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THE IMPUDENCE OF YOUTH

BOOKS BY WARWICK DEEPING

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THE MAN ON THE WHITE HORSE
SEVEN MEN CAME BACK
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LOVE AMONG THE RUINS
THE MAN WHO WENT BACK
THE DARK HOUSE
I LIVE AGAIN
SLADE
MR. GURNEY AND MR. SLADE
REPRIEVE

THE IMPUDENCE *of* YOUTH

Warwick Deeping

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THE IMPUDENCE OF YOUTH

1

They had climbed one of the deep trackways under the beech trees, a track that was as old as time. The trees were in spring leaf, and green with that strange and luminous greenness that is like light caught and transformed into one of the garments of God. The grey trunks rose out of the chalky soil in which flints lay amid the bronze of last year's leaves. The sky was invisible above the massed canopies, but there was the other blueness of bluebells pouring down the slopes. There was a great stillness here, supreme peace.

The tall woman paused. Her eyes were dreamy and tender, and she was smiling as a woman smiles when she looks at some very beautiful thing, or at a very young child.

"Oh, this England! There is almost a pang in such loveliness."

Her friend, who was dark and more silent, looked up into the greenish light amid the leaves.

"After London, yes."

"What do they call this place?"

"Monk's Wood."

"How utterly right. "Where do we come to? Nowhere, and everywhere?"

"Yatley Heath. But it isn't quite a heath."

"Let's go on."

The hollow way led them to a little plateau on the summit of the chalk ridge, a wild place where bracken was crooking up amid thorns and yews. Grass tracks ran hither and thither, or spread into lagoons of brilliant rabbit-nibbled turf. The old thorns were in flower, and looking like green tents that had been snowed upon.

The smell of them was stronger than the more subtle scent of the bluebells. Here and there, a great tree, beech or oak, raised a dome above the wild tangle. To the north a wood of pines built a barrier of impenetrable gloom. Westwards a grove of birches fluttered their green lace above the silver trunks. The sky was profoundly blue and brilliant with piled up clouds.

Just ahead of them as they reached the edge of the plateau a vast beech, dwarfed as to trunk, trailed its lower branches on the ground. They were in the shadow of the tree, and half concealed by it when the fair woman touched her friend's arm.

"Look!"

Beyond the beech tree and surrounded by flowering thorns lay a little circle of grass. A small, naked, Pan-like creature was dancing there. He had a willow twig in his hands, one end of the twig in his mouth, and his fingers were playing on this mock-pipe. Almost, his head was the head of a faun, black and big for his small body. Near one of the thorn trees his clothes lay in a neat pile, with a pair of very modern shoes set neatly on the summit of the little heap.

The two women stood close together, watching the boy footing it over the turf. He did not see them. He was absorbed in his dancing, in the wild fancy of his small Puckish soul. So, John Keats might have danced on his little short legs, even in fancy, if not among the thorns on Hampstead Heath.

They turned to look into each other's eyes, and each understood the look in the eyes of the other. This was a vision of Greek phantasy, the Spring dance of a wild thing out of the woods. Pan and his flute? Mere mortals should not disturb him, nor should he be seen by them. They drew back step by step and side by side, still watching that little white figure with its dark and faunlike head, brilliant as an ivory cameo set in a case of green velvet. An old thorn offered its shelter and they slid behind it, and so away by a path that flowed into the wilderness.

The tall woman spoke in a whisper as though she had seen a vision.

"Who——?"

"Little John Pope, the village oddity."

"So, he is real?"

"Very. He lives with his aunt who keeps the village shop."

"An orphan?"

"Yes."

"I have never seen anything like it. Quite lovely, and so unself-conscious. But, what on earth does the village make of such a child?"

"It doesn't. Little John Pope does what he pleases."

"They think him nicely mad, perhaps?"

"Hardly that. John, at ten, is top of the village school. Our schoolmaster must be posed. Four more years in which to teach him more than he knows himself."

"That sounds absurd. Surely, such a child ought to—— My dear, I feel as though we had been present at the birth of a genius. Am I being silly?"

"Not at all. I believe his aunt rather thinks as you do. She has plans."

"Can one plan for a child like that?"

Can one plan for genius? Can genius plan for itself? Had Miss Jane Pope been asked that question while she was issuing you a postal order or weighing you out a pound of cheese, her broad, austere and somewhat enigmatic face might have suggested that you should mind your own business. John James had been Miss Pope's business for the last seven years, John and the village shop, and the shop was a means to an end. Miss Pope was one of those large, solid and black-browed women who may appear formidable to the world, but who, having seen the light, follow it with a quiet and implacable patience that leaves the gabblers breathless on life's doorstep.

For, could anything have been more unexpected than John James?

He was unlike any other child, and yet other children did not bully him.

Miss Pope was taking tea, while Florrie, her understudy, looked after the shop and the post office. John James had not appeared for tea, but Jane Pope was not worried by his absence. Her unfussy tranquillity and confidence in the essential orderliness of things was comforting to the soul of John James Pope. On such a day as this she liked to take her tea in the back garden under the old Blenheim Orange. She was a great gardener was Aunt Jane, and her garden was like herself, of a large simplicity.

Miss Pope sat in a basket chair beside her little old round oak table. The tea service was Willow Pattern. Jane Pope, as she crumbled her cake, held in her left hand a little buff-coloured book. It was her P.O. Savings Deposit Book. Not that she was unfamiliar with all its figures. She knew just how much she had put by each year, and what the interest amounted to. She enjoyed poring over the figures like an enthusiast over a seed-catalogue, and secretly gloating over the power it gave her to plant and sow in human soil.

One thousand, three hundred and thirteen pounds, three shillings and three pence.

Gracious, what a lot of threes, The Trinity in excelsis! God the Father, God the Son, and little wee threepence—God the Holy Ghost! Miss Pope did not quite know which member of the Trinity she favoured, but she rather suspected that the Holy Ghost was a very potent influence. He even insinuated himself into a Post Office Savings Book, and spread a luminous joy over two-and-a-half per cent. Thirty-two pounds ten a year, or thereabouts, in interest. And the profit on the shop, after deducting all expenses, public and personal, amounted to about two hundred and seventy pounds. Well, well, well! Yatley had taught John James all that it could teach him in the academic sense. John James should go to Southbourne Grammar School. He could catch a train each morning and evening. And after Southbourne? Miss Pope cut herself a second slice of cake. Yes, after Southbourne all sorts of wonderful things might be possible. A scholarship? Why not?

The savings book was reposing on Miss Pope's stout stomach, and her mouth was full of cake, when a small boy crept stealthily over the grass like some light-footed little faun, and put his hands over Miss Pope's eyes.

"Who's there, auntie?"

"As if I didn't know, you bit of mischief! I've nearly finished tea."

John James withdrew his hands, and skipped round to face his aunt. He saw the little book in her lap. He knew that book so well by sight. Miss Pope picked up the teapot.

"You'll have to drink stewed tea, young man."

John James smiled at her with affectionate shyness.

"I've been dancing on Yatley Heath. I took my clothes off."

His aunt added two lumps of sugar.

"What! Going about naked? Shocking!"

"Why? The Greeks didn't wear clothes, Auntie, when they danced."

"Greeks, indeed! Supposing——"

"But one takes off one's clothes when one bathes in the river."

"That's different."

"How?"

"Well, you're in the water."

"Why shouldn't one be in the sunlight? Besides, there wasn't anybody there."

"I'm glad to hear it. The next thing will be your taking up some of the other children."

"No, I won't, Auntie. I like to dance with myself."

"Well, you sit down and have your tea, young man."

He cocked his head at her.

"You're not shocked, really. You're just pretending."

"Oh, am I? I've got something serious to talk to you about."

There was an old milking-stool by the table, and John James sat down on it with sudden solemnity.

"What's it about, Auntie?"

"I'm going to send you to Southbourne Grammar School."

He sat and stared at her.

"Not to live there, Auntie?"

"Don't you want to?"

"I don't want to leave Yatley, and you."

His aunt cut him a slice of cake.

"You'll always get round people, my lad."

"Oh, no," said the child, "only the ones one wants to get round. We're different, Auntie."

"Bless us, so we are. Well, you'll go in and out by train."

"But won't it cost you an awful lot."

"I can stand it," said Miss Pope, picking up her savings book and fanning herself with it.

2

MISS JANE POPE was picking apples on that September day. Keswick Codlings, great balls of condensed sunlight that were beautiful for baking. Miss Jane Pope liked a baked apple or an apple dumpling, and now that her head was white she was even more apple minded. Miss Pope's mother would have worn a lace cap, but Miss Pope scorned such proofs of feminine surrender to age and convention. Was she not very much a person in the village, a part of the Trinity formed by the Squire and the Parson, though Miss Jane was much more modern in her outlook than either of those gentlemen. The Squire was Old Port, the Parson, Old Testament, but Miss Jane Pope was almost New Psychology, the aunt of a very notable lad, who in educating himself, had carried Miss Pope along with him.

Miss Pope might be picking apples, but her mind was elsewhere, in her ears rather than in her fingers. She was expecting a telegram, and though she stubbornly assured herself that she knew what the message would be, her pride and her affection were in travail. John James was in search of a scholarship at Cambridge, and if brains could win honour, then John James was safe. Miss Pope had become a doubter of things as they were. She had had her old eyes opened to various hypocrisies. England was supposed to be a democratic country, but it was permeated with prerogative and prejudice. Not that Miss Jane Pope believed in democracy. Therefore, she was in the unfortunate position of a woman whose cream had gone sour on her, while the cream of to-morrow was still in the making.

Did brains count in England?

Would those eminent gentlemen who guarded the gates of Learning favour a headpiece that was considerable, and overlook a body that was not? If competition was keen, might not convention choose the blood-horse rather than the shaggy little pony? Appearances were so important, a Rowing Blue more potent than a scholar. Just because Miss Pope was posed by these problems, it may be gathered that she was a very unusual woman, because she was the friend and confidante of a very unusual young man.

Miss Pope had a particularly large apple in her hand, and was meditating upon it as though the golden fruit was somehow symbolical, when the back door opened, and a voice hailed her.

"It's come."

Miss Pope did not run and snatch the telegram from the girl's hand. She placed the apple with deliberation in the basket, and looked up at the tree as though to select the next victim.

"Put it on the table."

She was not going to display haste and flurry in confronting her crisis. When life challenged you, it behoved you to counter it by remaining calm, or by maintaining an appearance of calmness. She waited until the door had closed before carrying her basket of apples to the garden table and exchanging it for the telegram. There was a moment's pause before she opened the envelope. How one swift moment of suspense could make you realise how deeply your affection and your prides and prejudices were involved.

Miss Pope did not need to put on spectacles. She spread the form, and read: "I have it. Love. John."

Miss Pope stood very still for some seconds. In her austere world exultation had been a rare bird, but suddenly it was in full song like a thrush on a May morning. "I have it, I have it, I have it. Love, love, love. John." And Miss Jane Pope laughed, which was unusual, and her laughter was not thrush, but more like a rook's cawing. How like John was his message. She could see that ironic, glittering smile of his, the cool gaiety of his handsome head, and the way he carried it, not cockily, but with a combative confidence. Miss Pope drew a long deep breath. So, the learned world's favour had gone to Head, not Legs. What a pity that John James was short in the leg! As a child his little legs had appeared normal, but something had seemed amiss with the lad's growth-centre. He had gone all to

the head, and his legs had remained almost infantile. Legs were so important in England, the paradise of the game-player.

Miss Pope laid the telegram down on the table. What she would have liked to have done would have been to have posted it up in the shop-window, but that would not have been quite seemly, and John James was not that sort of lad. She stood and stared at the piece of paper. Then, she gathered it, folded it up, and tucked it into her apple-basket.

Miss Jane Pope could not say just when and how the thought came to her. Probably, it had been there in her subconscious for quite a long time, and had popped up suddenly like a ghost at the foot of her bed. She had allowed herself a glass of stout at supper, but whether it was the stout or the news of John's triumph that had caused the secret fear to materialise she could not say. Perhaps, it was a combination of the physical and the mental.

Miss Pope found herself staring at the moonlit blind. She had been picturing John James in a mortar-board and gown. John was a scholar of St. Jude's. John was to receive eighty pounds a year. John was a young gentleman to be waited on, a member of a memorable college, and the Grammar School's particular star.

What if John James should be ashamed of her?

The thought was so poignant that Miss Pope sat up in bed. Her large white face, her white head and white nightdress belonged to a rather frightened old child. She felt cold. Something seemed to have dropped inside her. She was a woman of courage, and not given to moods, but this horrid thought was like the first stab of pain that heralds the presence of some fell disease.

Miss Pope got out of bed, pulled up the blind, and looked at the moon. It was the same old moon, and yet different. There was something sinister and cat-faced about it. The luminary glared at her. Miss Pope gripped her nightdress between her two breasts, and in that moment of doubt and of dismay, dared confession of faith.

"No, he won't be. I tell you he won't be."

Maybe it was perversity or pride that made Miss Pope put on her apron next morning, and go behind the counter. During the last

two years she had ceased from active service, for she had Florrie, and a bright lad, William, to serve, and her part had been played in the little post office where she would sit in austere black behind the brass grill, very much a person. Moreover, she was a heavy woman, and her feet had come to resent too much standing. But this day was to be different, the day of John James' return, and no moral cowardice could be sanctioned. Once again she would be the keeper of a shop, slicing bacon, and cutting up cheese, and passing packets of shag across the counter to labouring men.

"You can take the post office, Florrie."

Miss Pope had passed the great news to Florrie and William, and within an hour it seemed to have travelled all over the village, and though Miss Pope was more respected than loved, quite a number of people came in to congratulate her. They found her behind the counter, the Jane Pope of tradition, aproned, and busy, her large and deliberate hands capable as ever.

The Squire was one of the first visitors.

"Well, Jane, the lad has brought it off, I hear. Congratulations."

Mr. Peter Larcombe was rather like a very vigorous ram togged up in riding breeches and boxcloth leggings, a yellow waistcoat, yellow tie and fleece-coloured coat. Almost, he was the Squire of Musical Comedy, but he was far less stupid than his ram's head suggested. His bulging stone-blue eyes saw many things, especially a pretty face, and scandal had it that at least half-a-dozen of the village children could claim Mr. Larcombe as their sire.

Miss Pope bent her head to him. Her austerity had never had to counter the squire's passion.

"Thank you, sir. It is quite true."

"Wonderful head-piece, that lad. Well, I'll have a bottle of whisky on the strength of it."

"I'll send it up, sir."

Mr. Larcombe winked at her.

"No, you don't. Here and now. I'll borrow a glass."

"As a magistrate you should know, sir. Well, I'll bring in the whisky myself, and perhaps you will go into the garden and honour me by taking a glass."

Mr. Larcombe smacked his leg with his cane.

"Jane, you're coming out these days. Damn it, we'll have to find you a husband."

Miss Pope picked up a knife and began to cut rashers of bacon.

"If you'll excuse me, sir, I prefer—— Florrie, will you please take a bottle of whisky and a syphon and a glass into the garden."

"Come on, Jane, join me in drinking the lad's health."

"Thank you, sir, but I must not leave the shop."

The Squire had his whisky and five minutes' meditation. He was something of a humanist and a rustic philosopher, and if he kept his bluffness for the village, he could and did divine reactions that were more subtle. Great woman, Miss Pope, in her own particular way; never had been the sort of wench whom you persuaded to share a haycock. Rather on her dignity too on this particular morning. Well, if that funny little fellow was something of a genius, Miss Pope had planted the ladder, and ladders were apt to be precarious perches. John James might climb it, and then kick it down when he was up on the roof. But would he? That would be a cad's gesture, and though Mr. Larcombe had been the village Juan, there was nothing mean in his make-up.

Having drunk his whisky, he passed out again through the shop. He raised his hat to Miss Pope.

"You've every right to be a proud woman, Jane."

"I hope so, sir."

"And if I were John James I should be damned proud of you."

He passed out, and Miss Pope heaved a large and profound sigh.

Regular customers came in, women of the village, and as Miss Pope would have described it, clucked or giggled at her. She did not take their felicitations very seriously, knowing that when they were out of the shop they might share confidences that were less kindly. Miss Jane had detected surprise on one or two of the faces, especially so upon the narrow and malicious countenance of Miss Euphemia Lardner. Miss Lardner's oblique eyes had leered at her. "What, behind the counter! I wonder why?" and Miss Lardner had gone away with two reels of cotton and certain reflections that had secret venom in them. Was Miss Pope playing the snob about snobbery? Young John James was, in Miss Lardner's opinion, a disgustingly conceited young man. Miss Jane Pope had better be careful; ambitious young men did not favour aprons. Or, was it true that Miss Jane Pope had a secret authority over her supposed nephew. Young John was an orphan, was he? His origin had been provok-

ingly mysterious, and Miss Lardner was inclined to believe that the boy was no orphan, but the product of a concealed indiscretion on the part of his hypothetical aunt.

About half past eleven the rector sidled in, long, pallid and hirsute, like a melancholy Christ. Ethics appeared to have no joy for the Rev. Matthew Cock. His name belied him; for he was no chanticleer, but the father of six unmarried daughters, and the husband of a lady who wore the trousers. It was Mrs. Cock who ran the parish, and preached everywhere, save the pulpit. The vulgar asserted that poor Mr. Cock had gone into moult a year after the marriage ceremony, and had never recovered either his voice or his feathers.

Mr. Cock stood rather helplessly in front of the counter. He had been so snubbed by the seven members of the other sex with whom he lived that there were occasions when he became completely mute. In his hairiness and his melancholy he reminded Miss Pope of a tired old horse hanging its head over a gate.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

Mr. Cock looked startled. A direct question always appeared to shake him out of deep brooding and a consciousness of miserable sin.

"I'm out of tobacco, Miss Pope."

Miss Jane knew his particular brand. He had smoked it for years, and report had it that he was not allowed to smoke in the rectory, but had to retire to the greenhouse or the stable. She reached for a packet. Mr. Cock took it, fumbled, brought out four pennies and a halfpenny, and a characteristic and inopportune remark.

"I am very glad to hear of your nephew's success. Ah, hum, a most surprising career before him. He will come back to us quite the young gentleman."

If Mr. Cock could say the wrong thing, he said it, and with a mild innocence that may have explained the family scorn. Miss Pope, accepting his coppers, appeared to grow taller and more formidable behind her counter.

"He will come back what he has always been, a scholar."

Mr. Cock blinked. He felt that somehow he had been reproved. He was forever being reproved, and his poor old stupid soul never grew the wiser.

Yatley had no railway station. You walked or drove to Medhurst if you were travelling to Southbourne or London. J. J. Pope, arriving at Medhurst by the 2.15, set out on the three-mile walk to Yatley, carrying a small black Gladstone bag which looked as though it might soon be delivered of a number of baby bags, all of them black. J. J. Pope wore a black jacket, a bowler hat, and pepper and salt trousers. So short were his little legs that the bag he carried seemed to slide along less than a foot from the ground.

He took the familiar short cuts, over stiles and along field paths, and the way was as familiar to him as his own separative self. Day in, day out, in bleak disappointing springs, variable summers, and sodden winters he had followed this path to and fro on his way to or home from Southbourne Grammar School. The Forest Ridge lay before him spired and domed with trees, and it had to be climbed before Yatley was seen in its sheltered valley.

He came down into Yatley village by the steep path under the beech trees by the church. It had been his favourite track, for it brought him suddenly and sharply into the village close to the Green and Miss Pope's shop, and if he were in a mood to avoid the obvious both in the flesh and the spirit, and Yatley was full of such obviousness, this shaded path smuggled him past humanity. J.J. was in such a mood. His return to Yatley might have been cocky and triumphant; in fact, it was secretive and serious.

Miss Pope was weighing out an ounce of shag for old Peters the sexton. She happened to glance at the doorway; it was open and empty. A moment later, just as she was passing the paper of tobacco to old Peters, she looked again, and John James was there, suddenly and surprisingly so, like a picture flashed upon a screen. He stood looking in, holding his bag. He seemed to be sensing all the familiar outlines and objects, and savouring the smells that had been his from boyhood, cheese, bacon, tea, butter, onions, shoe-leather. Old Peters, having put four pennies on the counter, turned and saw him. Old Peters grinned; he was both a servile and a surly old man.

"Why, if it be'nt young John come back a scholar!"

John James gazed at the old man as though he saw in him something sinister and symbolical. It was a strange, soul-revealing stare. Then he gave the faintest of nods, walked past the sexton, that

digger of graves, and leaning over the counter put up a face that was almost a child's face to his aunt.

She kissed him. Old Peters had paused by the door, puzzled and vaguely hostile. Unfriendly young tyke, John James, grown a bit above himself with all this book-learning. Those two seemed to be waiting for him to remove his shadow from the floor. Florrie, behind the brass grill, was staring and sucking a pencil.

Florrie saw J.J. kiss his aunt.

"Thank you, my dear."

He was looking at her white head.

"For what?"

"Everything. The old woman is proud to-day."

How some of his boy-moods had puzzled her, his sensitive shrinkings and nauseas, his puckish perversities, his peculiar and ridiculous terrors! Strange, shy, fastidious creatures, some children. It was useless to scold, or preach, or pull a long face over some fantastic fancy. John James had had a horror of fat and of women with red hair. Now why? Miss Pope had found life breaking down under the law of causation. There was something more whimsical and mysterious about it. Two and two did not always make four. That Miss Jane Pope should have made such a discovery, marked her as a remarkable woman. And here was John James hesitant behind her chair, and not wanting to be looked at for the moment, just like the child who had been hurt and perplexed by some stupid or cruel act.

They had retired to the garden. J.J. came round the table and stood in front of her. She glanced up at him for a second, and then let her eyes drop to her work. John James was staring over the top of her head like a young man looking into the future. Or was it into the past? She knew that look so well, a narrowing of the eyes, a kind of darkening of the whole face as though a cloud covered his inner consciousness, faint lines of stress about the mouth and on the forehead. Miss Pope had grown very wise as to such moods and manifestations. Her love was not blind. It had learned to wait in silence upon a silence that questioned and calculated and divined. Life could be a sort of jig-saw puzzle, and J.J. was trying to get some of the pieces identified and placed.

"Feel like talking, Auntie?"

"I feel like listening, my dear."

Oh, wise woman! J.J. gave her a look of profound faith and affection. He sat down on the grass, with his back to the trunk of the apple tree; it had been a favourite place of his as a small boy, and the slope of the tree's trunk took both your back and your head.

"Ever visited one of the seats of learning, Auntie?"

"No, my dear."

"Wonder how you would react? My first night there. A sort of dream. Gothic mysteries, and all that. Tennyson's immemorial elms, willows weeping by the river. A sleepiness, a peace, the suggestion of profound wisdom. Sounds quite lyrical!"

She had taken her knitting with her and she glanced from her needles to his face. She knew this mood of mockery.

"Were you frightened, my dear?"

He gave a quick frown. Frightened! Now, how did she know that?

"Yes, I was. Next day. I felt rather like an anonymous ant crawling about that great court. Besides——"

"Besides, what, my dear?"

"My clothes were all wrong and my hair and my cap. That's not your responsibility, Auntie."

"Well, that's easily put right."

"Is it? Should it be put right? There are the clothes one wears inside one, as well as the outer togs."

Her needles clicked away steadily.

"Different, my dear?"

"Yes. Non-conformity, horrid word!"

He put his head back and laughed. His little legs were drawn up, and his hands clasped round them.

"You see, I shan't play games. I shall just be a little swat. Maybe I shan't learn to crease my trousers and pull my cap well forward. Funny how these things seem to matter. I didn't foresee them until I found myself with those other fellows who were up for scholarships. Southbourne isn't Eton, Winchester, or Repton. Atmosphere, Auntie, the polish of a particular convention."

She was silent for a moment, and then she looked at him with a curious steadfastness.

"Afraid, my dear?"

His head gave a little toss.

"Yes and no. It's not nice to be a sort of foreign body in any community."

"Need you be?"

"I don't quite know yet. I'm not going to shirk things. I shall just laugh. Even if I get ragged they shan't get more than a smile from me."

Miss Pope nodded.

"Yes, go on smiling, my dear. And don't be bitter. The world can't get at you if you smile in its face. But, after all, you got on with the lads and children here."

"Different, Auntie."

"How?"

"Oh, well, we've grown up together, and maybe I have been just the village oddity. I have the same smell. But these class feelings. I don't think one realises how strong they are until you find fellows looking at you as though you were a Hottentot."

"Do they?"

"Some. Not all. I do count on making a few friends, fellows who are more head than leg. But I have made up my mind to it. To most of these men I shall be an outsider."

