna, was his ridiculously small size."

# THE BILLS

## I

HEAR the postman with the bills—
Little bills!
What a secret misery the sight of them instils!
How they flutter, flutter, flutter
In their envelopes of blue,
While you open them and mutter,
In a whisper or a stutter,
"What the deuce am I to do?"
Thinking where, where, where
Is the money that shall square
Every paltry, petty item, that monotonously fills
Little bills, bills, bills, bills,
Bills, bills, bills?
Ah! those saddening little, maddening little bills!

### II

Read the lengthy household bills—
Awful bills!
Glancing at their totals grim, the brain with horror thrills.
From the East and from the West
How they echo one request:
"A remittance must be sent
Without delay."
Food and coals and clothes and rent—
It is hideous to reflect on what is meant
By Quarter Day.
And, enthroned amidst your cares,
Impecuniosity impertinently stares.
How it chills!
How it kills
All the future, how it fills
With the haunting fear of ills,
Does that pressing and distressing
File of bills, bills, bills—
Those offensive, comprehensive household bills!

### III

There's another sort of bills—
Brazen bills!
Each its diabolic task effectively fulfils,
How all hunger to be paid
In that paper cannonade!
Will the trouble never end?
Still they send and send and send,
Day and night,
In a clamorous appealing to the debtor's scanty purse,
In a wild and greedy grabbing for the starved and shrunken purse;
And you curse, curse, curse,
Sinking sure from bad to worse,
Till a resolute endeavour
Cries, "Now—now flit, or never,
And renounce the unequal fight!"
Oh, the bills, bills, bills—
They are bitter, bitter pills
To digest.
Smiling ghosts of pleasures flown,
Lo! we greet ye with a groan;
Ye will never more return, sweet hours of rest.

We shall have no more repose
From the stunning
And the dunning;
For the monster grows and grows,
Till it shatters iron wills,
Under crushing
And unblushing
Importunity. It fills
With a frantic, maniac anger in the clutches of the bills,
Of the bills,
Of the bills, bills, bills,
Of the screeching and beseeching cloud of bills.

## IV

Comes the threatening of bills!
Cruel bills!
Pictures of a ruined home inspire the writers' quills.
'Tis the last, the sorest strait,
And we shrink before the fate
That is bellowed in the menace of their tone.
Cringing now amongst our friends,
See, the humble prayer ascends
For a loan!

And relations—rich relations—
Will they heed our supplications?
They are stone.
They've no carking, biting, wearing,
Tearing trouble of their own;
No great horror of despairing
Poverty they've ever known.
Are they fathers? Are they mothers?
Have they children, sisters, brothers?—
Have they hearts?
Back the message comes from each.
God! They preach, preach, preach,
Preach
A sermon on our bills,
Purse-proud opulency thrills
With a shudder at the bills,
At the bills,
Saying, "Go, go, go,
Pay the money that you owe.
You are blotted from our wills,
From our wills, wills, wills.
We shall never meet your bills—
Oh dear no, no, no.
Ask the hills, hills, hills
If they'll help you in your woe—
Beg the sea to pay your bills,
Pay your bills, bills, bills."

* * * * *

Now the heart-beat slows and stills,
Lost in wilderness of ills;
Drowned in bills, bills, bills.
Oh! the railing of the bills,
Of the bills, bills, bills;
Oh! the wailing of the bills,
Of the bills, bills, bills;
See them patter on his coffin,
As they fill a wretch's grave
Full of bills, bills, bills—
Cursèd bills!

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