Miss Pope laid her knitting on the table.

"So was Christ, my dear. So was Napoleon, and dear old Cobbett. So was your great man Darwin, so far as the bishops were concerned."

J.J. looked at her whimsically, and then jumped up and kissed her on the forehead.

"Well, we'll laugh together over it all, you and I."

"And the laugh will be all yours, my dear, when you are Professor Pope, or something."

"Doubt whether I shall ever be that. I'm too much of a *Mayflower* person."

3

THE master looked out of his window.

As an admirer of Dante he saw the Great Court as a miniature replica of Hades, filled with tormented shadows and lit by spurts of fire and little tongues of flame. It howled, it shouted, it sang; it blew horns and hammered teatrays, and the discord was immense. The Master stroked his Mosaic beard and smiled, though the sacred turf was being desecrated. Did flowers of flame burn the feet of those who walked in the Elysian Fields? But this was a happy and a hilarious crowd, part of it not a little drunk, for the occasion was splendid and singular. The college's first May boat had gone head of the river, removing from that distinguished place that very bumptious college, Tudor Hall. The Master of St. Jude's did not love the Master of Tudor Hall. Both of them were eminent classicists, and Tudor Hall had dared to criticise St. Jude's monumental work upon Plato. Surely, there were occasions when it was pleasant to behold the head of John the Baptist served upon a charger?

Another figure joined the Master in the oriel, the neat, serene, pragmatical mate of the Head who remembered when he forgot. The great man might be as wise as Moses, but he could be colossally absent-minded, or pretend to be so. He could ape a bland and childlike innocence, and ask idiotic questions, but there was a lovely naughtiness in his *naïveté*.

"The stars look down, my dear, on the Greeks sacking Troy. Why did you not ask Jeudwine to dinner?"

His wife slipped a hand under his arm.

"Would you gloat over poor Hector?"

"No, but I might over a swollen head that was exploded. Caught them in the Long Reach, I understand. How many years have they been head?"

"Seven, I think."

"Quite biblical, my dear! Naughty, naughty, but I did want to see Jeudwine bumped before my descent into Hades."

His wife smiled up at him in the oriel where the coloured escutcheons gathered some of the light from the pyrotechnic fireflies in the court.

"Yes, and you would be the first to ——"

"Oh, should I! I don't like academic bounders. My dear, what is a bounder? Define the creature."

"A man who wears a black coat with a red tie and brown boots."

"Naughty, naughty! Do you know what I should like to do?"

"I never know exactly what ——"

"Now, now, am I so incalculable as all that? I should like to go out and ring our dinner-bell, and let off one small squib."

A bump-supper may produce joy and horse-play of varying intensities, and the great court was full of healthy exultation. Gains, the rowing blue, might be drunk, but that was his privilege, and he could be drunk with dignity. If the Hon. Selby Lowndes, the first boat's stroke, crawled about on the grass, and implored someone to milk him, that was harmless cow-play. But in such a crowd, especially when the more wholesome members are drifting off to bed, there are the elementals who make mischief. A victim must be offered up. One, named Crewdson, a third year man with lascivious eyes, and the profile of a goat, was the leader of a clique drawn from a particular school which was suffering from an unpleasant reputation.

"Say, you chaps, anyone seen the Tadpole?"

No one had seen J. J. Pope, and the inference was obvious. A little swat who could not join in celebrating his college's triumph needed educating. Moreover, J. J. Pope had come from nowhere out of nothing; he wore the clothes of a shop-assistant, played no games, was rarely seen in hall, and was supposed to live on apples and bread and cheese. Also, J. J. Pope worked much too assiduously; he pos-

sessed that absurd passion for gathering knowledge which is an offence to a certain sort of Englishman.

"Gentlemen," said Crewdson, "I think a lesson in deportment is indicated."

Crewdson spoke with a supercilious lisp, but he could be crisp and sardonic when in liquor.

"No sense of obligation, gentlemen, no loyalty to this great institution. Sits and swats on an occasion such as this. Regard, I beseech you, this noble court, this splendid fountain, our Hall, our Chapel, our immemorial gateway. The Tudor Rose, gentlemen, shades of the Great Henry. Beef, beer, and brothels! What shall we do about it?"

A voice said: "Let's have the little squit out and duck him."

Crewdson, standing on the steps of the fountain, raised his mortarboard to the voice.

"Sir, I salute you. A sage has spoken. The genius Tadpole is bred in water. Even when it becomes a frog, it is no more than a frog. Let us proceed to Sputum Court, and collect the specimen."

J. J. Pope kept in a room of the top floor of that dismal, mock-Gothic building. There was no spaciousness and splendour here. His windows faced the north, and received no sunlight. J. J. Pope was working. He had sported his oak, and was sitting at a table under the narrow, mullioned window across which old red serge curtains had been drawn. He had a book propped up before him, and he was making notes as he read.

The world knew him as a very little man, not more than five feet two in height, with a large head and ridiculous legs. He was dark to swarthiness, with rebellious hair that swept back from his big round forehead like an insurgent and intelligent wave. His mouth was the mouth of a man who suffered almost ascetic self-restraints, yet, it was not a bitter mouth. His very deep set eyes were happy, if the eyes of a searcher after truth are ever happy. His little legs were tucked away under his chair. The hand which held the pencil was narrow and fragile, and not made for coarse labour or for games. It was an artist's hand, and he worked with the cuff of his coat turned up, not because the cloth was frayed, but because he had a peculiar dislike of anything constricting or rubbing against his wrists.

At the moment he was working upon abstruse chemical formulae,

and bringing to them that imagination with which genius lights up the implications of a problem. At the end of his second year J. J. Pope was no mere indefatigable scholar, but a young man to whom the great could delegate research, and to whom they could talk as an equal. Half way through his university career he could have taken a first in the Science Tripos far more easily than a third year man could have secured a pass. He had jotted down some figures in his notebook and had raised his head to gaze at and beyond the shabby red curtains when he heard those noisy voices on the stairs.

His face sharpened; his eyes narrowed and lost their meditative serenity. He turned his head to listen. His little legs hooked themselves almost convulsively round the legs of the chair. A spasm of fear gripped him. He knew the possible significance of those sounds, and had suffered on other occasions from such invasions, smashed furniture and secret humiliation. He had come to believe that he had lived down the dislike that certain young gentlemen felt for him. Why was he hated? Because he was singular, because of his indefatigable urge to know, because he wore odd clothes, played no games, and was not a social creature? Well, did it matter?

Crewdson & Co. were at the outer door, hammering on it and shouting.

"Hallo, Pope, open up."

"Is the little swat in?"

"Open up, Jerry Pope."

J.J. sat very still, his fingers still holding the pencil. Should he lie low and pretend to be out? But even if he shirked the issue, they might break in and smash up his furniture. It was poor stuff, but his own.

"I can see a light under the door."

"Pope, you'd better open up."

He recognised the voice of Crewdson. His head gave a jerk. Courage! There was a mounting pride in him that blazed with sudden scorn and fierceness. But one should not show anger, only a cool and smiling indifference. He would face it out, and he would not forget. He had many such things to remember.

The keeping-room door was closed. Deliberately, and head high he went and opened the dor and stepped into the little lobby. His

stomach might contract with an animal's primordial dread of its enemies, but his head was clear.

"What do you want with me?"

"Open up, Pope, and we'll tell you."

There was a little smile on his face as he turned the key and stepped back quickly into the room. He preferred to face the crowd there, head up, back to the wall. They might be many, and stronger than he was, but he had a tongue and would use it. He was not going to cringe to them, or seek to placate prejudice.

The dozen or so young men surged into the room like a football scrum breaking up. They filled it. Pope stood with his back to the fireplace, his hands in his pockets. There was hardly a yard between him and that bunch of faces, but, for the moment the space between them held.

"Well, what do you want with me, gentlemen?"

He smiled, but there was irony in the one word. Gentlemen! It was Crewdson who answered him.

"Why weren't you out in the Great Court?"

Pope glanced towards his table.

"Working. Is that a crime, Crewdson?"

"You little squit, don't you understand?"

Pope smiled in his face.

"Have I neglected my duty? Isn't it possible, Crewdson, for a brain to bring honour, as well as a rowing man's hands? And you don't row, I believe."

He could pose them with his quick tongue and the flash of his temperament, and the coarser creature, when thwarted in the battle of wits, reverts to crude violence. Crewdson, with a sneer on his Capricorn face, turned to his clique.

"No sense of decency. What shall we do with the little swat?"

"Duck him," said a voice from the background.

"Had a bath, Pope, recently? You don't do it, do you?"

Pope looked Crewdson straight in the face.

"There are other sorts of dirtinesses, Crewdson."

"Oh, are there! Well, you've got a head like a Bath bun. Swollen, what! Go and have a look, Kernott. See if it does keep a bath."

Kernott and another lad went to explore the bedroom.

"No bath, sir."

"I thought tadpoles liked cold water."

"Well, we can wash him in the fountain. Better take his breeches off, you fellows."

Pope did not attempt to resist. He smiled and was silent. Crewdson and Kernott caught him by the arms, swung him to the floor and held him there while two other men removed his trousers.

"Gosh, he's wearing pants!"

"Pants in May, you stuffy little beast!"

"Remove them," said Crewdson.

They frog-marched him down the stairs. The blood ran to his head; his shoulders hurt, but he neither spoke nor struggled. A kind of fierce gaiety sustained him. Some day he would be revenged upon the Crewdson world, or he would be so remote from it that it would be no more than a forgotten cesspit. His courage transcended the crisis. At the Great Gate a porter was on duty, but he made no attempt to intervene. These young gentlemen were merely honouring a tradition. The college had gone head of the river, and hilarious things might be expected to happen. Moreover, the porter was tired and sleepy, and his feet were sore; he wanted to take off his boots and get to bed.

The great court had almost emptied itself. The last cracker had skipped about the grass, and youth, having exhausted itself, was becoming conscious of reaction. The procession proceeded across the grass to the fountain. There were beds of wallflowers about it, and they suffered from youth's trampling feet.

"Now then, one, two, three, all together, heave."

J. J. Pope's body was swung like a sack. His chin and knees just grazed the edge of the basin. The lads let go, and the victim struck the water with a solid splash.

The little crowd cheered.

"That was a good souse."

"Hallo, Tad, how's the water-weed?"

They watched him emerge and stand with the wet kilt of a shirt sticking to his thighs. He seemed to be smiling at them. They saw his white teeth, but not a word did he utter.

"Better clear off now," said someone, in an undertone.

Maybe, an anti-climax mocked them, and that there were mem-

bers of the gang who would become conscious of secret shame. Nothing can be more damning than silence.

"Nighty-night, Tad. Better run home and get dry."

As they drifted away, breaking into groups of twos and threes, their voices sounded less loud and confident. They had ducked J. J. Pope, but they had failed to make him flinch or squeal.

John James Pope sat on the edge of the great stone basin and shivered. The tail of his shirt trailed in the water, but it was his body that shivered, not his spirit. The air about the fountain could be fragrant with the scent of wallflowers when England's dastardly spring was not all north-east wind and grey bloom. In the darkness of this warmish night J.J. fancied that he could smell the flowers, and the scent of them was to become a memory associated with his eternal combat with a Crewdson world. He did not wish to forget it, the stars, the great grey court, the coldness of the water, the scent of the flowers, the kind of shivering exultation that filled him. He had outfaced these fools. They had not extracted a squeak from him.

The master, meanwhile, had been standing at his window. He was supposed to be short of sight, but he saw many things that he was not expected to see. He stroked his Mosaic beard and was challenged by the occasion. All that he said to his wife was: "There is someone out there, my dear, whom I think I ought to interview."

This large and stately figure crossed the sacred grass to the fountain. J. J. Pope had seen the master's door open, and if he still shivered, the imminent interview filled him with a feeling of curious exhilaration. What would Academic Dignity have to say upon the subject of his outrageous nudity?

The master paused and stroked his beard.

"May I ask who it is? In this light my sight is a little inadequate."

"Pope, sir."

"Ah, Mr. Pope. It seems that a little horse-play has been in progress. Can you explain?"

"Easily, sir. I'm afraid I did not get drunk and excited because our first boat——"

The master interrupted him.

"Mr. Pope, I am sorry that this has happened. I will admit that

in this young and rather physical world, those who play no games and work with great assiduity are apt to be unpopular, but ——"

This time J. J. Pope interrupted the master.

"I admit that, sir. I'm afraid I am too separative a creature and must accept the consequences of my sin."

"You are not feeling bitter, Mr. Pope?"

"No, sir. Stimulated. It may seem strange to you, but to be unpopular with certain persons may be essential, if —— No, I do not wish to give any names."

"That is magnanimous of you, Mr. Pope. But, forgive me, you must be very cold. Honour me by coming into the Lodge and drinking a whisky, and borrowing a pair of my trousers. May I say that I am one of those, and there are many others, who appreciate your assiduity. But, Mr. Pope, even scholars and philosophers must cultivate social cunning. Please come with me."

Pope hesitated for a second or two; then, he slipped off the stone basin and planted his feet among the wallflowers.

"Thank you, sir."

"Mr. Pope, your name is almost symbolical. Remember how some reputations live when the braying mob is dust."

The great man and the little man crossed the sacred turf, and the stars looked down upon John James Pope's shirt-tail and naked legs. The master was confronting the immediate problem. This nudity of body and soul had to be both protected and comforted. The master opened his door and then pointed J. J. Pope to a chair.

"One moment, Mr. Pope. Sit there, or perhaps you would be warmer standing."

He crossed the hall, glanced into the particular room and saw that it was empty, but that a fire was laid in the grate. The master's Mary exercised foresight in the providing of all possible comforts, and these Gothic buildings could be cold even in June.

"You will find a box of matches on the mantelpiece, Mr. Pope. Light the fire. And excuse me for a moment."

The master mounted the stairs while J.J. crept into the room, and finding the matches, knelt down and lit the fire. Oh, blessed flames, oh, fatherly and human kindness! On the landing above the master met his wife.

"Refrain from going downstairs, my dear. Someone has had a ducking. Yes, organic savagery. I will collect dry clothes."

"Who is it, Montague?"

"Poor little Pope. So like his namesake."

The master went and rummaged in his dressing-room, and marched downstairs with a pair of trousers, an old white sweater, a flannel shirt and a pair of shoes. In his preoccupation he forgot such essentials as braces. J. J. Pope was kneeling in front of the fire, spreading his hands to it, and trying not to shiver. The master closed the door and deposited the clothes in an armchair.

"Change, Mr. Pope, while I find some hot water for a whisky."

He left the little man alone, closing the door carefully after him. He called up the stairs.

"Mary, my dear, do you think you can find me a glass of hot water?"

J. J. Pope was busy on the hearthrug, stripping off his wet coat, shirt and vest. He grabbed the great man's trousers and stepped into them. They were monstrous bags, ascending nearly to his chin, yet leaving concertina-folds about his feet. How was he to sustain them? He let them fall, and slipped into shirt and sweater, and they descended well below his knees. He lugged up the trousers, and tucked the upper garments into them, and was holding up the bags and looking lost when the master returned.

"Bless my soul, Pope, but I have forgotten the most urgent necessity!"

"If I could have a belt, sir."

"Let us improvise. Take that antimacassar and rope it around you. I am afraid I am something of a Behemoth. Now, a little whisky."

The master walked to the sideboard and took a bottle from the tantalus. He poured a good dollop of spirit into the hot water while J. J. Pope swathed the antimacassar about his middle. It looked like some prodigious Oriental sash. The master approached him with the steaming glass.

"Drink that down, Mr. Pope. I think you had better stay in bed to-morrow."

Pope's hand shook a little with emotion and with cold.

"I shall have to, sir. That is my only suit."

The master fondled his beard.

"Is that so? Well, Mr. Pope, I will have these clothes put before the fire. They shall be brought to your room early in the morning. You can return those garments at your leisure."

Pope was sipping the whisky. It was a new drink to him, and it warmed other things than his stomach.

"You have been very kind to me, sir."

"Oh, no, Mr. Pope, just human. By the way, I breakfast at nine. I shall be glad if you will breakfast with me."

"If my clothes are dry, sir, I——"

"I will see that they are dry. How is the whisky?"

"Excellent, sir."

"Drink it down, my dear lad. Let it warm up your philosophy. Then I should run along and get to bed. By the way, who is on duty at the Great Gate?"

"I think it is Robinson, sir."

"Please tell Robinson as you go out that I wish to see him."

J. J. Pope swallowed the last of the whisky. He had ceased to shiver.

"Is it the names, sir, you want from Robinson?"

Master and undergrad looked at each other steadfastly.

"I admit that I had that in mind, Mr. Pope."

"May I ask you a favour, sir?"

"Most certainly."

"May they remain anonymous, sir?"

"That is generous of you, Mr. Pope."

J. J. Pope put his glass down on the table. His feud was his own and he would cherish it, but he did not tell the master so.

4

JOHN JAMES POPE, sitting at breakfast in that stately room, was very conscious of an atmosphere of sympathy. Fine, courteous creatures, these. But sympathy! How near was it to pity? For, in J. J. Pope the faintest breath of pity blew his secret anger into flame. He had far more courage in his small body than had most of these physical young men, a quality of courage that might appear insolent and bare-faced to those of little understanding. He had marched through the Great Gate that morning, carelessly carrying those enormous trousers, sweater and slippers bound about with the master's antimacassar, and under the eyes of Sykes the head porter. Sykes considered himself a very important person. His top hat had a perpetual and superlative polish. He had eyed J. J. Pope's bundle with invisible scorn, and he had not wished Mr. Pope good morning.

J.J. had remedied the omission.

"Good morning, Sykes."

"Oh, good morning, sir."

Breakfast with the master and his wife could be a dreadful meal to those who were self-consciously conscious of the occasion, for, though Mrs. Mary had the serenest of blue eyes she was "Blue," and almost as noted a classicist as her husband. Nor did the young world understand the great man's supreme naturalness. He appeared odd and baffling to the conventional just because he was so lucidly natural. His air of transcendental innocence reduced the little clever people to baffled voicelessness. What could you say to a great scholar who appeared to be ignorant of the subtleties of slang, and who, like a child, might ask you to explain Rahab's profession and the impli-

cations of the genus "Cad." Why, cad? Well, if a man did not know what a cad was, how could you converse with him?

But to J. J. Pope the master was Plato to Galen. He did not quote Theocritus, nor did his wife mention Pythagoras. The master could say, and did say "In Natural Science, Pope, I am as a child unborn. I can speak of protoplasm. I have read Darwin. But just what are the implications of chemical biology as it concerns the cell?" What a subject to broach over bacon and eggs at breakfast, and how did the great man know that the exploration of the cell, its microscopic structure and its chemistry was J. J. Pope's passion?

"The significance is infinite, sir."

"The secret places of the soul's cell."

What a phrase, and how comprehensive and comprehending! J. J. Pope's face was alive. The blind was up, the window open.

"That's the very inwardness of it, sir."

"Mystery plus mechanism. I like to think that mystery is more inevitable than mechanism. We are being given so much mechanism."

Pope smiled.

"I'd give you both, sir. The microscope——"

"And the inward eye," said the lady.

Almost, J. J. Pope bent his head to her.

"In all humility, yes, but the eye must be ruthless."

"In the quality of its vision. Take plenty of marmalade, Pope. Why do they call it 'Squish'?"

"Perhaps, to save time and tissue, sir."

"Ah, the reduction of the absolute to the obvious!"

It was nearly half past ten when J. J. Pope left the master's lodge, after smoking a pipe with him, for Pope's asceticism did not eschew tobacco. Maybe, most men would have shirked facing the publicity of the Great Court after the night's adventure, but Pope confronted it and the two separate men whom he met, one near the fountain, the other by the Great Gate. The first, a fairish, freckled child named Lister, hovered in front of J. J. Pope, and blushing, addressed him.

"I say, I want to apologise for last night."

The little man looked him straight in the eyes.

"That's all right."

"I was a bit blotto, or——"

"Thanks, Lister, I'll forget it."

His second meeting was with Crewdson, depraved mortar-board on head, his gown disgracefully and self-consciously curt. Crewdson was looking liverish.

"Morning, Tad, recovered from your bath?"

The retort was obvious.

"Yes, Crewdson, thanks to the master."

Crewdson cocked his head.

"Oh, I see, been sneaking?"

"No, having breakfast at the Lodge. Some things are beyond you, Crewdson. Bad luck!"

They passed, each upon his way, but Crewdson's face was balked and evil, J. J. Pope's somehow triumphant. That hour with a great man had given him a new serenity.

Surely, this was to be no day of labour? It had been a late, cold spring, but this particular morning had the suddenness of summer in its breath. John Pope's mood was for escape, to enjoy inward celebration, not with women or wine, but in the open country and under the spacious sky. He did not ask for casual faces and the casual streets, or the Senate House doors where groups of interested young men crowded to gaze upon the examination lists. Anxious faces would float away from those fatal doors, suddenly happy or suddenly sad. There were those who smirked at fate. "Ploughed! Well, who cares a damn?" J. J. Pope, like those rare few who explore, and create, and decipher, was a separative creature, destined by temperament and his very urges to walk apart, for, apartness is the privilege of the singular.

He met Mrs. Barter, his bed-maker, on the stairs, a stuffy black bundle of a woman who was motherly to her young gentlemen, but not to J. J. Pope. She thought him a mean, queer, ironic little rat. He had no glamour, and pickings were poor.

"Morning, Mrs. Barter."

"Morning," said the lady, "you've gone and locked your door again. How can I make a bed when——"

"Never mind. I'll leave it open now. I shan't be in to lunch."

Did that matter when sardines and bread and cheese were on the menu, and sardines were oily, friable things that did not encourage pilfering.

Pope kept a bicycle stored at a local cycle shop in Bridge Street. He went out to collect it, wearing trouser clips and a cap that was slightly too much on the back of his head, yet another proof of his origin.

J. J. Pope wheeled his bicycle out into Bridge Street. Should it be chalk or green meadows, the Gogmagogs or the Fen Country. He chose the meadows, and taking the Ely road, pedalled off into the sunlit morning.

So late was the season that some of the great thorn hedges were still fragrant and in flower. Here was a green solitude under the vast blue bowl of the sky. A field-gate welcomed his mood. He dismounted, and leaning the machine against the gate, climbed it. The great green field, starred with buttercups, seemed to stretch into infinity, for the distant hedges merged into its greenness. Pope waded in. The fen country could be so like the great lagoons from which it had been recovered. The hedge near to him was smelling sweet, and he pulled down a spray and put his face to it. How bittersweet could the scents of nature be when you were feeling rather lonely and starved of love.

The master had spoken of the unwisdom of bitterness, and though there had been assuagement in the great man's words, J. J. Pope cherished the tang of the sweet venom of hatred under his tongue. He knew, and he was right in knowing, that when a certain name cropped up, someone would say: "Oh, Pope, the fellow who was ducked in the Great Court fountain." That might be his label. It would adhere to him, even were he to occupy the Woolsack, or preside over the deliberations of The General Medical Council. He accepted that label. Or, rather, it should be a smarting wound over his heart, urging him to implacable effort and serene gaiety. Jealousy! Man and Jehovah were jealous beasts.

He rolled on his back and stared at the sky. The great blue bowl upturned above the green world was immense and soothing. The sun warmed him; the smell of the mayflower was in the air. It brought to his mind the name of that memorable ship in which men had escaped from oppression into a new and adventurous world. He had read of

their sufferings and their struggles, pests, marauding birds, savages. But what other world was there into which he could escape, save a world of his own?

It was one of his last evenings of the May term, and a strange restlessness possessed him. He went out and wandered, for the evening was sheer summer, golden and serene. Passing a house in Jesus Lane he heard young men singing:

"For she is the Jewel of Asia—The Geisha, The Geisha."

There had been a champagne party, and young men were warm with wine. Two of them, leaning, singing out of a window, with champagne glasses in their hands, raised those glasses with merry irony to Pope.

"Hallo, there's Tad."

"Salutations, Tad."

Pope walked on without looking up at them. Oh, the young! Would he ever be young? Had he ever been young? There were times when he desired passionately to be as those others, comely, and attractive to women. The genus girl was strange to him, and on those rare occasions when he met it, he did not know what to say to the creature.

At Mortimer Street he turned right and wandered circuitously to the Backs. Trees, the willows, Tennyson's immemorial elms might be more friendly, but he found no assuagement here. Even the beauty of this golden evening tantalised him, the still water, the sleek grass, the shadows, the great grey buildings. Oh, the stateliness of King's, the lovely leap of Clare bridge, the rich russet sadness of John's! Yes, all this vexed him, for it had not accepted him. He was an alien. He could not play. Laughter had not come into his life. It was time for him to go elsewhere into some other and shabbier world.

Even his clothes would be less noticeable in London. He would be part of an obscure crowd, and mere poverty would be no stigma. He crossed the college bridge into the Cloister Court, passed round the arcade into the next court, and came to a narrow slype. He had forgotten a certain thing, or perhaps it had not penetrated his consciousness. It was the night of the college ball when that other world

drifted into this supposedly celibate community. Eve was here, Eve and the apples and the serpent.

This sudden picture patterned upon his consciousness was to remain with him all his life, the dark passage closed with a curtain of amber light, steps going up, and standing upon them like young princes, Hereward Gains, the rowing-blue and Selby Lowndes, the stroke of the first boat. They were in evening dress, tall, fine young men; Gains wore a broad light blue ribbon diagonally across his shirt-front, Lowndes the colours of the Club. From somewhere came the sound of music, a waltz of Strauss's. Great and stately young men, these stewards in the world of muscle and panache. Standing on the steps there they seemed high above J. J. Pope on his puny legs.

Then, suddenly there stepped into that arch of light three figures like figures in a coloured window, a woman, a young man and a girl. It was the girl upon whom J. J. Pope gazed. Her dress was the colour of the evening light, and she had a little cape of black fur over her shoulders. She was supremely dark and slender, and of a pure loveliness that caused Pope to stand and stare like a boy at a puppet-show. She had one of those warm white skins, a perfect profile, serene lips, eyes so brown that they looked black. Moreover, there was a young stateliness about her, a quality of limpid pride that put passion at her feet.

The two young men became alive. They seemed to descend from pedestals in the presence of this Eve. They were smiling, flexible, eager. The woman passed up the steps, the girl and the young men following her. They disappeared, and to J. J. Pope she became a memory and music.

What he did realise was that not one of those people had appeared to notice him. He might have been the invisible man, or just a sack of coal left there to be collected.

5

J.J. SPENT a part of his last long vacation learning German in Germany, and another month in acting as emergency dispenser to Dr. Dibble of Dewhurst.

Both experiences were not without significance. Since the Germans were leading the world in chemistry, especially so as it applied to the art of the physician, J.J. had decided that he wanted to be able to read German technical journals in their natural language. Also, he and Aunt Jane, after serious discussion, had agreed that he should combine chemistry with medicine.

"It is a matter of money, my dear. Take a ride on the Golden Calf in order to reach heaven."

J.J. was a little surprised at his aunt's realism, or was it cynicism? But he could chuckle over it. Pure science, as a producer of funds, spelt poverty. The world would accord you a salary which any successful butcher would have despised. As for the brewers, beer was more than the man.

"One can be sure of some sort of income."

"How many years will you have to spend at a hospital?"

"About two more, after Cambridge."

"I can manage that all right, John."

"It won't be all on your shoulders. I expect I can get some work coaching the dull."

"That you will never be, my dear."

"Thanks to you, Auntie."

So, J.J. went to Germany as a third class tourist, visiting Cologne, Heidelberg and Munich. Vienna called to him across the mountains,

but lack of funds kept him from crossing the frontier into the country of Strauss and Freud. He settled at Mannheim for a month, and was fortunate in finding a family who agreed to give him bed and board in return for English lessons for their two small boys, Gunther and Fritz. J.J.'s host was employed in a great chemical factory at Mannheim, and through him, Pope gained an introduction to one of the firm's younger chemical experts, a big, blond young man who took a liking to the little Englishman.

J.J. returned from Germany, and its cleanliness and its almost frightening efficiency to the England of Epsom, Lords, and the Oscar Wilde scandal. He crossed at night, and arriving at Liverpool Street Station in the chill of the morning, was struck by the filthy platforms and the stink of stale fish. J.J. had read his Cobbett, and he did sometimes wonder whether the world would suffer any catastrophic loss if London, Paris, and Berlin were treated like the Cities of the Plain. As he lugged his bag up the slope of the station approach to catch a bus that would take him to Waterloo, he remembered that he was coming to live in this London, and that no city could be one vast sepsis. Beauty has to live on the Beast.

John James had not been back in Yatley three days when Dr. Dibble of Dewhurst, who had been visiting Miss Plender at Brickwall House, met young Pope strolling across Yatley Green. Young Pope, as Dr. Dibble called him, had become known as far as Dewhurst as something of a prodigy, and Dr. Dibble hailed him.

"Morning, Pope. By the way, do you happen to want a temporary job?"

"What kind of job?"

"My dispenser is laid up. I don't know whether you have done any pharmacology, but you might be able to help me dispense."

J.J. smiled at Dr. Dibble.

"I think I could manage that."

Dr. Dibble was quite impervious to irony. He was a florid, good-natured soul in whom the habit of professional pity had developed into a passion for patronage. Little Pope might be glad of a few guineas and the chance to gain experience in a country surgery.

"Very good. Turn up to-morrow, if you like. Good experience, you know."

Dr. Dibble was walking towards his dog-cart, and J.J. strolled with him.

"And, the remuneration, sir?"

Remuneration! What a word! It smelt of Miss Pope's shop, and Dr. Dibble's blue eyes stared.

"Say two guineas a week, Pope."

"And what hours?"

"Nine till seven. I like someone to be in charge when I am out. Take messages, you know. And you can write up the books, under my supervision."

J. J. Pope stood by the dog-cart with his hands in his pockets. He hesitated, and became aware of Dr. Dibble's surprised and displeased stare. Didn't the youngster appreciate the favour that was being shown him?

"I'll turn up to-morrow."

"Very good, Pope. Punctually at nine."

J.J. bicycled into Dewhurst each morning. Dr. Dibble's house was a big, red Georgian structure in the main street, with a fine doorway and fanlight. A path led to the stable, the offices, and the surgery, and here in this rather stuffy and sunless little sanctum, John Pope made his first contact with general practice. From the first J.J. discovered a certain perfunctoriness in Dr. Dibble's treatment of the poorer patients. Two or three stock bottles were kept from which the obscure Judes and Judies were dosed. Dr. Dibble would even empty into these vessels of utility the contents of unused mixtures.

He was blandly cheerful in explaining the inwardness of the economy to Pope.

"All they need, Mr. Pope, is just something in a bottle. Imaginary ailments, too often. By the way, we cannot afford to dispense tinctures to the club patients. There are so many people who make a hobby of being ill. That is a fact you will discover. When I write or say 'Haust. Omnibus' you will know what to dispense."

J.J. was never a very talkative person, and to Dr. Dibble's air of bland condescension he responded with docile silence. He was earning two guineas a week and gaining experience, but not the kind

of experience that Dr. Dibble understood. His food cost him nothing, for Aunt Jane supplied him with a sandwich lunch, and the kitchen sent him in tea. He dispensed the doctor's very limited series of prescriptions, and learned to make them appear more varied by the colouring matter and the flavouring ingredients that were introduced into them. He wrote up the books in his very neat script, took messages, dusted the shelves, bottles and counter, was taught to economise over paper, sealing-wax and string. To all appearances he was a most dutiful and conscientious little drudge, and Dr. Dibble could say to his wife: "Quiet little fellow, Pope. Got a wrong impression of him at first. Thought he was rather bumptious. Those jumped-up lads generally are. As a matter of fact I don't think he could say boo to a goose."

J. J. Pope, after a month's experience of the Dibble practice, was satisfied as to its relativity. What Dr. Dibble did not know, he did not want to know. It was so much more comfortable and tissue-saving to shut the unknown up in a cupboard. J.J. would observe the old chronics whom the doctor treated with a kind of bluff and jocular tolerance. Were pains in the joints imaginary? Were chronic dyspepsia and old man's cough and varicose veins mere figments of fancy? Hardly. Well, what was to be done about it? Burk the issue, indulge in platitudes, talk about *anno Domini,* or seek, ponder, experiment? J. J. Pope had no doubt as to which inspiration he would choose.

If life moves in an ascending spiral, J.J. arrived during the summer months at one of those curves of consciousness when a sudden more vivid awareness of the loveliness of the world was quickened in him. He could wander up to Yatley Heath on a summer evening, and in that lovely solitude watch the sunset die among the great trees, and the distant hills blaze and grow dim. The almost too poignant beauty of Nature, its complex cunning, its amazing artistry, forced him by contrast to reflect upon the strange ugliness of humanity. He thought of Dewhurst High Street and Dr. Dibble's waiting-room for the poor. Old shrivelled faces, hands worn down like old teeth, ulcerous legs, grotesque bodies. How rarely did he see a lovely face, or a sailing, stately body! How different were the animals, in pelt, grace, completeness! Had man's soul turned sour in him and made him the unappetising creature he appeared, a mock-

ery of what he might be, of the Greek idea? Did not women desire beauty, and yet in the whole of this little country town J.J. Pope could not discover one feminine face that made him desire to look at it again. Maybe there had been grim fun in the Circe legend. *Homo sapiens* was more presentable when transformed into the shape of a leopard, lion or gazelle.

What of his own little legs? Would they have carried him into the spear-clash of Marathon?

There were moments when he laughed at the undistinguished gaucherie of man, clumsy figures, splodged faces, silly voices, a kind of fleshly bathos that was boring. Had Shakespeare's England been like this? Had the men of Agincourt lacked all swiftness, grace and splendour?

J. J. Pope pondered this problem. Man possessed the earth, and had lost his artistry. Did civilisation make of him what a Lancashire mill made of its men and women, dollop-headed, stunted, bandy-legged dwarfs? And was he seeing life only in terms of matter, as a pagan person seeking profane beauty, and ignoring sacred love? Aunt Jane could not be described as a beauty, and yet——! But, if he was but a neophyte in the Temple of Reality, he could boggle at the old phrases. Beauty is only skin deep. A heart of gold. Handsome is as handsome does! Were not these old phrases excuses invented by man, and woman, with which to drape his or her own plainness? Was there a spirit that transcended the flesh, and shone through the often too shoddy surface? It should show in the eyes, those windows of the soul. J.J. began to study eyes and mouths, and to pay less attention to undistinguished bodies, and for the first time, perhaps he realised that Aunt Jane had rather beautiful eyes set in an old dumpling of a face. However, in his search for the soul in the eyes Dewhurst gave him no very positive data. It seemed very dull of eye, bovine or porcine, and not even dog-like. So many dogs had beautiful eyes.

He had wandered up to Yatley Heath on a brilliant September afternoon. It was a Sunday, but the green wilderness knew not man. And to him came a picture of himself as a small boy dancing naked on the sweet turf, and playing upon an imaginary pipe. Yes,

just by this same monstrous old beech tree. Maybe that for a moment he recaptured the spirit of a child, or the divine madness woke in him and protested. Why not follow the impulse, shed his clothes and run naked over the grass? After all, it was no more than bathing in the sea.

A kind of wildness possessed him. He stripped off his clothes, piled them neatly by the beech tree, with the boots on top, and stepped out into the full sunlight. He stretched his arms above his head, stood on his toes, and tried to recapture that pagan memory. It was no use. Like Adam, he had become self-conscious. His wretched rational self was observing and criticising that other, inward, spontaneous creature. He was too much aware of his own little legs. What, prance about on those! Assuredly, they were better concealed in bags, like the bodies of most humans. Also, he found himself jumpy and scared. What if some Yatley lovers should appear and catch him naked? Clothes had made a coward of primitive man.

He was about to dash for his garments when the thing happened. He saw a figure rising in the gloom of the beech walk, a girl's figure, almost like the shape of a mediaeval saint appearing to confound mere mortals. Had she seen him?

J.J. dashed for cover. It was almost a header that he took into a mass of tall fern. He burrowed in and crouched, breathless, as shocked as any prude. For the moment he could not even laugh at himself or at the conventional shame that had sent him running to cover.

He peered. He could see through the fern fronds. He saw the girl standing and gazing at his pile of clothes. Assuredly they had disturbed her day-dreaming. But if those discarded garments surprised and challenged her, her face and figure were perhaps more astonishing to J. J. Pope.

God, if she wasn't the girl he had seen mounting the steps at the college dance to the music of Johann Strauss's waltz!

His was no comfortable hide-out. The fern fronds tickled him; last year's stems pricked his naked feet, and a little assembly of flies suddenly became interested. Yet, so much of him, or perhaps all of him was in his eyes, that he crouched there, gazing, not daring to move, and enduring the pin-pricks of nature. She was wearing an amber-coloured frock, and a straw hat of the same colour which sat

on her dense black hair like a golden flower. Again, he was ravished by the slender height and grace of her, and by that lovely little face, so still and serious. She just stood and stared at his heap of clothes. Then, suddenly, she turned about, and her swift black eyes seemed to sweep the green world as though it might hold for her some ugly and sinister thing. Head up, she looked and listened, perplexed, disturbed. Who, why? Then, a kind of child's panic must have seized her. She went gliding back to the path by which she had come, not tumultuously so, but with a brittle and almost resentful pride, turning now and again to look back over her shoulder. Her figure sank away down the hillside into the gloom of the woods. She was gone.

J.J.'s head broke water above the green foam of the fern. A particularly vicious fly, biting at his left arm, was smacked and squashed, and fell into the bracken. He waded out, dashed for his clothes, grabbed them in both arms, and fled back again to cover.

Who was she? Thank God she had not caught him fooling about naked on that carpet of turf!

Lady Strange of Hardacre had a house-party. The Hardacre house-parties were, according to political opponents, infamous, which venomous assertion signified that in Sir Jocelin's day all manner of subtle schemes for the confounding of red ties had been concocted there. Now, things were different. Lady Strange was a tired and a sick woman. Her husband was dead, and their only son Lawrence so very much alive that his mother was proposing to persuade this infantile young man to drink the medicine of marriage. Lawrence had looks, and no brains, which might not have mattered if he had not inherited the soiled shirt of his father.

So, Mildred Marwood and her daughter had been asked to Hardacre, because Lawrence was showing some sense for once in his life in admiring the daughter. If he was a good-natured, amorous fool who had been in trouble with petticoats ever since he was sixteen, then some intelligent woman might be persuaded to manage him.

Sybil Marwood, returning to Hardacre with her strange tale about the abandoned clothes on Yatley Heath, was taken as seriously as she looked. To be somewhat in love with a man whom her intuitions knew to be a fool, was a serious business. She had gone out

alone to be alone with her crisis, nor had it been decided for her, and here was an incident that might distract attention.

"My dear, a man's clothes!"

"Yes, all neatly piled in a heap."

"That means——" and Lady Strange recoiled from the naked inference.

"Some silly tramp," said Lawrence. "Perhaps too much vermin!"

"They were clean clothes."

Lawrence laughed.

"Did you explore them, my sweet?"

She was not feeling herself anything of his at the moment. Lawrence was so sure that all women loved him.

"Mightn't it be——?"

"What?"

"Well, suicide or something horrible."

"A corpse dangling!"

What a frivolous fool he was, and yet he roused in her elemental things.

"I think——"

"Certainly," said Lawrence's mother, "the police ought to be told. Don't you agree, Mildred?"

"I do."

So, P. C. Pook of Yatley was informed, and taking his bicycle, went out to explore. He rode and he trudged, pushing his machine up the steep woodland track, and hoping, as human nature does, for a sensation. But he found nothing. A yaffle, winging away into the trees, laughed at him.

6

J. J.'s THIRD year at Cambridge was without any very dramatic happenings. Crewdson and his crowd had gone, and the college came to accept J. J. Pope as an oddity, and perhaps as a somewhat significant oddity. He was classed with James Jellaby, the mathematical genius who was fore-doomed to be senior wrangler. This funny little fellow Pope was no ordinary undergrad. Rumour had it that Sir Humphrey Porson had marked him down, and that J. J. Pope was working under Sir Humphrey upon the bio-chemistry of colloidal matter. This—for a man who was not yet a bachelor of arts or of science! The college accepted J. J. Pope as a person. It was even a little proud of him as an eccentric creature with a phenomenal head, who, if you were friendly, could talk upon the possibilities of science with a fascinating and provoking fancy. Men quoted him.

"Gosh, that fellow Pope says that we shall soon know how to arrange for a kid to be a girl or a boy."

"Have you heard Pope on the segregation of the germ plasm?"

"What the devil's that?"

"Oh, some German fellow has an idea that we carry our ancestors about with us in the sex cells, and pass 'em on like registered letters to our kids."

One or two of the intellectual cliques in the college even cultivated J. J. Pope. They discussed Jude the Obscure, and Bergson, and the new decadence, and Stephen Phillips, and the Fabian Society, and Havelock Ellis. Some of the brighter spirits read "Papers," and the society debated the subject afterwards. J. J. Pope read a paper on "The Significance of Carbon in Organic Evolution," but though he

tried to popularise the theme it was above the heads of his contemporaries, some of whom had very vague ideas upon protoplasm. It was a sort of strange jelly that somehow had come alive.

J.J. did make a friend who, in later years, was to become of peculiar significance to him, one Peter Pratten—the only son of Thomas Pratten who had made a fortune in selling pills. "Pratten's Pills" were known all over the Empire, and you could not pick up a paper without finding them advertised. They were as famous as Pear's Soap. Nor could you miss the picture of a rubicund and smiling old gentleman popping a pill into his mouth and telling you "I'm seventy-nine and I take one every day." J. J. Pope may have felt an infinite contempt for Tom Pratten's Tonic Pills, but the son was a stimulating person with ideas beyond out-riggers and girls, and rather unusual and precocious views upon chemistry and its financial significance.

Peter Pratten had not, like so many sons of successful and vulgar fathers, protested against the parental crudeness by developing a greenery-yallery hyper-refinement. Peter's hobby was boxing, and since he weighed nearly fifteen stone, and was the best heavyweight either university had known for a quarter of a century, he commanded respect. He might be a fighting man, but he had a most sweet temper. Actually, his child's face had been used to help in the pushing of the Pratten Pills, and he had been as lovely and as pink as "Bubbles." He had been known as "The Pratten Pill Child." Assuredly, this was a form of fame that might take a lot of living down at Winchester and St. Jude's, but Peter's smile, his large and handsome face, and his fists had smothered prejudice. It was not good to quarrel with a large and benign lion who, with one pat of the paw, could knock you head over heels across a sofa. Crewdson had tried it during his second year when the spiteful wit in him had not learnt caution. That, apparently, had been the one rare occasion when Peter had lost his temper.

"Well, Pratten, how are pills? Using much paper?"

Crewdson had been invisible for three days, and the nice and symmetrical blood-smudge round his eyes had lasted for a week.

But Peter had a head as well as fists. Such supreme contrasts were he and J.J. that the big young man seemed to find his opposite in J. J. Pope's physical insignificance. J.J.'s head was a very different

proposition. Peter had also been to Germany and absorbed some of that country's genius for organisation. The pater's show had been a supreme success so far as publicity and profits were concerned, but Peter had a more dignified attitude to life than had his father. Old Pratten might say with grim jocosity: "Half the game's faith-healing, my lad, so why worry about the doctors?" Old Tom was a very colourful person in language, clothes and domestic decoration. He had a place in Berkshire, and kept a yacht, and—it was said—pretty ladies. In appearance he was rather like a wart-hog, and very red at that. How he had helped to produce Peter God alone knows. That must have been Polly Pratten's privilege. She had been a beauty, a big blonde creature, and the daughter of a gentleman who had run the most exciting of the Maidenhead week-end hotels. Polly had been the particular attraction to the polygamous male, but Tom Pratten had carried her off, and she had made him a most admirable wife. He had been a very miserable man for six months after her death, and had even eschewed canary-coloured waistcoats.

Peter spoke of J.J. to his father.

"We have a chap up at St. Jude's who is a bit of a genius."

"What sort?"

"Chemistry and biology."

"Any use to us? I haven't got much use for the stuff they call pure science."

"He might be, Pater. You see, I have ideas."

"Go along, young fellah m'lad! Want to outdo your father!"

"Other days, other ways, Pater. The public is becoming more educated."

"Fudge, my child. Same old stuff, though you may have to serve it up differently. Shove a nice scientific label on the bottle, what! You rather fancy this fellow?"

"I'm pretty sure he has a future."

"Well, snaffle him."

"He's not quite that sort. He's——"

"Highfalutin."

"You might call it that. I'd like him to come and stay."

"That's easy. What's he going to be?"

"A doctor."

"Poor pigeon!"

Peter laughed. He knew his father's jocund cynicism, and that it concealed some humanity and much sound sense.

"Never give anything to hospitals, Pater, do you?"

"Just plunder, my lad; placating the public. I'm after a knighthood. That's why I gave ten thousand to the Prime Minister's pet——"

"Rot," said his son, "you always pretend to be just an old filibuster."

It may be gathered that a peculiar frankness characterised the relations between Pratten father and son. Peter had a punch, old Tom an irreverent and irrepressible tongue. Peter had had the education which his father had lacked, but he had inherited some of the old man's pushfulness, and an urge that was to function on a somewhat higher plane.

J.J. was invited to Pollards for a week during the Easter vac. He accepted. He was met at the Berkshire station by the latest sensation on wheels, an early model of the motor car, shaped like a four-wheeled gig, and steered with a tiller. Old Pratten was a man who would be one of the first to possess anything new. Peter was in charge of the machine. J.J.'s bag was shoved under the seat, and he took his place beside his friend.

"Pater's latest toy."

The thing lurched out of the station yard, and nearly swerved into a well.

"Hi, hold up, you! She's a bit tricky on the steering."

J.J. had clutched a rail.

"Seems so."

"This is only my second try-out. Think I'd better attend to business."

They bumped and swayed along the country road at the immense speed of fourteen miles an hour. The solid wheels jarred on the macadam. Now and again the machine showed an inclination to diverge towards the ditch.

"Bit heavy on the road."

"Why not pneumatics?"

"Yes, why not? I suppose they got stuck with the carriage idea. Funny how slowly ideas come."

"Or, in a flash."

Peter smiled at his friend.

"Yes, I bet yours do. Here, hold up, you!"

"Pollards" was red brick Gothic, with immensely tall and self-conscious chimneys and high gables, and in colour rather like its master, but the house was beautifully set on its terrace, with views over wooded and blue hilled country. Old Pratten was waiting for them on the terrace, very much the country gentleman with a gun under his arm. An austere manservant took J.J.'s bag, and instantly it seemed to become a thing of scorn. Strange, how underlings are so superior to their masters! Old Pratten put out a pink fist to J.J. and his little pig's eyes twinkled.

"Glad to see you, my lad."

He was. T.P. was a very vital creature who enjoyed every day in the trough. He looked at his son, and J.J. understood that old Tom was most furiously proud of Peter, as well he might be.

"Glad the rascal didn't spill you in the road, Mr. Pope. How do you fancy my oil horse?"

J.J. liked old Pratten. There might be ostentation here, and chuckles of vulgarity, but it was hearty and good English vulgarity. Old Tom was Music Hall not Albert Hall, and J.J. preferred the former.

"It's the new idea, sir."

"Ha," said old Tom, "so are you, from what my lad tells me."

Jackie Pope, as Mr. Pratten called him, enjoyed his week at Pollards, in spite of the attentions of the superior person who valeted him. Life at Pollards was country, and the kind of country that J.J. loved; the difference was that he was seeing it from the mansion instead of from the shop. He and old Tom Pratten struck up quite a friendship, for Tom was a wart-hog with ideas. He had a kind of genius for rooting up reality. They had arguments together, rather mordantly so, but with mutual good-humour.

"I'm a plain man, but I've got a philosophy. Now, what does the public want, Jackie?"

"Corn and games, sir."

"That's the tradition. Fact is, in nine cases out of ten the public doesn't know what it wants. All that it knows is that it wants something, usually the thing the other fellow has, and it hasn't."

"Just blind urge?"

"You've said it. Give it beer and butter, and a certain amount of copulation, and the right to grumble, what then? Just a blind crave. You have it; I have it. Your crave is to find things out. Most men ask God to spare 'em any such trouble. Well, what then?"

"I'm listening, sir."

"Teach 'em to want something. Rub it into their eyes and ears. Advertise, shout. It doesn't matter much whether it is my pills or a piano or a porcupine. You've got to create the crave, and then satisfy it. Why, my office is stacked with letters from grateful purchasers of Pratten Pills."

Yes, old Tom was a buccaneer in his realism. He asserted that ninety-nine men out of a hundred desired to make money, and he was one of the ninety-nine. Most people weren't honest about it. They palavered; they put on the Sunday hats and black kid gloves of social smuggery, and pretended that their hearts were in some sort of other worldliness. Just highfalutin, and keeping in with God. He, Tom Pratten, doubted whether any live man, however elevated his soul, failed to find money interesting. And what about the one in a hundred? J.J.'s host did allow that there were such people, fellows who were so passionately married to their job or some cause that they forgot all about value for service. Fine, and altruistic and all that, but rather bad luck on their wives and families, if they had them. And then, Mr. Pratten winked at J. J. Pope.

"You might be one of 'em, you know."

"I might. What's in your pills, Mr. Pratten?"

"Ah, wouldn't you like to know! And I guess it wouldn't take you long to find out. You're too clever by half, young man. But there's another side to the question."

"There always is, sir."

"Young Peter. Hasn't it been a pleasure to me to give him all the opportunities I didn't get? He is Pratten's Pills—grown up. Whether it's wise to give a young fellow too much is a thing I'm not quite sure about. You take away the stimulus. Depends on the lad, I suppose, and Peter's a good lad. He's got ideas."

J.J. happened to know something of Peter's ideas. He appeared to have inherited from his father a passion for selling things, but they were to be different things, and of otherness in conception and in value. That crude, experimental petrol-carriage was the

symbol. Here was a vision of provoking progress, a new source of power, transport, speed. Peter's urge was to be a developer and a manufacturer of motor cars.

He was a little sensitive on the subject of his father's pills.

"I don't want to crab the old man's show, or quarrel with his philosophy. I know some people might call it a swindle, even though the pater's pills do contain something which bucks up the brain and the bowels. After all, people wouldn't buy them if they didn't feel better for them. That's the point of his philosophy."

"And not a bad one, either."

"Well, I want to make cars. I'm fey about cars. It's the game of the future. I have talked it over with the pater."

"I suppose he'd like you——?"

"In the pill game? Well, yes, in a way, but he is a great old sport. He's willing to finance me."

They were idling in the "Pollards" garden, and suddenly Peter laid a very large hand on J.J.'s shoulder.

"I've had another idea. You are the sort of fellow, who, if you went in with the pater, might make a much more significant business of the show."

J.J. smiled up at him.

"And how?"

"Well, research, you know, new products."

"Professional etiquette would forbid."

"So, you still mean to go through with the doctoring?"

"If I don't know my sick, I shan't be a judge of my remedies. The human body isn't just a test tube."

"Yes, I see your point of view. I suppose it's the same with me. When I go down I shall spend two years in an engineering shop."

"The hospital will be my shop."

J. J. Pope was walking along King's Parade when facetious youth challenged him.

"Hallo, Tad, lists are up."

"Are they?"

"You're pilled."

J.J. gave the jester an ironic smirk and continued upon his way

to Cavendish Street and the day's work. It was not arrogance but certitude which inspired him. Not for him was the ordeal of the Senate House door. Had he prepared the Tripos papers for himself they could not have suited him more admirably. He took his lunch with him to the lab. and sat and ate bread and cheese like any working man. There was no better food than this, and you did not tire of it as you tired of kickshaws, provided both temperament and tummy were in health. J.J. sometimes wondered whether old Tom Pratten hankered after his bread and cheese days, and those strenuous and struggling years when work could be a frenzy. He did realise that Peter's father had offered him a unique opportunity as advisory and research expert to a company whose ramifications spread all over the world, but J. J. Pope had not yet reached that cynical phase when a man throws pious protestations into the washing-basket, and sallies forth with a new nakedness into the jungle. J.J. was still what old Pratten would have called highfalutin and high headed. He believed that the quest was the serious business, and that a man could be a kind of Galahad in the scientific wilderness, seeking the sacred flame.

The lab. served an improvised tea to its special students, and not till the day's work was done, and J.J. set out to dine in hall, did he receive a particular message. The porter on duty at the Great Gate accosted him.

"Mr. Pope."

"Yes."

"Mr. Ward left word that he wants to see you. He'll be in his rooms after hall."

"Very good," said J.J. and passed on to his dinner.

Mr. Ward was his tutor, and there had been occasional passages of arms between them over hall and attendance at chapel. Mr. Ward was large and sonorous and bald, with a sense of duty to the young that was almost biblical, and if he tended to impose upon his world a paternal sympathy, it was done, at times, with too much unction. The college called him "Sappolio," but he was, in fact, a very benign person, lavish with breakfasts, and also with avuncular hints as to behaviour. Pope climbed Mr. Ward's stairs, knocked, and was told in a resounding voice to enter.

Mr. Ward was at his desk, making notes upon a book by the latest German philosopher.

"Ah, Mr. Pope. Come in, sit down. I am glad you received my message."

J.J. sat down on a hard Victorian chair, and was silent.

"I must congratulate you, Mr. Pope. Of course you have seen the Tripos lists."

"Not yet, sir."

Mr. Ward's eyebrows went up. He was an authority on psychology and sociology, but J. J. Pope puzzled him. To let a whole day go by without visiting the Senate House door! What was the inference? That Pope was scared, or——?

"Indeed! Is it that you doubted your capacity?"

"No, sir."

Again Mr. Ward raised bushy eyebrows.

"Supreme confidence, Mr. Pope?"

"I know my work, sir."

"Well, your confidence is justified. A first class, Mr. Pope." J.J. nodded.

"And more than that. As you probably know, places are recorded, unofficially. I have been informed that your name heads the list. I congratulate you."

A faint smile spread over J.J.'s face. He looked out of the Tudor window and saw the cusped cupola of the fountain. He had not forgotten that incident of a year ago, but the smart of it was passing.

"Thank you, sir."

Mr. Ward sat back, put his fingers together, and became paternal.

"May I ask you a few questions, Mr. Pope?"

"Of course, sir."

"What of the future? Do you contemplate following an academic career, or——?"

"You mean, sir——"

"Well, a post graduate course, a demonstratorship, and ultimately, a——"

But there Mr. Ward paused. He had been about to say "Fellowship," but as a member of a famous fraternity his mellow humanism recoiled from a suggestion that might imply a social misalliance. J. J. Pope was not quite the person for the jocund conventions of a

college Common Room. You could not see him drinking port, and enjoying a witty and slightly smutty story. He was a burr, not a round and sun-warmed apple. So, Mr. Ward, who was proud of himself as a man of the world and no mere donnish person, paused and reflected, and was wise as to possible incompatibilities. This little man might be exceedingly able, but he was the sort of fellow who made you feel uncomfortable, like a paragraph that would not come out nicely on paper. The silence was momentary, but J. J. Pope's acute self had divined some of its implications. Even his seniors might be a little shy of him.

"Research, sir, I think."

"Ah, Pope, pure science. Do you propose to——?"

"In London, sir. I shall go to one of the hospitals."

"I see. Healing as well as research. What about the Fellowship?"

"You mean—the examination, sir, not the post?"

Mr. Ward pressed his finger-tips and his lips together. Damn the little fellow! Had he read his thoughts?

"The examination, Mr. Pope."

"I'm not a surgeon, sir."

"Surgery not sufficiently subtle?"

If there was irony in the remark Pope ignored it.

"Limited, sir. The surgeon comes in at the end; my idea is to begin at the beginning."

"Quite so, Mr. Pope. And can you manage in London? I mean——"

Pope's face seemed to become brightly hard and austere.

"Yes. I can always manage. I am not quite without friends."

7

Miss JANE POPE travelled to Cambridge to see John James take his degree. She travelled up with the knowledge that all Yatley knew that not only had her beloved taken a first in the Natural Science Tripos, but that he had headed the list. To the greater part of Yatley the word Tripos meant nothing at all, but it did gather that J. J. Pope had done brilliantly, and was a scholar of great repute.

Mr. Larcombe came down and congratulated Jane.

"James will end up as a professor. Well, well, well!"

Mr. Larcombe was genuinely pleased, because, being a man of some healthy wisdom, he did respect accomplishment, and knew that without it the world would be just a piggery, whatever the urgists might say.

Mr. Cock, the rector, drifted into Jane's shop, and made his characteristic and melancholy mumbling. It seemed to him extraordinary that Jackie Pope should be what—he—Mr. Cock was, a Bachelor of Arts. So much for Christian sense and humility! Moreover, Mr. Cock had scraped a second class in the Classical Tripos.

"I hope, Miss Pope, it won't affect your nephew's, a'hem—head."

Aunt Jane answered him with a question.

"Did it affect yours, sir?"

"What?"

"Taking a degree."

Mr. Cock gazed at her, moon-eyed and sorrowful. Surely the woman should know that the conditions could not be compared,

and that he, as the son of a Canon of Shrewsbury, had not suffered from inflation over, a'hem, a second class?

Aunt Jane felt sorry for him. He was a poor, spunkless thing.

"Don't you worry about James, Mr. Cock. He was born with a big head. So, you see!"

Mr. Cock did not see. A hereditary largeness of head did not prevent a young fellow from developing cerebral tumescence. Moreover, he was not really worrying about John James, for no one at the rectory was pleased by J.J.'s success.

"Well, I hope it will be—so."

"Big heads have a right to feel big," said Miss Pope, rather tartly.

So Miss Pope travelled up to Cambridge in a June that did not flame in journalese, but was just old John Dreary the English clerk of the weather. J.J. had found rooms for her, and she sat in the gallery of the Senate House and watched that little figure in its hired white rabbit-skin kneel down to be dubbed bachelor. Aunt Jane's face was proud and maternal. This, in a sense, had been her life's job, and she was watching the fruition of it.

J.J. and Aunt Jane walked back to St. Jude's, and climbed the stairs to the top floor. Miss Pope climbed them deliberately, for she was growing stout and short of breath. And there, in the narrow lobby, J.J. kissed her.

"Thank you, for everything."

"It's you who have done it, my dear."

"Not without you, Auntie."

"Well, I've enjoyed it, my dear, every bit of it."

Luncheon was laid. J.J. had given thought and affection to that lunch. There was cold salmon and cucumber, and a gooseberry tart and cream. Miss Pope had a wholesome liking for good food. But the most significant offering was half a bottle of white wine, and good white wine. It was the first bottle of its kind that J. J. had ever purchased.

J.J. had gone up to London to interview the Dean of St. Mark's Hospital, and Miss Pope, it being a Wednesday and early closing day, sat under the Blenheim Orange with her Post Office Deposit Book in her lap. It was not that she was considering ways and means,

but rather the manner and the inspiration of her purpose. Two or three more years would have to pass before John James would be a qualified doctor, and though he had assured her that he could live on two pounds a week and probably make that money himself, Miss Pope was not for niggling.

Miss Pope smiled over her deposit book. It represented money and power, and money should be used. When she died, and she knew what J.J. did not know, that something was failing in her, all her money would be his. Why not equip him with a part of it now?

J.J. was to be back for tea. On a still day Yatley could hear the trains running in the valley, and Miss Pope heard the 3.25 go down to Dewhurst. In half an hour or so J.J. would be with her, and she rose and went in to put the kettle on, and cut her bread and butter. Raspberry jam? Yes, she would put out raspberry jam, and they would take their tea in the garden. J.J. liked to be out of doors, hatless, and often coatless, as though his large and active head and swift small body rebelled against anything that cramped and confined them. Miss Pope was carrying out the tea-tray when she heard the side door open and close.

"That you, John?"

"Yes."

"You're early, my dear."

"Mr. Larcombe gave me a lift."

"We're having tea outside. Come and help."

She knew at once by his face that the day had not been too good a day for him. He would display a kind of brittle gaiety that could be ironic when he had met obstruction or unfriendliness, but he was not one of those blind egoists who could not see when a woman was tired.

"You sit down. I'll do things. It's a bit stuffy to-day."

He had looked at her consideringly and affectionately, and she accepted his diagnosis.

"Yes, it's the heat, my dear, the first we've had this year. I always wilt a little."

"You go and sit down. I'll do gyp."

She returned to her chair under the tree, knowing that he liked doing these things for her. Well, wasn't that a comfort after all these years? Also, it is usual for the young to be so self-absorbed that

they expect things done for them, not to do them. J.J. was quite a capable cook; he did not mind helping to wash up; he always cleaned his own boots, and made his own bed.

"Raspberry jam, Auntie!"

"Yes, I thought you'd like it."

"I do. Shall I pour out?"

"Yes, my dear, you can."

She watched his quick hands at work. Would he ever find a woman who could understand the significance of those hands? Miss Pope did not ask him questions; she waited; she could be wise in waiting. He always remembered that she liked two lumps of sugar.

"Help your glycogen, Auntie. Good stimulus."

"What's glycogen, my dear?"

"The sugar stored in your liver. I think the gentleman I met to-day must have had a liver."

"Oh, that's a pity."

"A rather natural reaction, perhaps. Ward had written to him about me. A mistake, I imagine. People with hard-boiled heads don't like being prompted."

"Was he like that?"

"Yes, rather like a large white egg, and a little stale. Or a gander in a bad temper. Almost hissed at me. I think I put my foot in it."

"How?"

He was spreading raspberry jam on his slice of bread and butter.

"Well, like this. Ward must have spread too much jam on my reputation. I suppose these London chaps may feel prejudiced against someone who has been to Oxford or Cambridge. My friend the Dean was rather hoity-toity with me, and then I put my foot in it."

"How, dear?"

"I explained that I had to keep myself, or wanted to, and I asked him whether I could do some coaching. He snubbed me; said that if a lame duck needed help, his own men ought to have the preference in the matter of fees, and that, in a sense, I was only an interloper. Well, of course, that's true."

Miss Pope, sipping her tea, looked at him over her cup.

"Jealousy, maybe. You'll get it."

"Oh, I suppose so."

She nodded her head at him.

"Just laugh it off, my dear. Besides, we need not bother about your Dean. I've had an idea. You know, John, you'll be having all my money, so I am going to let you have some of it now."

He sat very still, regarding her.

"Call it a loan, Auntie."

"No. We don't lend to those we love."

"You have given me so much."

"Well, you've been my hobby."

"No, Auntie, I don't like the idea."

"Fudge, John. What's the use of money lying idle? I call this an investment. Don't flout me, my dear. I want you to feel independent. I want you to have a place to work in."

"Oh, just how?"

"Well, what you would call your lab. I expect you could get an extra room or something."

His face lit up. He sat a moment, staring at his teacup. Then he got up and kissed her.

J.J. took a week's holiday, and he spent it in London. So far as medical education was concerned, the close season was approaching when most students were dispersed upon holidays, and the eminent members of the staff were to be found in Switzerland, or Austria, or shooting grouse and partridges, or just lazing in the country. J.J. was not a person who needed educating. He had taken his anatomy and physiology at Cambridge, and was as ready for the second part of his M.B. as any man could be. Self-education was the thing, getting your eyes and ears and hands to work upon the diseased and the sick, and that was the life of a hospital. He had been appointed clinical clerk to Sir James Fraser, a very delightful gentleman whose weakness lay in a prejudice in favour of exteriors. J.J. appeared in every possible out-patient department, eyes, nose and throat, skins, children, medical and surgical. Members of the staff began to ask each other the question:

"Who is that funny little chap who turns up like a poor relation?"

"Fellow with the hydrocephalic head and infantile legs?"

"That's the man. Does he come to you?"

"Yes."

"I think it's a fellow named Pope. Down from Cambridge. Supposed to be something rather special."

"I had to snub him the other day."

"Oh, why?"

"Asked an infernal lot of questions, and had the cheek to argue about a point in chemistry."

When enthusiasm for the truth oversteps discretion, seniority is apt to take offence. Students were expected to stand or sit in a respectful circle and be mute. J.J. was still reading German, and one afternoon, in a little lecture upon a new synthetic product originating in Germany, the physician in charge of a particular out-patient department, misquoted the monograph on the subject. No doubt, it was very unwise of J.J. to pipe up and correct him.

"I think Bergman meant so and so, sir."

The junior physician was a rather florid and dramatic person, and his colour increased, and his eyes became angry.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I think Bergman——"

"And who the devil are you?" said the eyes of seniority.

"The German version, sir——"

"You read German?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps not very accurately."

The physician, having administered the snub, continued with the case in hand.

It was unfortunate that so early in his career J. J. Pope should have earned the reputation of being a prig. The member of the staff whom he had offended spoke openly of the incident to others in the hospital board-room. Who was this little fellow with the enlarged head who had the impertinence to argue with and correct his seniors? Sir James Fraser, under whom J.J. was clerking, was present during this conversation, and Sir James was not a lover of uppish young men who lacked both birth and manners.

"One of my clerks, I believe."

"I think a little reducing treatment is indicated, sir."

Much of this was in the future, and at the moment J. J. Pope was staying for a few nights in an obscure and stuffy Bloomsbury boarding-house, while he explored the neighbourhood for rooms and a possible private lab. He had five hundred pounds to his credit, Aunt Jane's investment in faith, and no one but J.J. knew how profoundly that gift had affected him. All that he was and had accomplished he owed to himself and to this ageing woman who had given him a strangely impartial and unclutching affection. Bloomsbury was veritable Bloomsbury in those days, still smelling of the Georges, Dickens, and Vanity Fair, and the droppings of cab-horses and the great beasts which drew the railway vans over thundering stone-sets. It was solid and solemn, if not wholly respectable. Even the Foundling Hospital had implications of its own. The great squares with their plane trees were as significant as their names: Brunswick, Bedford, Russell, Mecklenburg. The tall railings hedged a guarded privilege, prospects of propriety and peace, and rightly so. Bloomsbury was still mahogany, and soft black brick.

Unicorn Place accepted him. No. 7 was on the hospital lodging list, and the top-floor rooms were vacant at twenty-five shillings a week, including breakfast and a simple supper. Coal, of course, was extra, and only one meal was provided on Sundays. No. 7 was kept by a Mrs. Dally, and two tall grim daughters, Phoebe and Ophelia, and obviously those who had christened them had had no feeling for the future. If they had dallied, they were neither Phoebe nor Ophelia. The old lady was seen but rarely, rustling in black and coifed with a huge white cap. She looked exactly like an animated corpse.

It was Miss Phoebe who showed J.J. the rooms. She stood in the doorway, holding the brass handle of the mahogany door as though no unmarried woman should enter a room to be alone in it with a man. J.J. looked out of the window, and saw the trees of the Foundling Hospital and of Brunswick square, and obliquely a row of houses rising like a dark cliff. He could see a section of the hospital forecourt, and a part of one quaint white colonnade. There was space here, and a largeness of sky, and the umbrage of trees.

Meanwhile, he listened vaguely to Miss Phoebe's dry declaiming. "Latchkeys are provided, but we like our young gentlemen to

be in by ten. Twenty-five shillings a week, coal half-a-crown a scuttle. A hot bath twice a week, sixpence extra."

J.J. was more absorbed in the view than in her ordinances.

"Does Handel still play the organ at the Foundling?"

Miss Phoebe understood neither his puckishness, nor his lack of attention to business.

"I do not know the name of the organist. We sit under Mr. Spurgeon."

J.J. turned to explore the bedroom which opened from the sitting-room. So, they sat under Mr. Spurgeon? Miss Phoebe Dally did not look much of a cushion.

"I take it you do the catering?"

"Of course. Plain, good food, you understand."

J.J. had disappeared into the bedroom. This, most certainly, was a celibate show where giggles and shy encounters upon the stairs would not vex him. The bedroom was a mere slip of a room, with the bed and a vast mahogany wardrobe confronting each other like two tyrannies competing for space, but the window did not give upon the street, and J.J., being a countryman, liked to sleep in peace.

He reappeared.

"Plenty of cats, I presume?"

Miss Phoebe Dally's very stupid eyes were hard pebbles below her sandy eyebrows. Cats, indeed! This young man appeared to be a very odd and rather ridiculous person. Cats, indeed!

"I beg your pardon!"

J.J. smiled at her. The fanciful suggestion flitted to him that this creature was like a sandy cat in a gooseberry bush, glaring with ground-glass eyes.

"I mean in the gardens. You see, I read a great deal at night."

Miss Phoebe's reaction was instant, and concerned the gas.

"Late hours. We should have to charge extra for light."

"I could use candles, you know."

"We like the lights out at ten-thirty."

J.J. was to discover that one or other of the austere daughters patrolled the stairs at night to look for slits of light under the doors, but the view from the window of No. 7, and its Georgian atmosphere pleased him.

"Ill take the rooms."

"We like a deposit."

J.J. produced two sovereigns from a purse.

"Will that do?"

Her narrow, flat hand accepted the coins.

"Yes. When will you come in?"

"To-morrow."

"I take it the Dean sent you?"

"Yes. I can vouch for my own respectability."

Never once did she smile. In her drab life not even the dust danced when the sun shone.

J.J. said farewell without regrets to his Bloomsbury boarding-house. It was not a place to eat in, much less to sleep in. The boiled cabbage, soapy potato, red-edged meat regime had antagonised his fastidious stomach, and he had slept between a fat man who snored, and a faded cantatrice who had practised the high notes while going to bed at any strange hour. Cheese, good butter and bread, and fresh fruit seemed to J.J. so much more wholesome than the messes that frowsy cooks and kitchens concocted. No. 7, Unicorn Place was an improvement. He could sleep here, and the food was plain but good. The Dally family might be lean and acid, but it did possess a kind of austere pride, and like many of the unlovely people it was efficient and honest.

It took J.J. a week to discover his lab. He found it in Mortimer Mews, a stable and coach-house which had been converted into a workshop by a dentist's mechanic who had gone elsewhere. Gas had been laid on, and the place promised to suit him admirably. The two little rooms above were let to a young woman who owned a part share in a small millinery and hat-shop in Roper's Row. J.J. paid a deposit, and became a yearly tenant, with the promise that if the rooms above him became vacant he should be given the chance to take them.

8

SIR JAMES FRASER was going round his wards. His hair was silver, his colour high, his profile that of the English aristocrat. His name was Scotch, but since the family had been domiciled in London since the days of Charles II, Sir James thought and spoke of himself as English. He had had his portrait in the Academy; he attended royalty, and looked it, a very stately and confident person with a lovely and deliberate voice. His pleasure-pursuits were as dignified as his looks; he trained and flew falcons, was an authority on china and miniatures, and had written a book on the subject.

Sir James enjoyed his ward work. He liked demonstrating cases to his clinical clerks and the little crowd of students who followed him. Being a looker, he preferred looks in young men, and the manners that should go with looks. Nor, it must be confessed, did he not like a young man to be too clever.

Sir James stood six feet, one inch, J. J. Pope five feet, two. J.J. had to look up at Sir James, and Sir James to look down at J.J. Little men with very great ability have the reputation of being bumptious, and Sir James could quote Louis Quatorze and Napoleon as examples, and French ones at that. Nor did J. J. Pope look quite English; he was Celtic or even Iberian. Sir James had discovered that whenever he asked a question this young man with the large head and the infantile legs could always answer it, and J. J. Pope's ready response limited the scope of a bedside lecture. Sir James rather liked to have puzzled faces round him waiting to hear his exposition of the case. This damned little fellow was too final.

Hence, Sir James fell to addressing his questions to the three

other clinical clerks, and ignoring J. J. Pope. Grimes, the house-physician, was equally unattracted by a fellow who seemed to know too much. The partiality was obvious, especially so to J.J. Sir James' favourite was Falconer, a tall, comely lad, a Blue who had rowed for Leander and won the Grand at Henley.

Falconer was not very bright upon diagnosis. He had rowing hands, but not a doctor's hands, and his handsome head was bovine.

It happened this way. The case was a pneumonia, and Sir James asked a particular question, with his eyes on Falconer. Falconer smiled, looked perplexed and was silent.

"The percussion note is exaggerated above——"

Sir James turned quickly upon J.J.

"Will you kindly wait, Mr. Pope, until I address the question to you."

J.J. flushed up.

The snub was drastic, and the audience sniggered.

J.J. took that public affront home with him to Unicorn Place. Had he been too officiously knowledgeable, or were there other and deeper reasons for Sir James' prejudice? That horrid phrase "Class Consciousness" had recently been born, but J.J. even in his most bitter moments, had too much wisdom to be fooled by such a phrase.

But the snub had hurt him. He admired Sir James Fraser both as a man and a physician. He would have liked to be liked by him. What a strange thing was human incompatibility! Yet, was it so strange? The mysterious alchemy of human emotions! Peter Pratten liked him, and Peter was a large and handsome person, so it wasn't just a matter of looks and of size. As a rule J.J. took his tea at an Aerated Bread shop in Holborn, a penny bun and a twopenny cup of tea, but to-day he renounced his tea. He was fitting up his lab. in Mortimer Mews, and he went straight to the job that would soothe and distract him.

He was unlocking the door when he heard footsteps on the stairs. They were coming down lightly and swiftly and with all the snap of youth. He saw a pair of neat black shoes, a swinging skirt bellying out under the play of the knees. J.J. had not seen his neighbour, but he had heard her singing overhead, not like his friend the cantatrice, but making a kind of pleasant crooning like a dove

in a tree on a hot day in summer. Suddenly, her face came into view, crowned by a contraption that was called a toque, black velvet set with pansies. J.J., his hand still on the key, stared at her obliquely. He saw the pansies in her hat, and her face was just like that flower, an amber-coloured pansy with strange dark eyes.

The girl paused abruptly on the bottom step, one hand on the rail. Even her regard had a pansy seriousness.

She smiled.

"Are you the new one?"

J.J. returned the smile.

"I suppose I am. Is it better to be new or old?"

His puckishness seemed to provoke this Alice in Wonderland to secret laughter.

"Oh, new, isn't it?"

"Was the other one——?"

"Yes, old and cross, and always coughing."

"I'm cross sometimes, but I don't cough."

"You're a doctor, aren't you?"

"Not quite yet. Suppose I'd better introduce myself. John James Pope."

Her very dark eyes flickered fun at him.

"I'm Kitty Jewell."

"Moonstone and agate."

"That sounds rather nice. But I must be going. Mary's been in charge all day."

"Of the lamb?"

Her expressive lips curled back over very white teeth.

"No, our shop. And I've got a customer to fit. Good-bye, Mr. John James Pope."

"Good-bye, Miss Moonstone."

She slipped past him, and he stood staring after her as a faun might have watched a nymph disappearing into a wood.

So that was the light overhead! And she kept a shop in partnership with Mary! J.J. passed into the room that was to be his lab. and his feeling about things was that Miss Kitty Jewell was not quite your conventional shop-keeper. A little unusual, like his feelings!

As he began to potter about in his new sanctum, rigging up

rubber tubing to his Bunsen burner and his incubator, he was conscious of an inward warmth and a sense of perfume. Those sombre eyes and that amber-coloured hair! Rather an unusual mixture, like a Titian type. Vitality, a blending of child and woman, a joy in life that was infectious.

J.J. had almost forgotten Sir James and the snubbing the great man had administered to him. This woman child had smiled at him. She was friendly, and somehow real, not the product of family snobbery and suspicion. Perhaps she was an orphan like he was, and so had escaped the heavy hand of parental interference. J.J. lit his Bunsen lamp, and saw that it functioned happily. The room possessed a sink, and a water-tap, shelves, and a bench by the window. J.J. got out his microscope and his histology box. The lab. was beginning to feel like home.

Meanwhile, Miss Kitty Jewell was hurrying to Roper's Row, walking with a little lilt that might so easily have become a skipping or a dance. All her movements were quick and vital, but without restlessness, like the movements of a sensitive and intelligent child. Those sombre eyes of hers could light up and laugh. Men looked at her admiringly, and she knew it, and was glad.

The little shop in Roper's Row had one window and a side door. The window displayed hats and a *mélange* of millinery. Kitty opened the door, and found her friend and partner Mary, sitting on a stool, sewing. The shop was empty.

"Afraid I'm late."

Mary was dark, placid, and fat. She looked with a maternal air at her friend.

"Not much. Mrs. Gates hasn't turned up yet."

"You go and have your tea, dear. I lost a minute with my new neighbour."

Mary eyed her consideringly.

"Young or old?"

"Young. Going to be a doctor. Funny little man, no taller than I am. He's got a head like a——"

"A what?"

"Melon. No, not quite like that. A big hot-cross bun."

"Doesn't sound very dangerous."

"Oh, no, but I think I like him."

"Sisterly, my dear?"
"Of course."

Mortimer Mews and Unicorn Place became contrasts in J.J.'s consciousness. At 7, Unicorn Place he sat like Keats at his high window, and dreamed dreams in which the human tissues and juices were woven into a strange tapestry. Why this, why that? How little could the text-books tell you when you delved below the surface, and shed the sacerdotal solemnity of mere words. Why Kitty Jewell, why the Misses Phoebe and Ophelia Dally? J.J. liked to gaze at the tops of his trees, but Mortimer Mews had its beauty—of a sort. When you entered it you saw rows of green and blue coach-house doors, the pattern of old black brickwork, inquisitive windows, chimney-pots, none of which seemed alike, here and there a window-box. Perhaps cabs and carriages were being washed and polished, or put away. The smell of manure hung in the air; little heaps of it were stacked against the walls before being carted off. They steamed. Women gossiped, children played, noisy children. It was a very human scene, London in its intimate mood, redolent of sweat and dung.

J.J. did not divine sepsis here. Miss Jewell had a window-box full of petunias above his workshop. That, somehow, was a sign and a symbol. The very vitality of the place confounded hygienic and critical dreariness. To J.J.'s country mind it always seemed that the supercilious and critical mind was sterile, and needed a good dunging.

It appeared that in the evening Miss Jewell sat and sewed at her window, and while she sewed she sang, not continuously so but like a wind coming and going and making a languorous murmuring. J.J. might be at his microscope, or mixing up experimental concoctions, and her voice crept into his consciousness. Didn't she ever go out? She did. One evening a rather dressy young man knocked at the door that was both J.J.'s and Miss Jewell's, and Pope went to open it.

The young man looked surprised. He had, John thought, rather nasty, sleepy, insolent eyes, and his socks and tie were full of colour.

"Miss Jewell live here?"

"Yes, upstairs."

There was suspicion in the young man's eyes. Who was this funny little fellow who appeared to share Miss Jewell's hutch?

"Live here?"

"Isn't that my business?"

The young man went sulkily up the stairs and knocked at the lady's door. It was locked.

"Hallo, kid! Coming out?"

Miss Jewell did go out with him. J.J. saw them pass his window. The young man appeared to be wanting to slip an arm under Miss Jewell's, but she was not wanting it. She drew apart, her arms pressed to her body. J.J. was displeased, and caught himself questioning his right to be displeased. And the reason thereof? He frowned, and glued his eye to the eyepiece of his microscope.

Twilight was falling, and he had finished for the night, and was about to go out and lock his door and return to Unicorn Place, when Miss Jewell and the young man reappeared. J.J. saw their faces, the young man's turgid and sulky, the girl's pale and determined.

"Good night."

"Look here, kid, I——"

"Oh, shut up. Leave me alone."

The young man caught her by the arm, and J.J. moved to sudden anger, opened both doors and appeared on the threshold. Kitty Jewell was trying to shrug him off. She turned quickly to J.J.

"Oh, Mr. Pope, would you mind telling this gentleman to leave me alone?"

J.J. smiled at her.

"With pleasure. Do you mind getting out?"

The young man glared at J.J.

"You mind your own business, damn you."

"It is my business."

"Oh, I see, you're her bully. Not much of one, at that."

A sudden blaze came into J.J.'s eyes.

"Get out, you cad. We have friends here who know how to deal with your kind."

Which was true, for a couple of cabmen, who were off duty,

had edged up, and one of them was young and pretty handy with his fists.

"Cheap toff, what! You let the girl alone."

The young man showed his teeth.

"Everybody's tart, I suppose?"

And then Jehu smote him, and so suddenly and successfully that he needed no further coercion.

Kitty had fled up the stairs, and J.J. having watched the retreat of Juan, and exchanged a few friendly words with the cabmen, returned to the foot of the stairs. That beastly word had shocked him. He found himself wondering whether the thing could be true. He had never thought of Miss Moonface in that way. Poisonous swine! Such poison stuck. It infected even the innocent. But was he being God's own babe? How did he know that Miss Jewell kept a shop, and whether she belonged or not to the sisterhood of the Magdalen?

He was standing there, hesitant and frowning, when he heard a particular sound. His head lifted with a jerk. He listened, looking up the steep and narrow stairs. Next moment he was climbing the stairs. The sounds were quite definite, and they moved him most strangely. Something in him trembled. He raised a hand and knocked gently at her door.

"Yes?"

"It's Pope. Can I do anything?"

"No, go away, please."

There were more sobs, and he turned to go, both angry and compassionate. What a beastly thing sex could be when it was without tenderness and pity, just raw, red meat! He was halfway down the stairs when her door opened suddenly. She was leaning over the rail.

"Oh, Mr. Pope, I'm sorry I was rude."

He turned and looked up at her.

"I didn't think you rude."

"You don't believe it, do you?"

"Good God, no!"

She gave a little gulp, and applying a crumpled handkerchief to her nose, blew it.

"Oh, thank you so much. I—I didn't think he was that sort. And I'm not that sort."

"Of course you're not. We all know that."

"Oh, thank you so much."

The strangest thing about it was that J.J. did believe her, and in believing her was to foreshadow one of the greatest curative forces that he, as an unorthodox healer, was to discover, or rather, rediscover, for the thing was as old as time. People wanted to be believed in; people wanted to feel well with themselves, and with others. The man or woman who feels poor and inferior, may behave in a poor and inferior way.

Nor did J.J. realise what he had done. At one of those anguished moments in a child's life he had touched her with the healing hand of faith. A healer must believe in himself, and in the essential goodness of others. More than that, J.J. himself had ceased to be a funny little man with a Bath-bun head. To Kitty Jewell he had become a person, significant and somehow strange. From that time she began to love him.

J.J. did not see her again until two evenings later. He had crossed the cobbles of the mews to swap a word or two with Joe Clements, the cabbie who had smitten Lothario. Joe was cleaning harness, and blowing over it as he did when he groomed a horse. He was a dark Cockney, lean, and black of hair, with a big nose and a sardonic mouth. Because of his nose he was known as Conkie, but only his intimates were allowed to use that nickname.

"No more trouble, I hope?"

"No, sir," said Joe, "that dirty tyke didn't want a second outin'."

"You can punch, Mr. Clements."

"Joe grinned at him. From that moment he was J.J.'s faithful friend.

"I've got a bit of a kick. Nuff t' make a decent gal go funny, bein' called a thing like that."

"Worse than murder."

"Yes, sir, in a manner of speakin'. And she not deservin' it. Just a jolly kid, y'know, and not thinkin' any wrong of life."

J.J. looked at Mr. Clements with sudden affection.

"Yes, of course. You and I understand each other."

J.J. walked on, and Joe spat and watched him curiously. Funny little josser, but right sort of stuff. Bit of a nob he had too, and probably plenty inside it. J.J. was looking up at the box of petunias. A face swam into view like the moon, and smiled at him.

J.J. raised his bowler hat. It was a very large hat.

"Good evening. Your flowers look pretty."

"Yes, don't they? I'm afraid they won't last much longer."

"What do you do then?"

"Why, nothing. Just wait for next year. Or put other sorts of flowers in my hats."

"Pansies?"

"In the hats I make?"

"Oh, of course. And where is your hat-shop?"

"Know Roper's Row?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"It's called 'Nanette.' That was Mary's idea. Mary is my partner."

J.J. smiled at her, grew suddenly shy, and disappeared from her view. He felt that he had been indulging in rather childish babble, but pleasant babble. After all life wasn't just a time-table or a sheet of formulae and if you couldn't play the child sometimes, you must be something of a dullard. J.J. unlocked his door, and sat down to his microscope. He had stained and mounted some sections, but as he gazed steadfastly down the brass tube he seemed to see yellow pansies in a black velvet hat.

9

August was ending with a heat-wave, and the black-coated world may have wished to shed its coat and parade in shirt-sleeves, but the conventions forbade. Mortimer Mews was more fortunate in this respect than Unicorn Place. Mr. Joe Clements could suck a straw and lean against a shady wall in his shirt-sleeves, and cast secret and longing glances at a particular window, but Joe Clements had a wife and family, and sufficient crude sense to know when the moon was a moon. J.J. had taken tea at his Aerated Bread shop and was returning to Unicorn Place. The great planes in the squares were still and somnolent; window blinds were down. J.J. walked in the shade.

He had slipped his latchkey into the door of No. 7 and was swinging back the big blue door, when another door opened, that of the Dally private sitting-room. Miss Phoebe stood there with something orange-yellow in her hand. Her hand too looked yellow.

"Telegram for you, Mr. Pope. Came about three o'clock."

J.J. stared at the envelope in her hand. A telegram! Telegrams were not usual in his world. He took it from Miss Phoebe, and climbing the stairs, paused on the first landing. He slit the envelope, drew out the form, and unfolded it and read:

"Come at once, Miss Pope ill. Florrie."

J.J.'s face went all twisted. It is at such moments that a man realises who matters to him in a world of casual human shapes. Aunt Jane ill! What was it? Heart? Frowning, he went slowly down the stairs, and knocked at the Dally door.

Miss Phoebe opened it. Her face looked lean and eager.

"I have to go down into the country at once. My aunt is ill."

Miss Phoebe's cat's-eyes stared. In her arid life anything that made for sensation was welcome.

"Not serious, I hope?"

"I don't know yet. I expect I shall be away for a night or two."

"That will be quite all right, Mr. Pope. Shall we cook your supper?"

"No. I'm going at once."

Yatley seemed very cool and green after London. It was habit and not economy that made J.J. walk from Dewhurst to Yatley, though, if he had chartered one of the station cabs, the crawling old horse would have taken as long to go by the road as J.J. took by the field-paths. It was one of those close evenings when even thinking makes one sweat, and when J.J. came to the beech walk his shirt was sticking to him. There was always a breeze under these beeches, and J.J. sat down on a bank, took off his hat and mopped himself. When he came out of the shade of the trees and saw the village green in the glow of the evening, he knew that he did not want to meet people. There was a path across the churchyard, and he took it, but to reach the lane that ran beside his aunt's fence, J.J. had to scramble over the low wall. He did not go to the front door, but slipped in by the back gate in the boarded fence. Miss Florence Mercer was sitting under the apple tree in Miss Pope's chair.

Was that an omen? J.J. was not pleased to see her sitting there. Her back was towards him, and he took her by surprise.

"Well, what's the trouble?"

His voice was curt and rough. Miss Mercer got up with a little scream. She was that sort of woman.

"Oh, you did give me a start! But I'm glad you've come. Miss Pope's had a stroke."

J.J. stood very still, gripping his bag.

"How bad is it?"

"Pretty bad, I'm afraid. It must have been the heat. She can't speak, and her face is all drawn down one side. Dr. Dibble's been twice."

"That won't help much."

"You shouldn't say such things, you shouldn't, reely," and Florrie burst into tears.

Florence Mercer was a good soul, if rather stupid and elemental, and J.J. understood that emotion affected people in different ways. It made him abrupt and laconic, not towards the very particular few, but to the casual many.

"Sorry, Florence. Yes, she has been a good friend to both of us."

"She has that," blubbed Florrie, "neighbours used to think her hard, but——"

"I know. I'll go up. Does she——"

"Yes, she hasn't lost her senses. But her poor smile——"

"So she can smile. She would."

"And make signs. You'll have to write, or ask her what she wants."

"I know."

Florence was dabbing her eyes, and J.J. left his bag in the garden, and entered that familiar house. Here were all the old friendly smells which seemed to permeate it from the shop. The grandfather clock tick-tocked at the foot of the stairs, like the very heart of the house. And the human house was in ruins!

He opened the door of Aunt Jane's room. It had been so familiar to him as a child with its chintz-covered dressing-table, and simple furniture, the oak press and painted chest of drawers. There had been nights when he had dreamed bad dreams, and Aunt Jane had appeared like God in a nightdress and carried him off to be comforted in her bed. The blind was down, and he saw her large white face on the pillow. She had slipped down in the bed, and J.J. knew that she should be propped up. He went to her, and kissed her, and the one hand she could use fumbled with his hair.

"Well, Auntie."

That was all he could say, and she could answer him only with human noises, a parody of speech, like an animal trying to talk. He raised her up and rearranged her pillows. Her poor face looked all lop-sided, and it hurt him to look at her.

She pointed, and made strange noises. What did she want? More light? He went and pulled up the blind, and looked at her questioningly. Yes, that was it. He saw a crooked smile, a toothless smile. Her dentures had been taken out. He had a horrid feeling that he was regarding a precious person who suddenly had become senile.

He sat down beside the bed, and took her hand. Its fingers closed on his.

"I'm going to look after you, Auntie. You mustn't worry."

He felt the pressure of her fingers. Her eyes stared. She looked frightened. Poor soul, what dumbness and bewilderment must be hers!

"Worrying about something, dear?"

She nodded.

"The shop?"

Again that movement of the head.

"I'll look after the shop. Florrie and I can manage till you are about again."

In J.J. was the knowledge that Aunt Jane would never be about again, and perhaps she knew it too.

Yatley saw him next morning taking down the shutters of the shop. He was in his shirt sleeves, and wearing a white apron. Yatley marvelled, but it approved. There was little that J.J. did not know about the village shop, for, as a child he had played at keeping shop, and in his later days he often had helped Miss Pope to check stock and prepare orders. Its tiers of shelves and rows of drawers were as familiar as his own workshelves had been, and he knew where all the various entities lived; tobacco, pipes, matches, cards of darning-wool, bootlaces, hairpins, buttons, reels of ribbon, slippers, sugar, tea, condiments, rice, sago, and what not. He took his place behind the counter as though his being there was the most natural thing in the world. J. J. Pope, B.A., weighing out cheese, and slicing bacon! Florrie Mercer, behind her brass grill, watched him and marvelled. Florrie was eight years older than he was, and still cherished a sentimental affection for him, an affection that had not lost all hope. How nice it would be if she and John were running the shop together in double harness, for the business would be J.J.'s if Miss Pope passed over. But then, of course, a bachelor of arts and a future physician could not be limited in that way.

Mr. Larcombe, strolling in to inquire for Miss Pope, found John cutting rashers of bacon.

"Hallo, John, my lad! Deputising, what! How is your aunt to-day?"

"Much the same, sir, I'm afraid."

"When did you get down?"

"Last night, sir."

Mr. Larcombe was thinking: "Well, damn it, this is the right sort of lad. Not ashamed to turn to in a crisis. Not like our friend, the—— Well, never mind." Mr. Larcombe bought two ounces of navy cut, stuffed the tin into his pocket, and sat sideways on the counter. He tapped on the floor with his stick.

"Let's see, what time do you close, John?"

"Six-thirty, sir."

"In time to come up and have some dinner with us. We meal at seven-thirty. What about it? Just as you are, you know."

J.J.'s face lit up. This was a good and jocund gesture.

"I should love to come, sir, if——"

"Someone can be with your aunt?"

"I'll ask Florrie."

Miss Mercer was moon-eyed behind her grill. J.J. asked to dine at the Hall! Well, well, well! That, in football journalese, put paid to all her dreams. But why should not J.J. dine at the Hall? He was the cleverest man in the village. J.J. had finished cutting rashers, and was carefully cleaning the knife. He glanced across at Florrie.

"Can you do that for me, Florrie?"

"Of course," said she.

"Thank you, Florrie. I'll just go up and tell Miss Pope."

When Aunt Jane heard the news her poor face broke into a toothless smile, yet there was beauty in that smile. J.J. was going to dine at the Hall. Was she pleased? Indeed she was. This was a kind of triumphant finale played while her little ship slipped down the river. Mr. Larcombe had always been the gentleman, a real gentleman, and this was a gentleman's gesture.

"Do you mind if I go, Auntie? Florrie will be here."

She managed to nod her head at him. Of course he was to go.

J.J. returned to the shop to find the melancholy Mr. Cock buying stamps from Florrie. J.J., in shirt-sleeves and apron, appeared to reduce the rector to a state of fumbling pomposity. So many tart and unpleasant things were said to him at home that wherever he opened his mouth in the parish the vicarage sour milk overflowed from it.

"Ah, Pope, reverting to normal, I see. How is your poor aunt?"

J.J. picked up a duster, and flicked the counter.

"Able to smile, sir."

Mr. Cock's eyebrows went up.

"Indeed! At such a time, I understand, one reverts to childishness."

Mr. Cock seemed very fond of the word revert. J.J. went on flicking the counter.

"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, sir. Senility is of varying degrees, and is discovered at all ages."

Mr. Cock looked puzzled. Now, what did the young fellow mean by that? Surely, no sarcasm was concealed behind an apron.

"I trust that she will not be left too crippled, Mr. Pope."

"Are there cripples in heaven, sir?"

That was a poser, and perhaps a most subtly offensive question, and Mr. Cock left it to the boots, the butter, and the bacon.

Dr. Dibble's dogcart drew up outside the shop while J.J. was helping to unload some cases which the carriers' van had brought from Dewhurst station. Dr. Dibble had nothing to say about J.J.'s adaptations, nor about his apron, but his impression was that a man so completely undistinguished physically as John James Pope could not be expected to succeed as a physician. Personal appearance could not be ignored, and as Dr. Dibble watched J.J. struggle in with a case of sugar, it seemed to him that the box had been endowed with a pair of little legs. The deed might be a worthy deed, but surely young Pope was making an exhibition of himself.

"Well, Pope, how's the patient?"

J.J., clutching the box, confronted the Dewhurst doctor.

"Rather an extensive hæmorrhage, I'm afraid."

Dibble had no sense of humour, but a lively feeling for the ridiculous—in others. Had the sugar-box spoken?

"Better put that down, Pope. Rather heavy for you. Then we'll talk."

J.J. staggered through the shop doorway like a small boy carrying the band's big drum. No doubt Dr. Dibble would do the talking, using those long words which had become sacrosanct in the profession, words which J.J. was beginning to question and mistrust. For, the greater the ignorance, the more pompous and pedantic became the language. So few men appeared to arrive at that state of sincerity which accepts the simple text—"I do not know."

J.J., having got rid of his box, left the shop to Florrie, and accom-

panied Dr. Dibble upstairs. Dr. Dibble sat down by the bed, and spoke like a very sure nurse to a sick child.

"Well, well, how are we to-day?"

To J.J., standing at the foot of the bed, his aunt's face was a poor stolid, twisted mask. Had she been frightened? Of course she must have been frightened. To be suddenly helpless, and speechless, can make you feel that you have been buried alive. Miss Pope just stared at Dr. Dibble. There was a curious, dumb hostility in that stare.

Dr. Dibble nodded pontifically, glanced meaningly at J.J. and proceeded to feel Miss Pope's pulse. Plainly, the patient's mentality had suffered; the human husk was here, minus the soul.

"Ah, pressure lower, I think. That is excellent. Now, my dear woman, just lie quiet. No worry, no thinking about things. Here is your nephew looking after the shop for you. Nothing for you to worry about, nothing at all."

Miss Pope's face remained vacant and dull.

"Ass!" thought J.J.

When Dr. Dibble had gone, J.J. returned to his aunt's room, and sitting down beside her, placed a hand on hers. No words passed between them. The pressure of hand upon hand was sufficient. J.J., sitting there with a peculiar and very gentle smile upon his face, was wondering whether, after all, there was very much difference between Dr. Dibble's bottles of physic and old Tom Pratten's patent pills. Both paraded a convention, one that advertisements never lied, the other that the doctor always knew.

Miss Pope's fingers closed upon J.J.'s. She mumbled something, and J.J. turned his head to look at her.

"What is it, dear? Anything I can get you?"

Miss Pope's head rolled negatively on the pillow.

"Is it that Dr. Dibble is a damned old ass?"

Miss Jane Pope nodded most emphatically.

But, for J.J., the day's finale was yet to be.

He was cutting a Dutch cheese in half for Mrs. Blundell, the butcher's wife, when one of the new automobiles pulled up outside the shop. Its colour was green, picked out with red, its metal-work

brass, its origin French. Florrie, peering through the window to look at the new monstrosity, let out a characteristic exclamation.

"Coo, young Strange, and his girl!"

J.J. was taken by surprise. The Stranges of Hardacre were little more than names to him. He was aware of two young people drifting into the shop, the man in flannels and a dark blue blazer, the girl in white. He glanced first at the young man, cool, stupidly comely, sleepily and sensually self-assured. So, this was young Strange whom all the girls thought wonderful, and his elders a conceited and spoilt young cub. J.J.'s knife was half-way through the cheese. He looked at the girl, and his knife remained motionless, embedded in the cheese. For this was the dark child of his dreams, that most strange and mysterious creature in whom all the poignant loveliness of life seemed consecrated.

"Got any Egyptian cigarettes by any chance?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"Thought it was a vain hope. We'll try Dewhurst. Come on, Syb."

Syb. indeed! Blatant young savage! They drifted out as they had drifted in, and J.J.'s knife resumed its cutting of the cheese. One thing he had realised. The girl had not even looked at him. Possibly, she had been aware of him as a vague entity in an apron whose world was no more than cheese and bacon.

10

Miss JANE POPE died in her sleep, probably as the result of a second hæmorrhage. J.J., knocking at her door very early in the morning, and getting no reply, not even one of those inarticulate sounds that passed for speech, entered, and in the dim light realised that death was here.

He was conscious of a sudden and profound feeling of desolation. This old woman was the one person in the world to whom he had been able to talk, and to whom he owed all that he was and all that he might be. She had been even more than a mother to him, in that she had never clutched or assumed that because he was her child she had the blood-right of blind maternal authority. J.J., with a pang at the heart and a sense of emptiness in his stomach, went and pulled up the blind.

The early sunlight came slanting in, and down below he saw the old Blenheim Orange set with fruit, fruit that she would never pluck again. The Apples of The Hesperides!

No outward emotion showed in him. He went and put his lips to her forehead, and its chilliness shocked him. That coldness of the flesh was so quick and final.

Some impulse made him speak aloud to her.

"Good-bye, Aunt Jane. You and I know how much I owe you."

He remembered that the shutters of the shop were up. Were they to remain up? Life had to go on. Women would need tea and cheese, and the Postmaster General took no account of death, but J.J. decided that those shutters should remain up. He would open the door, and carry on in the dim half-light, and the village would understand. Those who failed to understand could go to Hades.

J.J. knew where his aunt's will was kept, in the little old safe behind the sitting-room door, and where her keys would be, but he explored neither her top drawer nor the safe. Somehow he shrank from rushing to make sure that he had become a minor capitalist. All the formalities should be left to Mr. Roper of Dewhurst, his aunt's lawyer, and J.J. sent a boy off with a letter to Mr. Roper. What he did seek was a black tie, and the search proved elusive.

"Do we stock ties, Florrie?"

Miss Mercer was subdued and depressed. She might be out of a job, and she had lost a good friend.

"There were some."

"Black ones?"

"Yes, I do remember. In the drawer with the socks."

They were rummaging about together in the half darkness when Mrs. Cock came into the shop, or rather, into the doorway, and darkened it still further. Her need was a postal order for two-and-sixpence, and somehow she had not tumbled to the fact that the closed shutters spelled death. Mrs. Cock was a lady whose hobby was the discovery of a universal slackness always and everywhere. Here was Miss Pope laid up, and these two lazy young people still had the shutters up at nine o'clock in the morning.

"I would like some attention, please."

J.J. had just found a tie that appeared to be black, and was carrying it to the doorway to make sure, and Mrs. Cock was cutting off the light. She was large, and ominous, with pince-nez perched on a formidable nose. J.J. had always hated Mrs. Cock. To his young senses she had always suggested pale pork and vinegar.

"And I, if you don't mind, would like a little light."

What gross impertinence!

"Indeed, young man. I understand that the post office should be open at eight."

"It is open. Miss Mercer, will you please attend to the lady?"

He edged round her and found the tie to be veritable black. Mrs. Cock glared at it and at him.

"So, Mr. Pope, you attend to yourself before you——"

J.J. did not so much as look at her. He turned back into the dark chasm of the shop.

How Miss Jane Pope's death came to be mentioned at the Hardacre luncheon-table may be a matter of conjecture, but mentioned it was, and the conversation was carried over to rest upon Miss Pope's nephew. Lady Strange happened to be one of the two who had seen J.J. dancing naked as a small boy on Yatley Heath, and her description of the incident seemed to rouse her son to a sudden and unusual outburst of intelligence.

"Gosh, wouldn't that explain Sybil's pile of clothes, little Johnnie Pope gone native?"

His mother gave him one of those secret and considering looks which a sensitive woman may give to the barbarian stranger in a son.

"Possibly."

"What do you think, Syb.?"

Sybil Marwood played with her wine-glass. It was of a delicate green and contained hock. Lawrie's abbreviations were characteristic and too crudely intimate, as was his love-making. He exaggerated the trick of the English in cutting syllables and names. He spoke of 'untin' and shootin'. To him everybody was Edie or Johnnie, Freddie or Bobbie, Edgie or Aggie, or just Syb. He had a fine exterior, no dignity, and a completely banal mind.

"How interesting."

"Interestin'. That was the little fellah in the shop. Counter-jumper B.A. Rum little squit."

His mother looked pathetic. She had produced for her son a very charming creature and he called her Syb. Would nothing educate Lawrence?

"Young Pope is a very brilliant person. Took everything before him up at Cambridge."

"Little stodger. It always makes me laugh when I see his legs."

Sybil Marwood put down her glass.

"You don't look at his head, Lawrie."

"I! Good lord, no! A bun-head. Rather funny a B.A. dishing out cheese."

"Why funny?"

"Well, isn't it? Sort of Dan Leno business."

Sybil turned to Lady Strange.

"Did he really do that?"

"Do what, my dear?"

"Dance naked?"

"Yes. Quite pagan and pretty. Like a little tiny Pan."

"Going to ask him to perform for you, Syb.?"

"I might," said she, with a twinge of malice. "It might be more interestin' than seein' you shootin' rabbits."

There was a coolness between them that afternoon. Lawrie was good at killing things, and yet he had for Sybil Marwood the elemental appeal of the male. It was the Maurice Hewlett period, and Sybil's mood was fantastic and feudal, and maybe the girl in her wished wilfully to find in Lawrence Strange both Richard Yea and Nay and Prosper le Gai. And she would be Iseult not Maulfry. She was Iseult in all her wild, sleek darkness. Moreover, Hardacre, crowning its wooded hill, might have been Hauterive, and all that lovely Surrey valley-land and the Weald beyond the great ridge, pure phantasy. Sybil had experienced the crabbed and confined routine of both Cheltenham and St. Leonards, where a colonel's widow devoted herself to making a pension suffice and to playing croquet. Sybil loathed croquet. It was a mean, sneaking sort of game suited to old people's cunning. She had colour and temper, and perhaps she preferred Lawrie's crude killing of things to the crowding of balls through hoops.

Being what she was, that picture of a small boy dancing naked among the Yatley beeches piqued her fancy. A faunlike creature, unadulterated Keats! If, for the moment, she had had a surfeit of Lawrence and his rather too confident love-making, she may have been lured by curiosity into exploring the shopman's world. Yes, it was rather intriguing to contemplate a Bachelor of Arts weighing out cheese and slicing bacon.

J.J. happened to be alone in the half-darkened shop, bending over the counter, and reading by the light which entered by the doorway, a page of his aunt's journal. Mr. Roper had found it in the safe, and had passed it as immediate inheritance to John James. Mr. Roper had been able to tell him that he had inherited about seventeen hundred pounds, plus the shop's stock and the good will of the business. J.J. had known of his aunt's journal, but he had never seen inside its pages, and now he was absorbed in some of the pithy sayings of this shrewd and simple countrywoman.

"We like to blame in others that which is secretly blameworthy in ourselves."

"If you haven't got a pony and trap, you'll find some reason for disapproving of those who have."

"Don't have much to do with unlucky people. It isn't luck, but the wrong way they have come out of the shell."

"Giving credit makes you enemies."

But there was more to the journal than these rather caustic sayings. Some of it was almost biblical. Aunt Jane had not sat under Mr. Cock, but she had sat in the presence of a consciousness of God. There were sayings too about flowers and fruit, and how the country made you feel in spring and autumn.

"The beech tree is the Lord of the Woods."

J.J. read things about himself, secret and intimate observings that moved him deeply. How this aged woman had watched and reflected!

"The child has a lovely nature, but you must not cross him."

Was that true?

Then, some intervening body shut off the light from the book that lay before him, and J.J., lifting his head and expecting a customer, saw her.

She stepped into the shadows, or rather J.J. would have said she glided in on a little carpet of sunlight. He straightened and stood with his hands resting on the counter. He was there to serve, and no doubt she expected service, the kind of service which Hardacre House claimed from the world. There was silence, a curious pause, with her slim white figure poised there, head up, in the space between the counters. She had come in so confidently, so sure of herself and of the homage her very loveliness seemed to make inevitable, and suddenly she was shy, mute, unable to think of the excuse that should have been so easy.

J.J., waiting there, was puzzled. Did she expect him to ask her what her need was?

"What can I do for you?"

Almost she looked at him askance. His voice was so different from her idea of his surroundings and their implications.

"Are you Mr. Pope?"

"I am."

"I wondered. I mean, is the shop open?"

"Yes. What can I get you?"

"I wanted some notepaper. But it seems a shame to bother you just now."

He looked at her steadfastly, and as though he did not believe her. That was her impression.

"Shops have to keep open. I'm afraid we have only cheap boxes of stationery. I'll look. Won't you sit down?"

She knew now that ever since entering the shop she had lost control of the situation. The control was his. Nor had she ever been looked at in quite that way before, as though she was a picture to be both admired and criticised. This funny little man had most disconcerting eyes. And she rather prided herself on her young poise and her power to subdue the eyes of young men.

She sat down.

"Please don't bother, if it is much trouble."

"No trouble at all," said J.J. almost casually, poking about in a dark corner.

There was silence. Stationery seemed to be proving elusive, and the situation was less and less hers.

"Oh, please don't trouble."

"I'll find it. I'm not quite so familiar with things as I might be."

"Of course not. Weren't you up at Cambridge?"

"I was."

"St. Jude's?"

"Yes."

"I remember dancing there, after May Week."

J.J. had found what he wanted. He produced two cardboard boxes, and placed them on the counter.

"Yes, I think I saw you. I'm afraid this is all we have. The demand in Yatley for superior stationery is, I'm afraid, rather limited."

He opened the boxes.

"Bannisters at Dewhurst have a better selection. Grey and cream, and envelopes to match. Rather poor quality, I'm afraid. Perhaps you would prefer to leave it."

She was conscious of a feeling of resistance.

"I'll take the grey."

"Thank you. Let me see, that will be one and tenpence."

Then it was that she discovered that she had forgotten her purse.

"How silly of me. Perhaps you——?"

"Next time you are passing, certainly. Or would you like me to book it? Hardacre House, I think?"

He was wrapping up the box, and his hands were deliberate and very much under control.

"Yes, next time I am in Yatley."

"That will be quite all right."

He passed her the parcel, and stood like the polite salesman who had completed his service, and was waiting for her to go.

She went.

She thought him a horrid little man. But why?

Miss Jane Pope lay in the new God's acre of Yatley, and J.J. was wondering what to do with her possesssions. Some of them he would not and could not sell, personal things, pieces of furniture which had been as much a part of his life as of hers. But her clothes! What did one do with a dead woman's clothes, especially so when they had belonged to a woman who was old? Sell them to a dealer in second-hand clothes? Rather a beastly idea! Give them away to the poor of the village? Yatley did possess four alms-houses inhabited by very old women, and J.J. walked up to Yatley House and asked the advice of Mr. Larcombe. Mr. Larcombe was the chairman of the Yatley Trust.

"Would the old people like the clothes, sir?"

"Why, most certainly, John."

"It won't be quite all of them. The underclothing and the stockings, and that sort of thing."

"I see. Pack 'em up, John, and I'll put them in store and get Mrs. Larcombe to hand them out when necessary. Anything else I can do?"

J.J. hesitated.

"It's her furniture, or some of it. I want to keep it, if I can store it. I suppose I could——"

"We'll store it for you. There's the old tithe barn."

"Would you, sir? It's very kind of you."

"That's all right, John. Get the carrier to cart it up, and we'll put it away. I see you aren't one of those 'To hell with all the old stuff' young men."

"She gave me my chance in life, sir."

"Good lad. Some memories are damned well worth while."

Then J.J. did a thing which the village thought very strange and heartless, for few things that happened in Yatley could be concealed. On one serene September evening J.J. foraged out some straw from the lumber-shed, made a little pile of it near the Blenheim Apple, and having collected and carried out all Miss Pope's dresses, shawls, etc., he made a pyre and burned them in the garden. A little column of blue smoke rose straight into the still air. One or two inquisitive neighbours, poking their noses over the fence, saw J.J. with a garden fork feeding those old frocks and shawls, aprons and overalls on to the fire. He appeared to be absorbed in the job, and he continued to tend the fire until all was ash.

Yatley did not understand.

It thought it an act of cynical heartlessness. Burning all the poor old thing's clothes! He had her money, and that, perhaps was all he cared about.

Yatley did not understand that a man could care so profoundly that he preferred a kind of sacrificial holocaust to the casual elimination of a dead woman's clothes.

It was Mrs. Cock who assumed stertorous indignation when she heard of the incident. Young Pope was disposing of the shop and the business, and that he had a right to do, but burning the poor old woman's clothes in the garden she had loved so well!

Actually she marched down and tackled J.J. in the shop. There were other people present. Mrs. Cock tilted her head back, and focussed J.J. through her pince-nez as though examining some sort of insect.

"Is it true, Mr. Pope, that you have burnt your aunt's clothes?"

"Quite," said J.J., going on with the job in hand.

"Well, I must say it seems to many of us a most callous and reprehensible act."

"Probably it would seem so," said J.J., apparently unmoved.

"How you could bring yourself to do such a thing, after all the kindness——"

Then J.J. flared, and it was a cold white flare.

"Is it your Christian duty, madam, always to attribute evil motives to your neighbours?"

11

Genius can be strangely forgetful in a way that may appear incomprehensible to mundane men, for, genius, in concentrating upon an idea or upon the exploration of a problem, can become so absorbed in it and so much part of it, that other responsibilities or activities may be mere extraneous and superfluous trifles.

It is a fact that J.J., in rushing to share in Aunt Jane's last days, forgot St. Mark's Hospital and his duties as a clinical clerk. He neither wrote to notify his absence nor to explain it, and when he turned up on that September morning he was made aware of an amused and unfriendly expectancy on the faces of his fellows.

Gains, Sir James Fraser's H.P. was curt with him.

"Hallo, Pope, where have you been? Holidaying?"

"No, I had to go away suddenly."

"Any good reasons?"

"If illness and death are reasons."

Gains was sardonic.

"Your aunt or uncle, I suppose."

"Yes, my aunt."

"You didn't take the trouble to notify us, did you?"

"Other things seemed more important."

"Well, I think you'll hear about it from the old man."

J.J. did hear about it. He was near the head of the procession of students that set out to follow Sir James Fraser round the wards. Gains was walking with his chief. Sir James appeared to have noticed neither the absence nor the presence of J. J. Pope, but when the little crowd had passed through the glazed doors of

Ursula Ward, Sir James faced about with the air of a great gentleman performing some social duty.

"Mr. Pope."

"Yes, sir."

"You have been absent from the hospital for nearly three weeks. I understand that you had a reason."

"A near relation was ill, sir, and I had to go, rather suddenly."

"Did it not occur to you, Mr. Pope, that you might have notified us of your absence and its reason?"

J.J. was mute. He had put himself in the wrong, and he knew it, and yet this sin of omission seemed so very small after the loss that he had suffered. Sir James waited, benign, judicial, dignified.

"Do you not agree, Mr. Pope?"

"Yes, sir, but I——"

"May I suggest, Mr. Pope, that good manners can still be cultivated, even in a crisis."

"I'm sorry, sir."

It was a devastating reproof, and no one could administer such a rebuke better than Sir James. He spoke, as from a high place, with an air of gentleness and pity, the great man condescending to enlighten the uneducated lout. There was silence. Not a snigger. J.J. had been so thoroughly castigated that the complacency of the little crowd was that of a party whose stomach of prejudice had been filled to repletion. Nothing but digestion was needed. Sir James, having spoken, turned and walked with placid deliberation to the nearest bed. His fine surface appeared utterly unruffled.

Not so, J.J. He knew, without looking at the faces of his fellows, that they had enjoyed his discomfiture, and in feeling hot and angry and embarrassed he knew that he bore the stigmata of the man who was unpopular. These other young men had enjoyed seeing him being taken down. Did he care? Why should he care? The passion to please the crowd was not urgent in him.

Well, let these fellows gloat. Sir James' round was coming to an end, and J.J. had stood rubbing elbows with men who were chuckling over his snubbing. He was leaving the ward a little ahead of the crowd, for he wanted to escape. Sir James had paused to give some direction to his H.P. J.J. heard a voice.

"Mr. Pope."

J.J. turned. He saw Sir James walking towards him, and Sir James' face had somehow ceased from being a public face. J.J. waited. Was he to receive another lecture? But Sir James' hand slipped under the little man's arm, and drew him gently into the corridor.

"I am sorry you have had trouble, Pope. Was it very serious?"

"An aunt, sir. She took me when I had no one."

"I know what that must mean. How did it happen?"

"Cerebral hæmorrhage."

"Not much suffering?"

"No, sir, unless one divines things that—that sort of palsy must bring."

Sir James glanced down at him.

"Yes, what passes in the mind, at such a time? Like being shut suddenly out of life, a child in a cupboard."

"You could not have put it better, sir."

"Come to me at any time, Pope, if I can help you."

This sudden kindness, the magnanimity of the great gentleman had an unexpected effect upon J.J. He had been moved by it, but not towards happiness as any assuagement of his sorrow. He felt like a sensitive and lonely child, who, when spoken to kindly by some stranger, bursts into tears. As he walked the London streets he knew that he was a friendless creature, and that something in himself seemed to shut him off from his fellow men.

As he slipped his key into the door of No. 7 Unicorn Place he knew that here too he was a stranger, tolerated in the cause of necessity. The one home he had known had gone, and with it the one person who had loved and understood him, as far as one person can understand another. Miss Ophelia Dally, popping her head out of a door, and looking like a moulting hen in a coop, said: "Oh, it's Mr. Pope." Yes, just Mr. Pope! Miss Ophelia was interested in the first-floor lodger, a baldish and stout widower who was something in the city.

She withdrew, and J.J., climbing the stairs, suddenly hated this house, and yet, what other choice had he? He was a lodger, an obscure and homeless student in this casual city. Not till he had come back to Unicorn Place had he realised to the full how much

Yatley had meant to him. Well, work was the thing. Work and forget. He sat down at his table in the window and with his elbows resting on it, and his hands over his ears, he stared at the familiar scene. His sense of loneliness became a pain. He was conscious of himself as a creature in whom no one was interested. No one would care whether he worked or idled; no one would care what he thought or did, or dreamed of doing. Anything that he accomplished would seem to the world no more than a child's sand-castle by the sea.

A kind of anguish of loneliness attacked him; and with it a bitter restlessness. He could not sit here and read. He would go round to Mortimer Mews, and play with his chemist's toys. He might see Kitty Jewell.

Kitty Jewell!

He realised that he wanted to see Kitty Jewell.

For, suddenly, she appeared to symbolise for him all that he lacked, all that he had never experienced and possessed. She was youth, woman. And she was more than that. Her eyes were kind, and her warm gaiety was like her lambent hair, mysterious and live and lovely. He pictured her in her little flowery hat, coquettish and comely. He thought of her sitting at her window, sewing, and making a little song. Nor, so far as J.J. was concerned, was this a mere sentimental picture.

He went out and walked to Mortimer Mews, but when he saw those blue and green doors, the inquisitive windows, and the perky chimney-pots a strange and sudden shyness seized him. He hesitated. Almost, he turned back.

A cab, drawing in, made him step aside and take to the wall. A friendly, Cockney voice hailed him.

"Evenin', sir, quite a stranger."

It was Joe Clements, drawing in to give the old 'oss a rest, and to take his tea.

"Hallo, Mr. Clements."

"Don't you mister me, sir. Plain Joe's good enough."

J.J. found a sudden smile, and an inspiration. Why should not plain Joe be good enough for anyone? Why Mr. This, and That

Esquire? In Mortimer Mews the doors were all alike, if the people and the horses differed.

"I won't, Joe."

The cabbie's quick eyes had noticed the black tie.

"No trouble, sir, I 'ope?"

"I've lost my best friend, Joe."

"Sorry to 'ear that."

"Yes, there's nothing to be said about it, Joe, nothing at all."

"No, nuffin, sir, when such things 'appen."

J.J.'s shyness seemed to pass. He followed the cab up the mews, opened the door that belonged to both Kitty and himself, and unlocked the door of his lab. The room was just as he had left it, if a little dusty. He stood listening. And then, hearing no sounds above, he realised that Kitty Jewell would still be at the little shop in Roper's Row, and that all his terrors and his hesitations had been mere feathers in the wind.

J.J. sat down on his stool, leaving the lab. door open. As a research student he might be a genius, but in his knowledge of women he was as a babe unborn. He was lonely and sorrowful; therefore some woman should turn aside from her own particular path to comfort him. Because one solitary woman had been infinitely kind to him, J.J. may have believed that the world was full of Jane Popes.

Yet, without this faith in the greater selflessness, most of us make shipwreck, and J.J., sitting there, and pretending to be busy, while waiting for the footsteps of Kitty Jewell, was offering himself as a hostage to fate, and fate might be a little slut or just a schoolmistress.

Presently, he heard the tapping of her shoes upon the cobbles of the mews. The little flowery hat floated past his window, and just as she had passed it, she must have become conscious of being watched, for she gave a quick turn of the head, and saw J.J. sitting there. Her pause was instant yet momentary, like a butterfly settling for a second on a flower. That flick of the head had been followed by a smile. She opened the front door, and stood in the passage.

J.J. appeared stuck to his chair. Did he know that he looked more impressive when seated? People used to say of him in later years that he should always remain in his chair like a man in a portrait.

Kitty came to his doorway. It was the natural thing to do, and she did it, and did not go mincing and teetering past like a self-conscious little bit on a chocolate box. Her smile died away. She saw his black tie, and that secret and rather sombre young face, and her eyes grew solemn.

"So, you are back."

That was obvious, but life's most inevitable things may be obvious.

He nodded at her.

"And you are still here."

Her moon face was soft in its solemnity.

"Are you working?"

"No."

"You've had trouble?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry. Perhaps you don't want to talk about it."

"Perhaps I do."

She could have said to him "You want to talk about yourself. Men always do," and he might have retorted "And women, too!" Her dark eyes looked round the bare little room with its queer objects and its dusty sunlight. Possibly she felt his loneliness, for a woman takes life more emotionally than does a man.

"You can come and talk to me, if you like. I've got a hat to trim."

His eyes were hungry eyes.

"I'd like to. Here?"

"It's nicer upstairs, if you wouldn't mind."

He stood up, and though he did not know it he was looking at her like a lover.

"May I? It's very good of you."

"I'm lonely, sometimes. Aren't you?"

"Yes, very."

She led the way up the stairs, and producing a key she unlocked her door. She had two rooms, and a tiny kitchen, the front one a living-room and looking upon the mews. A minute bedroom opened from it and its window gave upon the gardens of Mortimer Place. Her sitting-room possessed one armchair, two faded rugs, a deal table, and old black chiffonier, a dresser, some crockery and a cupboard in which she kept her food. Yet, to J.J. its very simplicity was

pleasant and consoling. It seemed so much her room, like a child's play-box, and full of the little intimate things she treasured, one or two pieces of china, a round Georgian gilded mirror, a sentimental picture of a girl picking flowers, the coloured product of some Christmas annual. He saw a work-basket on the table, and the skeleton of a hat.

"Sit down there. I'll just take off my hat."

She nodded towards the armchair.

"No, that's yours."

"Not now. I like to sit on a higher chair when I'm working. I won't be a moment."

She passed into the bedroom, and J.J. took the armchair. Its springs were somewhat ancient, and its padding had gathered to itself into lumps and nodules, but it was her chair, and therefore even its faded tapestry had glamour. J.J. sat and waited. He picked up the hat-frame and examined it, thinking that it suggested a lamp-shade waiting to be trimmed. Was that the fashion? He made the astonishing discovery that he was quite unaware of the kind of hat the women's world was wearing, and here he was sitting in a girl's room. Yes, and in the room of a very pretty girl. He was conscious of a thrill, for if any man has no love of plumage, then he is not quite man. J.J. would have liked those fellows at the hospital to see him with Kitty. But would he? Might not one of them try to cut him out? And what was she doing in there? Brushing her hair? In those days none but the profession powdered and rouged itself. She did not need that sort of thing; she had one of those ivory skins, a face like milk. J.J. was a creature of strange, secret tremblings. She had asked him to come up and talk to her; she must like him, trust him.

Her door opened, and J.J. stood up. She had changed her black dress for a kind of loose, flowery smock. Her hair was sleek, her eyes like dark velvet. J.J. smiled at her, and she smiled at him.

"You do look——"

He floundered. He was raw at paying compliments.

"Do I? How?"

"What a pretty dress."

"Oh, just the old thing I work in."

"It looks homely."

Was that quite the right word? He hastened to qualify it.

"I mean, it looks pretty and comfortable, and not just for show. I'd like to watch you make a hat."

"All right."

"Who's it for?"

"Mrs. Bragg who keeps the Red Lion."

"A large lady?"

"How do you know?"

"Inference. It looks like being a large hat."

"A picture hat."

"Do you ever wear picture hats?"

"I like little hats."

"Yes, you don't need a shadow."

"What's that mean?"

J.J. could not get at the pith of it; he boggled and was shy.

"Think it over and guess."

She drew her work-basket to her, and with the hat on her knees, she began to select from her basket the materials that she needed. J.J. sat and watched her in silence, for, as an observer, he was alive, perhaps for the first time in his life, to the actual loveliness of youth's texture, its virginal freshness, its bloom. He looked at her sleek, soft throat, the lambent hair, the sweep of the downcast lashes, the gentle mouth, the dimpled chin. At the hospital he was seeing the ugliness of life, its discords and disharmonies, the poor scrag end of the joint, and here was a creature as fresh and virginal as a rose just when it is opening.

She spoke to him, without looking up from her work.

"Have you lost your tongue?"

"Perhaps. Words don't always express things."

"What things?"

"Oh, all sorts of things, a garden, or a landscape, or a picture. You see, I am always seeing ugly things."

She caught his meaning, and she smiled over her deliberate hands.

"I suppose you do, at the hospital."

"Plenty."

"I've never been in a hospital."

"I hope you never will be. Healthy flowers and trees don't need doctors."

"Are you very fond of your work?"

"I'm keen on finding out about things."

"That's what you do down there?"

"Try to."

There was a pause while she stretched black velvet on to the hat-frame.

Then she said: "Aren't you going to tell me about your trouble?"

Did she really want him to tell her? But why play Balaam's Ass to your angel? He settled down in the chair, and she glanced at him consideringly. A man ought to smoke a pipe at such a time. But, perhaps he did not smoke. She saw his hands resting on his knees, fingers slightly spread. She thought they looked very delicate hands.

"Don't you smoke?"

"Yes, when I'm working."

"Why not now?"

"I'm not working. And not in this room."

"I don't mind."

"But I do. One doesn't fumigate a flower."

He saw her eyes glimmer under her lowered lashes.

"Well, aren't you going to tell me?"

"Yes. It isn't alway easy, you know, when things matter, and you have lost something——"

"Precious?"

"Just an old lady, my aunt, who gave me everything she had to give. No, not just money."

"Much more than that."

"Yes. It makes one feel, oh, well, all sorts of things. A month ago she was alive, and life seemed as usual. Now, she's dead. A whole side of life wiped out."

"Your home?"

"Yes. She kept the village shop. I've had to sell everything. Funny how one hates to think of strangers being there. But there is a stranger thing than that."

"Yes?"

"Somehow I don't feel she's dead."

"Perhaps she isn't. Don't you believe in Heaven and all that?"

"Do you?"

"Of course I do. There must be a meaning for things, mustn't there? It can't be all muddle."

J.J. looked at her with a sudden and almost secret smile. Now, who was the great man who had said the same thing in much more solemn language? Samuel Butler? Well, well, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings! But what a very lovely thing she was, sitting there trimming that hat and talking a kind of flower-language that had the wisdom of all time.

12

J.J. WALKED back from St. Mark's by way of Roper's Row. This curious and picturesque alley, which was neither a passage nor a street, contained a number of little individual shops which appeared to have retreated into this backwater in search of peculiarity and peace. Here was a second-hand book-shop, there a window full of old prints and mezzotints and one or two modern water-colours that pleaded to be purchased. "Nanette's" was opposite a curio shop which specialised in jade and amber, Egyptian antiques, and old jewellery. "Nanette's" had a quality of its own. It advertised a naïve restraint, in that it displayed two frocks and six hats, and two sets of lingerie, for Mary Rackstraw, its initiator, was an artist, and though necessity willed her to make picture-hats for blonde and blousy Red Lionesses, there were the ultimate few who had taste and understanding.

J.J. came to a halt between these two shops. He looked first into the window of the curio shop, because an immoderate shyness was dominating him, and the approach to the sanctuary had become indirect. Kitty had been invisible for three days, and he was wondering why. It did not occur to him that it might be strategy of a very innocent sort, nor respect for the public conventions of Mortimer Mews. A certain incident still brought a blush to Kitty Jewell's simple soul. A certain person must not be allowed to think that she was that sort of woman.

J.J. saw something in the window of the curio shop which produced an association of ideas, an amber necklace, nodules of amber strung together like chestnuts on a string. The colour of it struck the same colour notes as Kitty Jewell's hair. That would look well

on one of her black frocks, and match her hair. Could he dare to buy it and make a present of it? He did not dare. He faced about and took three steps to the opposite window. It was not possible to see into the shop, for a black velvet curtain hung there like the black-cloth of a stage. J.J. examined the hats. He supposed that they were her hats. He was picturing her pretty white fingers at work upon them, when he became conscious of a presence.

Someone had come to the shop's doorway and was standing on the step, a short, dark, solid person in spectacles. She was observing J.J., and behind her spectacles were both appraisement and an amused twinkle. Surely, this must be Mr. J. J. Pope? Both his head and his legs were evidential.

J.J., moved by a sudden impulse, raised his hat.

"Miss Rackstraw, I believe?"

"Livingstone," said she, and then they laughed.

J.J.'s shyness suddenly fell away from him. Miss Mary Rackstraw belonged most strangely to the Sisterhood of Aunt Janes. Even the physical resemblance was there.

"I was wondering if Miss Jewell——"

He hesitated, and Miss Rackstraw prompted him.

"Kitty is in the shop."

"I hope she is——"

"We have had a rush of work, though I may not look like it at the moment."

"I'm glad."

"About which?"

This was a woman after J.J.'s own temper, quick in wits and tongue, while looking like a large white loaf.

"Both if you like. I suppose you have inferred——"

"Your identity?"

"Yes."

"I have, Mr. Pope. Why not come in?"

J.J. hesitated.

"One moment. I have to go down into the country to-morrow. Do you think I could ask Kitty to come with me?"

"Do you want her to come?"

"Of course."

"Well, ask her."

Miss Rackstraw was a naturalist at a period when English social hypocrisy was slipping down the ladder to the middle and lower rungs. J.J. followed Miss Rackstraw into the shop, but it was innocent of Kitty Jewell. There was an inner door painted white, fitted with windows of ground glass, and Miss Rackstraw pointed J.J. to the door.

"Our workshop. Explore it."

She passed behind the counter and spread her large posterior upon a stool rather like a hen sitting down on a clutch of eggs. J.J., hat in hand, approached the inner door, and knocked.

"Don't be silly," said a voice, "no need for Open Sesame."

"Come in," said another voice.

J.J. went in.

Kitty was standing behind a table snipping away with scissors at a length of cloth. J.J. closed the door. For a moment they stood and looked at each other like a couple of solemn and shy children.

"Miss Rackstraw sent me in."

Need he take refuge behind Miss Rackstraw? Kitty put down her scissors, and subsided on to a stool.

"I haven't seen you——"

"No, we've been so busy."

"So Miss Rackstraw told me. I've been wondering—— I'm going down into the country to-morrow for a day. I wondered whether you would come?"

She picked up her scissors, and pressed the blades to her lips. Her eyes had a shadowed look.

"We're so busy——"

"Miss Rackstraw said she could manage."

"Where are you going?"

"Yatley. Business. And I want to put some flowers on Aunt Jane's grave."

She tapped her lips with the scissors.

"I might. I'll ask Mary."

She rose, slipped round the table, and disappeared into the shop, closing the door after her, and J.J. stood holding his hat, and wondering whether he had been too bold. He could hear the murmur of voices, Kitty's hesitant and questioning. Miss Rackstraw's very

definite and sure. Half a minute passed, and then the white door opened, and J.J. saw Kitty's face. It looked most dreadfully serious.

"Yes, I think I might come."

They walked to Yatley by the field paths from Dewhurst station, two young things still rather shy of each other, and taking the day with great seriousness.

September was with them, a late and serene September. The heaviness and the heat of summer had passed. Kitty was wearing her pansy hat, though the pansy flowering time had passed. It was an aster, sunflower phase, with the trees waiting to put on their autumn colours.

"Isn't it lovely," said Kitty.

"It is," said J.J., looking at her.

At one point they had to take to the road for three hundred yards, and here an incident occurred, the significance of which hardly concerned J.J. as a person. One of the new road-machines overtook them with triumphant detonations, and leaving behind it odours and a film of dust. A young man was driving it, and beside him sat another young man. There was a portmanteau in the tonneau.

"I say, Geoff, what the hell would have happened if you had missed that train?"

"Someone would have had to deputise."

"Second-rate best man fobbing me off with the ring! I'm feeling a bit nervous."

"Rot!"

"I tell you I am."

The car, rounding a curve, came suddenly upon Kitty and J.J. walking in the middle of the road. Lawrie Strange squeezed the bulb of the hooter, and saw the little man catch the girl's arm and draw her towards the grass verge. They stood there to let the car pass. Both young men stared at them, but Lawrence Strange's passing stare was given in its last phase to the girl.

"Gosh, it's young Pope!"

The Hon. Geoffrey was looking back.

"My Lord, so it is! Was up with him at Cambridge."

"Out with a tart! Pretty bit of fluff."

The car disappeared round the curve of a hedge, and Kitty and J.J. were left in a little cloud of dust.

"What nasty things they are. The young men seemed to know you."

"In a sense, yes. I was up at Cambridge with one of them."

"Let's get out of the dust."

J.J. looked at her a little anxiously. Had she divined the gay contempt with which those two had regarded him?

"There's a stile just round the corner. And then, the woods No dust there."

"Is my hat dusty?"

"A little."

"I'll take it off."

She had the flowery thing in her hands when they reached the stile. Great beech trees began their shade here. J.J. dared to help her up on to the stile.

"Sit down. And give me the hat."

She settled herself on the bar, and J.J., taking the hat from her, wondered whether he could blow on it. No, that might seem a rather vulgar way of dealing with so sacred a halo. He took out a clean handkerchief, and solemnly and carefully flicked the dust from the faces of the flowers and the black velvet. Her eyes were soft as the velvet as she watched him.

"There. That's better."

He passed her the hat like a courtier offering a coronet to a great lady. She put it on, a little self-consciously, and patted her hair with slim fingers.

"Is that right?"

"Perfect."

His face was more flattering than any mirror.

The shadows of the beeches enveloped them. The path curved up the hillside with the great trees arching over it, and the green canopy hid the sky. Kitty said that she had never seen such trees. Her face looked pale and cool and mysterious, and the velvet of her eyes grew darker.

"Are they very old?"

"About two hundred years."

The child in Kitty was full of solemn wonder, and J.J. was re-

membering that the beech had been Miss Pope's favourite tree. The day was supremely still, but when they reached the top of the hill a sudden wayward breeze came from nowhere and all the million voices of the wood broke into a murmuring. Kitty stod still, her hand suddenly resting on J.J.'s arm.

"Oh, listen! The trees are talking."

The touch of her fingers and the sudden sibilant trembling became memories in him, linked together for all time.

"They are talking about you."

"About me?"

"Yes, trees always notice strangers, and talk about them."

"I wonder what they are saying."

The fateful words came to J.J.'s lips, words that he was never to regret.

"They are saying that you are the most lovely thing in all the world."

The stillness was as sudden as the tremolo of the trees. Her face had the strange sheen of a woman who is loved, and happy. Her hand slipped down his arm and met his fingers. They stood side by side looking up into the green deeps of the beeches.

When they came down the steep and shady path to the village, and reached the old flint wall of the churchyard, J.J.'s quick eyes detected something unusual about the porch of Yatley church. An awning had been added to it, an awning that was quite superfluous on so gentle a day, and from the porch ten yards of red stair-carpet led to and down the gravel path. A wedding! And whose? No ordinary wedding, certainly. Yatley did not indulge in such decorations save on very high and special occasions.

J.J.'s first business was with the new lessee of the shop. Mr. Roper of Dewhurst had promised to expedite all legal matters, but since it appears to take the legal profession six months to complete a transaction which an efficient business firm would carry through in a fortnight, J.J.'s affairs were still very much in the air. His aunt had left him an immediate legacy of a hundred pounds, and that Mr. Roper had paid, so J.J. was not short of cash. He had checked the stock before leaving, but he wished to be sure that the new man was

satisfied. Then, there was the matter of flowers for Aunt Jane's grave. J.J.'s desire was that they should come from her own garden, and he was meaning to beg or buy a few. As for lunch, he and Kitty could be served at The Chequers at the top of Yatley Green.

J.J. suggested to Kitty that she should go and sit on a seat under a chestnut tree by The Chequers while he got through his business. J.J. left her there, and walked across to that familiar house with its high gables and old brick chimneys. A painter was at work repainting the shop front, and he and J.J. exchanged the usual village greetings.

"Morning, George."

"Morning, Jack."

"New coat of paint. Someone being married?"

"Young Strange and Miss Marwood."

"Is that so?"

J.J., struck by the coincidence and by a certain pity for the lady, walked into the shop.

The new man was behind the counter, and a strange young woman had taken Florrie's place. Mr. Eames was bearded, bald, fat, and utterly respectable, a Radical in politics, and an aggressive chapel man. J.J. was not attracted to Mr. Eames, and therefore was the more conscientious in assuring himself that the new lessee was satisfied. Mr. Eames smiled upon him rather like a wolf, yellow fangs gleaming in a pelt of grizzled brown hair.

"Morning, Mr. Pope. Unexpected pleasure."

J.J. looked round the shop. It was somehow different. Mr. Eames was a new broom.

"I've come down to see the grave. I thought I'd like to know that you are satisfied."

Mr. Eames became pawky and cautious.

"Well, on the whole, yes, Mr. Pope. One or two small items didn't tally."

"I can meet you over that."

"Not necessary, mere trifles. Come inside. Have a glass of my gooseberry wine."

Mr. Eames was a purist, but he did allow himself home-made wine, and called it fruit-juice. J.J. was taken into the familiar room where a strange, gaunt woman sat among strange furniture. J.J. was intro-

duced to Mrs. Eames, who looked at him as though he was the son of Original Sin. Mrs. Eames had been listening to gossip. J.J. accepted the wine and asked his favour. Might he have a few flowers from the garden for Miss Jane Pope's grave?

"Surely," said Mr. Eames, sipping gooseberry.

Mrs. Eames was more tart.

"We'd promised most of them for the chapel festival."

"I only want a few. You see, she grew them."

"I'll cut you a few," said the lady.

Cut them she did, and with restraint and economy, and J.J. departed with three red dahlias, three perennial sunflowers, and four sprigs of purple Michaelmas daisy. J.J. looked at them whimsically as he crossed the Green to rejoin Kitty, but even if the flowers were few in number they were Jane Pope's flowers. Evidently, Mrs. Eames was of the order of Wise Virgins, and would continue among the elect, the matronic mainstays of the chapel. J.J. displayed the flowers to Kitty, and explained them.

"All I could get. The lady is careful and will arrive in Heaven!"

They strolled under the shade of the chestnuts to The Chequers Inn. It was a black-and-white house, its timber framing the colour of tar, its undulating roof a rusty red. White palings enclosed a garden, and apple trees full of fruit. Old Killick, who had been the lessee of The Chequers for nearly thirty years, was a big, buxom South Saxon, a jocund and a generous soul. He was standing in the oak porch.

"Well, if it isn't Mr. Pope! Glad to see you, John."

J.J. introduced Miss Jewell, and Old Killick, like the squire, had an eye for a pretty girl. Well, well, well, J.J. had picked up a jewel! Could Mr. Killick give them lunch? Could he not! And in the garden, if they so pleased. Mr. Killick eyed J.J.'s posy.

"Bit thin, John."

"I wanted them for her grave, and from her garden. It was all Mrs. Eames could spare."

"She looks it! You wait, John. I'll fit you out with a real posy."

Kitty went upstairs for a wash and a tidy, and J.J. and Mr. Killick drank half a pint of bitters together in the private bar. Mr. Killick had some cold salmon in the house, and would J.J. like salmon? Very much so, on such an occasion. And what about this marriage

business? Mr. Killick removed froth from a blond moustache with the back of a hand, and looked solemn.

"Sorry for the lady. Young Strange has never been any good, and never will be. I suppose the idea is, John, to settle him down."

"Marriage does, at times, doesn't it?"

"In my experience it makes a wild lad worse. Well, John, here's luck. I can tell you the shop isn't the same since Miss Jane left us."

J.J. emptied his mug.

"She was a good woman."

"Reg'lar rag and bone lady we've got now. Gives you a liver to look at her. Well, I'd better go and see about that salmon."

They laid both bunches of flowers upon Jane Pope's grave, which was a mere mound of turf that had been browned and baked by the sun. J.J. placed the bunch from the shop garden, and Kitty the much more sumptuous posy which Mr. Killick had provided. Hardly had the ritual been completed than the Yatley church bells began to ring. Humanity was gathering about the lych gate and its sentinel yews. Children had climbed the flint wall and were perched there like twittering sparrows. Mr. Lawrence Strange was marrying Miss Sybil Marwood.

Kitty, like all women, was moved emotionally by a wedding, and this September day had colour and romance.

"Can't we go and watch?"

J.J. smiled at her.

"If you like. I don't think there will be much happiness in it."

Kitty looked shocked.

"How terrible. I'm sorry. Then, why——"

J.J. gave a little shrug.

"Remember the young gentleman who passed us in the car?"

"Yes."

"The one who was driving is the bridegroom."

"The one who stared so hard?"

"Well, he had reason."

But Kitty was solemn over it.

"I shouldn't like the man I was to marry to stare like that at someone else on the day—"

"He won't, if I know him. He will look only at one person."

Yatley church lay in a great green bowl, with the wooded hills surrounding it. Up yonder was Yatley Heath, and as J.J. lay in a shady corner under a lime tree, he remembered the day when he had tried to recapture his childhood, and Sybil Marwood had surprised him, and he had fled into the fern. He glanced at Kitty with skirts decorously spread beside him, her face the face of a woman sharing in some human ceremony. What a pretty, gentle thing was this, not like that rather fierce and dark young woman who, he had to confess, still roused in him strange yearnings. But what was he to Sybil Marwood, or she to him? Carriages were coming and going, and people passing into the church. Organ music came from it. Kitty, becoming more and more involved in the emotional occasion, rose up and said that she was joining the spectators who were lining the church path.

"I want to see her."

J.J. gave her a lover's smile, and remained in the shade. Let Kitty enjoy the show. He found it sufficiently good to sit and watch her. Bells and organ seemed to be swelling out in chorus. There was a murmuring from the crowd. Mr. Strange had arrived with his best man, and was passing through the lych gate to the church.

Ten minutes later another carriage brought the bride, and General Marwood who was giving her away. J.J. saw her as a creature in white, a dim, veiled profile moving beyond the fence of figures. She passed into the church, and the village crowd, or some of it, flowed in after her.

Kitty returned to her lover. She stood a moment, as in thought, before sitting down on the grass.

"He stared at me again."

"Did he, damn him!" said J.J.

"I shouldn't like my man to stare at another woman, just before he married me."

13

J. J. POPE found himself a capitalist to the tune of three thousand, three hundred pounds. The three thousand pounds he invested in English and Colonial Government stocks; the three hundred he kept as fluid capital. He needed more equipment for his lab., and some of it he contrived to make himself, for he had a watchmaker's hands. His invested capital produced for him about a hundred pounds a year, sufficient for a student's needs, but hardly adequate for adventures. As to the future it was like a window with the curtains drawn, and the curtains were human prejudices.

Maybe J. J. Pope was too combative and had too sharp a tongue. He would not compromise. There was nothing of the professional Agag in him. Your careerist must be a debonair, nimble fellow, quick in his adaptions, ready with a conciliatory smile. Pope was too definite a person, and too definitely capable and shrewd, a dangerous man to argue with. To often he was right, and other men loathe the fellow who is too often right.

There should have been an inevitableness about his career. He would qualify at the very earliest date, fill various house appointments and registrarships, and become eventually a member of the honorary staff. He would lecture the young, perhaps marry a woman with money, and rent a house or a portion of a house in Harley, Welbeck or Wimpole Street, but long before he had passed through his first year at St. Mark's, J. J. Pope realised that his future would not work out according to plan.

There were incidents, illuminating incidents.

He entered for the Harvey-Wright Prize and Medal. Possibly he had regarded it as too inevitably his.

The prize went elsewhere, to a man named Gibbs, and J.J. wondered. In the matter of knowledge and capacity Gibbs was soft iron to his steel.

There was the curious behaviour of Sir James Fraser. It was as though Sir James, as a gentleman, disapproved of something that had been done. He made a point of singling out Pope for courtesies and favours. He invited J.J. to serve as his house-physician, when qualified. Then, Sir James, after enjoying a Guildhall banquet on a bitter winter night, developed pneumonia and died.

There was that conversation that J.J. overheard in a particular place. J.J. was occupying a seat in a water-closet; two young men were talking loudly and washing their hands.

"Thought that fellow Pope would walk off with the Harvey-Wright Medal."

"Not on your life. They aren't going to let in a little outsider like that."

"Do you mean they——?"

"I bet they did. Manners matter. If Pope thinks he'll ever get on the staff here, he'll have the surprise of his life."

"But my dear chap, they can't——"

"Oh, can't they! My guv'nor's very thick with old Padman, and I happen to know."

J.J., having pulled a handle, and waited until the two young men had left, emerged from that secret niche with an enlightenment that was sardonic and actual. Other illusions had gone down the drain.

Was it indeed true that he was to be barred from a conventional career by the peculiar unpopularity which attaches itself to certain persons? His head was too big, his legs too short, his tongue too quick, his ability too obvious. In the new science of bio-chemistry he was already a generation ahead of most of the eminent gentlemen who served on the hospital staff. He could pose them, and no doubt some of them knew it. J. J. Pope was one of those dangerous young men who lead revolutions and upset theories.

But the culminating incident that converted J.J. into the complete individual came as a piece of paternal impertinence on the part of the Dean. How it had got about that J.J. Pope was living with a woman

was a question for the gods. Nor was it true. What happened was that J.J. received a summons to attend to the Dean's private room, and in all innocence he obeyed that summons.

The Dean was a purist. He had absorbed the tradition of interference, and he belonged to the moral school which with serene impertinence despatched missionaries to China. He gave ethical addresses to the young, and enjoyed it. Probably he regarded himself as one of the guardians of professional purity. He held the torch aloft, and if it happened to burn with a very pale flame, it was blown about by no gusts of humour.

"Sit down, Mr. Pope."

J.J. sat down. The Dean wore spectacles, which made his myopic eyes appear large and ominous. He put his fingers together, and sat back in his chair. He was not a married man, and his pallor and his thin lips suggested many repressions.

"This is a rather delicate matter, Mr. Pope. If I ask you a particular question it is from a sense of duty."

J.J. was to discover that when certain people wished to be rude they dressed up the rudeness in that drab garment, a sense of duty. He was silent, waiting. He had no idea what this delicate matter could be.

"Is it true, Mr. Pope, that you are living with a woman who is not your wife?"

J.J.'s head gave a jerk. He appeared to draw a deep breath and hold it. A sudden, cold anger possessed him.

"And by what right, sir, do you ask such a question?"

The eyes behind the spectacles seemed to show more and more eyeball.

"I hold a certain position, Mr. Pope, which, I believe, endows me with a duty to those who are to carry our tradition out into the world."

"I will answer that question."

"Thank you, Mr. Pope."

"It is a lie."

There was such ferocity and emphasis in the denial that the Dean blinked as though acid had been thrown at him.

"Please, Mr. Pope, no temper. I am very relieved to hear——"

"Why, no temper, sir?"

"Well, Mr. Pope——"

"Am I expected to put such an insult in a paper bag and take it home with me for lunch?"

The Dean looked shocked.

"May I suggest, Mr. Pope——"

"Is that your only question, sir?"

"It is."

"Well, I have answered it. Good morning." And J.J. got up and walked out of the room.

It just had not occurred to J.J. that because he and Kitty had agreed to be lovers and to go on being lovers, they were living in sin. Had other men been kinder to him this might have been the happiest period of J.J.'s life. In Kitty Jewell he had chanced upon a delightful creature, one of those child women with a lovely appetite for life that can turn a drab day into joy. Kitty, somehow, was a mistress of life's artistry, just as she was an artist over hats.

"Let's go on pretending."

"Pretending what?"

"That we're shy still."

"Well, so I am."

"I'm not supposed to know, and you haven't told me yet. Like it was the day we went to Yatley."

Oh, wise woman! Familiarity may not breed contempt, nor persuade a man to take his pleasures for granted, but J.J. found in Kitty something of that spirit which had made him dance on Yatley Heath. Why not sip the cup instead of draining it, smell the growing rose instead of plucking it? So many men were butcherly in their love, in a sweating haste to uncover every mystery. So, it had been agreed between them that for the time being their lives should not be changed at all. J.J. came to his lab., Kitty went to her shop. The delight of it all remained fresh and dewy. They could go out together on Sundays, to Hampton or Kew, and lie on the grass, and look at each other and retain the bloom and the wonder of the April season.

It was not that Kitty was afraid. In her there would be no meanness, no thrifty parcelling out of favours, no holding back. She had

said: "We can't be married, can we, till you're a doctor? Let's go on pretending you haven't asked me yet."

But this interview with the Dean had, somehow, let the Serpent into Eden. Had the Dean known that J.J. proposed to mate with Kitty Jewell, he, no doubt, would have felt it his duty to point out to Mr. Pope that in marrying a milliner he would be jeopardising his professional career. J.J. chuckled maliciously over the thought, and contemplating his own birth and upbringing, wondered whether it was just snobbery that should make you so careful about the profession's frock coat and top-hat. The Dean could go to the devil, but such a gesture did not satisfy J.J. in facing up to the situation. Other men seemed determined that he should turn rebel. Moreover, Kitty had given him that which no other human creature had been able to give; not even Aunt Jane. He was her man; she thought him wonderful, and let him see it, and to J.J. as Ishmael, this applause was more than flattery. It warmed him, strengthened him, filled the secret places of his heart. He was ready to swear that Harley Street could well be lost for the soft embraces and the tender raptures of a woman's soul and body.

The crisis so obsessed him that he was not normal man for the moment. Living with a woman! The inference, of course, being that the woman was a prostitute. J.J. made straight for Roper's Row, only to find that Kitty had gone up to Highbury to fit a particular and precious patroness who had sprained an ankle and could not walk. J.J. saw Mary Rackstraw, and Mary, when she had looked at J.J.'s face, was wise as to some emergency.

"Any trouble?"

Mary was a little worried about these two. So intimate an affair, when prolonged, had its perils.

The shop was empty, and J.J. sat down on a stool. He suddenly was conscious of feeling tired.

"No. I may as well tell you, Mary. I want Kitty to marry me."

Mary sat on the counter, almost judicially so.

"Haven't you asked her, before?"

"Well, we had an understanding. But I want her to marry me now. I can manage."

"Some sudden reason?"

"I am not going to tell you the reason. It's too beastly."

"Gossip?"

"You could call it that. You know, Mary, I have a feeling that I am doing the best thing for myself I shall ever do."

"And for Kitty?"

"Ill try to make it that."

Mary got suddenly off the counter and kissed him on the forehead.

"I believe you will. Kitty will be back in an hour."

"I'm going to the lab. Don't tell her anything."

"Of course I won't. I'll just tell her you want to see her."

J.J. went on to Mortimer Mews. It was late winter and a north-east wind was blowing, and when J.J. turned into that familiar cul-de-sac he saw it, perhaps for the first time in his life, as a blind end. Here were the blue and green doors out of which humans and horses and cabs popped like mechanisms in a puppet show. Nothing seemed to change. People neither climbed up nor down, but went about their simple ways on the same level. Therefore, why blind end, finality for him and for Kitty? J.J. stood for a moment outside the door that was common to him and Miss Kitty Jewell. He frowned at it. It might have been Balaam's Ass, posing him with some unanswerable question. Blind alleys? Was it the voice of some old man that suddenly was assailing him, a suborning voice, tepidly wise. Would he be committing social suicide? Social suicide! What bosh! Had he any social ambitions? None at all.

He was conscious of sudden laughter breaking out within him, tender, happy laughter. He put his hand to the door, and pushed it open. This was the mood for adventure. Almost, he was the small boy dancing naked on Yatley Heath, and playing upon his mock pipe. Life, laughter and love! The light was fading, and his little den looked strange and dim. It was cold in here, bitterly cold. There was no fireplace in the room. J.J. closed the door, and keeping his overcoat on, sat down at his table, but not to work. He wanted to look at life and confront it in the shape of Mortimer Mews, this obscure alley in which he had found happiness and affection.

He saw Mr. Joe Clements drive in, unharness his horse and lead him into the stable. The cab was pushed into the coach-house and the blue doors closed. Joe's nose also had a tinge of blue. He flapped his arms to warm himself. On Yatley Heath this north-easter would be snoring through the bare beech trees, and sending last year's

leaves scudding. J.J.'s feet and hands felt cold, but not his heart. Would it not be better to go outside and keep moving instead of sitting in this unheated room?

J.J.'s feet were on the cobbles when he saw Kitty turn into the entrance of the mews. She had the collar of a little flimsy coat turned up about her throat. Love is said to be blind, which it is not, and J.J. had the eyes both of the physician and the lover. He had come to play the passionate and the urgent lover, but when he saw Kitty's face the man in him had eyes. Kitty was cold, terribly cold. Her face had lost the indefinable bloom of youth; it had a pinched pallor. Her eyes were anxious eyes.

She tried to smile at J.J.

"I've just been up to Highbury. Came back on the top of a bus. No room inside."

J.J. was conscious of fear and compassion.

"I'm so cold."

He had the door open. His arm went round her waist and drew her in. He felt her shiver.

"I've never felt so cold. I'm so sorry to be like this."

So sorry! J.J. was shaken almost as she was, by a spasm of tenderness. He seemed to know that Kitty was going to be ill. He felt one of her hands. His fingers tried her pulse.

"You come upstairs, my dear, and get warm."

She shuddered.

"I've never felt so cold, all shivery down my back."

"You're going to bed. Leave it to me."

He had to help her up the stairs, and perhaps her sudden feeling of weakness had an emotional surrender as its inspiration. J.J. might be a small man, but he was wiry. He held her close to him, his left arm round her waist. Her head came to rest upon his shoulder.

"Oh, Jack, my knees feel so funny. I'm afraid I'm going to be ill."

It had been a winter of black influenza, a pest that leaped upon its victim with a swiftness that was devastating. J.J. opened her door, and the first thing he saw was the fireless grate.

"You haven't a fire, Kit."

"No, I only light it in the evening when I come home."

"I'll see to that. Can you get yourself to bed?"

"Yes."

"Quick as you can, my sweet. I'll light the fire, and warm up some milk."

She put her cheek suddenly against his.

"You are being so kind to me."

J.J. kissed her.

"Not very difficult to be kind to you, Kit."

"My head's beginning to ache."

"The quicker you are in bed, the better."

She disappeared into the inner room, and J.J. found some matches, and knelt down in front of the grate. The fire had been laid, and J.J. soon had it alight. He was thinking. What was the matter with Kitty? Flu, probably. And who was going to look after her? Mary Rackstraw could not leave the shop, though she might be able to come round in the evening. But why should not he look after Kitty? There was an old sofa in the sitting-room and he could sleep there. People might gossip. Damn gossip! As soon as he had seen Kitty tucked up in bed he would go across and talk to the Clements. Joe's wife was a brisk and sensible little body, and Mortimer Mews was not a place that refused you help.

J.J. was getting up and going in search of Kitty's milkcan and a saucepan in her kitchenette, when he heard her voice. It was a small voice.

"John."

He went to her door and opened it an inch.

"John, I—I feel so ill. I'm afraid I'm going to be sick."

She was lying half undressed upon the bed, a pathetic little person, her knees drawn up, her body caught in some spasm. She turned her head and glanced despairingly in a certain direction, and J.J. was quick to divine her need. He pushed in, lifted a jug, grabbed the basin and carried it to her. She tried to sit up, and instantly he was on the bed behind her, propping her and holding her, while she clutched the basin to her body.

Sick she was, with little groanings and exclamations between the spasms. "Oh, dear, oh, dear! I'm so sorry to be like this." Her distress was his distress. Maybe he discovered, if he needed to discover it, the difference between love and sex, and that in loving a particular creature you loved them at all times and on all occasions,

and that nothing revolted you. Even the ugly things that may afflict the body are instigators of compassion.

"Just let go, Kit. Don't worry."

"I feel so disgusting."

"Nothing about you would ever disgust me. I want to get you to bed. You're so cold, my sweet."

Her face was all puckered, but her eyes said how she loved him for loving her like this.

"I think I might try now. Don't take it right away."

"Let me take your stockings off. Mustn't stoop. That's it. Where's your night-dress?"

"Under the pillow."

"Wait a moment. I'll warm it. Do you think you can manage?"

"Yes, I can manage."

"I'll get Mrs. Clements to come in presently. She's a good sort. I'll do the doctoring."

J.J. slipped a hand under the pillow, drew out the night-dress and went and warmed it at the fire. Then he carried it in to her, removed the basin to empty it, and left her to get into bed. He put the saucepan of milk on the hob. He had a clinical thermometer downstairs, and a stethoscope in his overcoat pocket. He went to fetch the thermometer.

She was in bed when he returned, her clothes piled on a chair. She was shivering.

"Now then, let's see about this. Under your tongue, Kit."

With the thermometer in her mouth, he tidied up her clothes, hanging her coat and dress in the cupboard, and folding up her underwear. She watched him. She was full of wonder that a man could be so wise and gentle. Her head ached, but she was happy.

"Now then, let's look."

He carried the thermometer to the window and read it off. She had a temperature of 102.4.

"Is it very bad, John?"

"No. Any pain in the chest?"

"No, I just ache and feel shivery."

"Flu, my sweet, that's what you have got, but I am just going to listen to your chest. Seems to me you'll be marrying a doctor as well as a husband."

Her eyes were big and vague.

"Are we going to be married, John?"

"Yes, quite soon. Now, don't you worry your blessed head about anything. When you've had some warm milk, I'll go across and see Mrs. Clements."

"And Mary?"

"Yes, I'll tell Mary."

"John, I do love you."

He left her to drink the warm milk, after he had added to it ten grains of one of the new antipyretic drugs, and went across and knocked at the Clements' door. Joe opened it, a Joe in shirt sleeves, and smoking a pipe.

"What'o, it's you, Mr. Pope. Come inside art of the wind."

"Thanks, Joe. Miss Jewell's ill. Influenza, I'm afraid, and she's all alone. Came back from work with a temperature of one hundred and two degrees. And we were to be married in a fortnight."

Joe knew nothing about temperatures, but he was not a passive person.

"'Ard luck. I'll ask the missis to go across."

"Would you, Joe?"

"Yus. We've both 'ave 'ad the bloody thing, so we must 'ave 'ad our packet. So, you're goin' ter be spliced?"

"Yes, I'm a lucky man."

"Not 'arf."

"I'm going along to the shop to tell Miss Jewell's partner."

"Right'o, Mr. Pope. I'll get the missis ter run across right away."

J.J. made for Roper's Row. It was growing dark now, and in the windy March twilight the lighted windows and street lamps seemed strange with phantasy, yet it was not the objective world that changed, but the sensitive, subjective spirit in man. As your mood was, so were bricks and mortar, mere bricks and mortar, or little goblin houses in which all manner of strange things happened. J.J. was both troubled and happy, and loving to love he had discovered within himself. It was good to love like this. Had the pious Dean ever known such exaltation?

There was a late customer in the shop, choosing blouses, and J.J. sat down patiently on a stool. The customer glanced at him irritably. What did a man want in a place like this, where feminine ritual

alone was exercised? Mary Rackstraw, wise as to the lady's impatience, winked at J.J. and pointed to the workshop door.

J.J. disappeared.

Said the lady: "Who is the funny little man? A cutter, I suppose."

Mary was holding a blouse up over her full bosom to show off its colour.

"No. A friend of the firm's. Some day, they tell me, he will be the most famous doctor in London."

The lady gave her a cow's stare.

"A doctor! I don't think I should fancy a queer little person like that."

"No, I dare say you wouldn't. It depends rather upon what you want, doesn't it? Isn't this a sweet colour? Just your colour, if I may say so."

When she had satisfied the lady, sold the blouse, wrapped it up and received her money, Mary smiled her patroness out of the shop. Mary found it much more difficult than did Kitty to be polite to people she did not like. She called it "Cultivating the Two C's, Custom and Character." Kitty was a very sweet-tempered person. In fact, Mary had never seen her out of temper save on one or two particular occasions when some mean or cruel incident had roused her. Mary stood a moment by the workshop door. Oh, bother men! The partnership had been so successful, and here was little J.J. Pope proposing to end it. Mary was not attractive to the male. Her large white enigmatic face was too plainly self-assured. But where was Kitty? Had anything happened to Kitty? Mary opened the door.

"All serene. What's the trouble?"

"Kitty's ill. Flu, I think. I've put her to bed."

"You've put her to bed!"

"Well, why not? She wanted putting to bed. I have arranged for a neighbour to go in."

Mary was conscious of a surge of hostility. She and Kitty had been close friends for five years, and here was this little fellow assuming possession, and behaving like the legal husband. But Mary could criticise herself and denounce the natural ego. She said: "Don't be a pig. You can't help these things when they happen."

"I'll shut up and come across, J.J."

"Would you?"

"Of course. There won't be much more doing now. I expect——"

J.J. looked at her as though divining some secret smart in Mary Rackstraw.

"Women can do things men can't."

"You admit that?"

"Well, of course. Besides, you're so much her friend, and mine, if you'll let me——"

Mary's heavy and almost sullen face softened.

"You're a bit of an exception, J.J. Supposing you pull down the blind while I get my coat."

14

J.J. MIGHT be ready to question all the old traditions, for he was of the new age, ever ready to challenge convention and authority, but woman is a far more traditional creature than man, and Nature is on the side of the woman.

Kitty was sitting up in bed, and looking very pretty, and J.J. sat and looked at her.

"If we really are going to be married soon——"

J.J. nodded at her. If Kitty chose to exert a rather charming authority he was in a mood to consent to it.

"Can you manage, I mean, about money?"

"Oh, we'll manage somehow."

"Why shouldn't you come and live here. There's your lab. We should only have to buy——"

She spread her arms as though measuring the bed and indicating its inadequacy.

"It's an idea."

"And I could keep on with the shop, couldn't I, for a while? It would help."

J.J. regarded her with the eyes of the complete lover.

"You want to help?"

"Of course I do, darling. And when you are a doctor we can think——"

Again J.J. nodded, but he was looking, not at Kitty, but out of the window. How much did this child-woman understand? How much could he tell her? That life would not be easy, that he might not develop into the conventional physician. Did she want the con-

ventional things? Would struggle and poverty and waiting upon fate sour her happy face? That would be rather horrible, to see her grow bothered and puzzled, and perhaps petulant and pinched. Was he expecting too much of her? Ought he not to tell her the truth as he envisaged it?

But what was the truth?

"You know, I'm rather a curious creature, Kit. Lots of peculiar ways and things."

"Of course you are."

"Oh, no, my sweet. I wonder if I ought to tell you about them? I think I ought."

She looked at him with the serenity of happy faith.

"I think you're wonderful."

"Oh, no, I'm not. There's an awkward beast in me. I don't take things for granted. I like to find out, ask questions. Do you remember that when you were a kid, how the youngster who asked too many questions was a nuisance?"

"What sort of questions?"

"About the things other people take for granted: God, and being respectable, and making money, and doing just what other people do."

She laughed, and opened her arms to him.

"Come here. What are you trying to tell me?"

But he would not surrender to those arms until he thought she understood, and until he knew that she knew. For J.J., brilliant person that he might be, was still in that innocent stage when he believed that you could know and be known, and that you could persuade people to see the truth as you saw it.

"I am trying to tell you, my sweet, that other men don't like me, that life may not be easy."

"They're jealous."

"Oh, well, as I said, if you are always asking awkward questions, if you challenge humbug, you are apt to be a bit of a nuisance. What I want you to realise, Kit, is that I'm something of a fanatic, about my work. I may get tied up in it, absorbed in it."

Her hands were folded now. She looked at him steadfastly, and smiled.

"I'm not quite a fool, John, dear."

"Have I suggested——"

"You are trying to tell me that I may be jealous of your work. Well, I shan't be, no—never. I don't think I love you in that way."

He sat there, frowning.

"I'm to be selfish, and you unselfish?"

"It isn't quite like that, is it?"

"You mean——"

"You dear, darling silly, I want to help. I'm going to be very proud when you do things."

Ten days or so before Kitty Jewell and J.J. were to be married at St. Michael's, Bloomsbury, a very beautiful young man rang the bell of No. 7, Unicorn Place. That was the description Miss Phoebe Dally applied to him when she found him on the doorstep. And the young man had beautiful manners; he raised his hat to her.

The following rather odd and disjointed conversation followed:

"Is Mr. Pope still living here?"

"Yes, but he is going to be married."

"Is he in?"

"He's hardly ever in."

"At what time do you think——"

"In about a fortnight."

"Oh, he's away?"

"No, I mean the marriage."

The beautiful young man laughed.

"Rather at cross-purposes, aren't we? What I want to know is when Mr. Pope is likely to be in."

Miss Phoebe Dally responded with a thin, long-toothed smile.

"Oh, about half-past nine."

"Not till then?"

"Such distractions, you see. Can I mention a name?"

"Yes, say Peter Pratten called. I'll come round again about half-past nine."

He raised his hat again to Phoebe, and left her gasping on the doorstep. Seemingly Miss Phoebe did not approve of this marriage. How could she, having seen the lady. So like a barmaid, and with that sort of hair. Miss Phoebe Dally was a regular consumer of Pratten Pills, but she did not connect such medicinal matters with the beautiful young man.

J.J. returned to Unicorn Place about eight o'clock. Having failed

to persuade the landlord to redecorate Kitty's maisonette, they had set about doing it themselves, with J.J. in the part of painter and paper-hanger. His skill as a paper-hanger was a source of astonishment to Kitty who, during these operations, was sleeping at Mary Rackstraw's.

"Have you ever done it before, darling?"

"Yes, once, my bedroom at Yatley."

"You are clever."

That was the song Kitty was to sing through all the coming years, a song of which few male ears ever tire.

Miss Phoebe Dally popped like a cuckoo out of a cuckoo-clock at J.J. as he was closing the front door.

"A gentleman called to see you."

"Oh," said J.J.

"He's coming again about nine."

"Who was it?"

"A Mr. Pratten."

"Young or old?"

Miss Phoebe simpered.

"Quite young." And she might have added: "And so good looking. I wonder how you—came to know him?"

J.J. thanked her and climbed the stairs. He climbed them slowly, for he was tired, and suddenly assailed by one of those vagrant and unwashed moods that afflict even the most sensitive of men. Perhaps J.J. was realising that behind all our highfalutin lurk hunger, sex and fear, and that no surplice can conceal from the searcher after truth the fact that these basic urges are the fulminating forces below the frail crust of culture. Gas-jets burned dimly on the stairs. J.J.'s room was in darkness, and without a fire. He had matches on him, and as he groped his way to the chandelier suspended over the table in the centre of the room he was conscious of one of those mean twinges of fear that may cause a man to exclaim: "Get thee behind me, Satan." Yes, a twinge of unregenerate jealousy. Did he want Peter to meet Kitty Jewell, Peter who was all that he was not?

J.J. lit the gas, and threw the match into the empty grate.

"You dastard," he said to himself; "just vulgar jealousy, the curse of the common people."

He sat down and worked for an hour, and the work calmed him. It was an eternal solace, and he could say to himself: "Get into your

brain and shut the door when vulgar emotion throws hysterics on the doormat." He did not even listen for the bell, nor perhaps would he have heard it, but when voices sounded on the stairs, he went out almost gaily to greet his friend.

"Hallo, Peter!"

"Hallo, my lad."

When he saw that handsome, wholesome face the devil of doubt departed from him. Damn it, he was proud of Peter, proud of knowing him, proud to be his friend! They looked into each other's eyes and smiled.

"Come in. How are motor-cars?"

"Still misfiring somewhat. Well, I've heard the news."

J.J. led him in by the arm, and shut the door.

"Sit down, old man. Yes, I'm going to be married."

"Congratulations. Wanting a best man?"

"Well, as a matter of fact I am."

"Why the devil didn't you write to me?"

J.J. looked both shy and sly.

"It's not going to be a fashionable show. Kitty is partner in a hat-shop. We are going to live in a Mews."

Peter lay back in his chair and looked at his friend. Also, he felt for his pouch and pipe.

"Call me a snob and have done with it, my lad. The pater began as bottle-boy in a chemist's shop."

J.J. turned to the mantelpiece for his tobacco tin.

"Reality, old man."

"I should say so. Listen a moment, my lad. I've had nearly a year in the works, using my hands with the men who do the job. Great chaps, many of them. One learns to respect the man who does the job. He may be an awkward beast sometimes, but he does the job. Well, are you taking me?"

"I am."

"Good man. Where are you going for the honeymoon?"

"Nowhere, I think. Work and economy."

"Oh, fudge! Why don't you both go down to 'Pollards' for a week? I shan't be there, but you and the pater get on pretty well together."

J.J. hesitated, filling his pipe. He was thinking of many things, the tips that might be expected, the atmosphere, the obligation.

"Very kind of you, Peter, but I may manage a week-end at Hastings or somewhere. I rather feel——"

"I think I get you. Rather a private and intimate business."

"Yes."

"Well, when can I meet Kitty?"

"To-morrow. Come round and have tea in the lab. The upstairs part is being redecorated."

Peter lit his pipe.

"That's the sort of thing I love. When you come down to Coventry I'll give you tea in the machine-shop."

There was no fireplace in J.J.'s lab., but added warmth was not needed on that April day. J.J.'s working table was cleared of its impedimenta, and two extra chairs were bumped down the narrow stairs. Kitty had rushed out and bought flowers, tulips and narcissi from the flower-woman in Russell Square. She was happy and excited; she was to meet the superlative Peter, who was to be J.J.'s best man.

J.J. was nervous, quite foolishly nervous. It was one of those occasions when he was conscious of his absurd little legs. How would Peter and Kitty get on together? Too well, or not at all? He need not have worried. He thought the tea table charming, and so it was, with its flowers and pretty cottage-china. Kitty could be as fastidious as a sensitive child, and she had the grace of an art that would have turned a coal-cellar somehow into a fairy's cave.

"Here he is."

She was at the window, and J.J. hurried to the door. He had told Peter to look for a window-box with hyacinths in it, and Peter had spotted the sign.

"I say, what a jolly place."

Peter was the son of his father. He liked life in its realities, its surprises, its jocund tricks and phantasies. Old P. loved to get into a café in Montmartre, or a Soho club, or a collier's cottage or the cabin of a barge, and make contact with life in the real and the rough. The people who did real things had something to talk about.

"Peter, this is Kitty."

Kitty and Peter looked at each other, smiled and shook hands. J.J. had performed the introduction with a seeming casualness that concealed the secret exultation of the artist in a picture that was his.

How would these two comely creatures shape in this obscure little room? Would Kitty be carried off her feet by this handsome youth? J.J. need not have worried, for Peter happened to be one of those men who are wise as to women, without knowing how this intuitive wisdom has arrived, and he had been so courted by mothers and daughters that he was a little bored with the sex.

"Well, congratulations to J.J."

It was not flattery, but sheer impulse. J.J. most certainly had stolen one of the golden apples of the Hesperides. Or might one call it a peach? Moreover, the peach had a sunny, open, wholesome face, and such very gentle eyes. Peter looked first at a woman's eyes, and then at her mouth.

Kitty laughed and glanced at J.J.

"It only matters if he thinks so."

J.J. drank up that look like a man who was thirsty, and thanking God for good wine.

"Yes, I'm lucky. Well, let's have tea."

Peter looked at the flowers on the table. For so large a young man he surprised the stupid in his tastes and habits. He could arrange flowers like a woman, and he liked to nurse a cat.

"Good bit of still life. How did you find this place, J.J.?"

J.J. laughed.

"Just luck, and predestination, perhaps. One of my unique discoveries. I found everything here."

Peter glanced at Kitty.

"Including?"

"Yes, including that."

It was a happy and easy meal, for all three of them found they could be natural. Kitty had too much vitality to suffer from affectation, and Peter might have described her as "A Jolly Kid" had he not had the feeling that there was a good deal more to it than that. Some people had meaning, while others were mere stereotyped copies of someone else. But Kitty had work to do, and a suspicion that these two friends wanted to talk. Poor Mary could not be left in lone responsibility for the shop, so Kitty put on her pansy hat, and left them alone together.

J.J. crumbled tobacco into a pipe. He was smiling over it as though he found life good.

He said: "The last thing you expect happens."

Peter also was busy with a pipe.

"A pretty good thing too. How's the hospital?"

J.J.'s smile disappeared.

"Rather sticky, so far as I am concerned."

"The old jossers don't like being jostled."

"Found that out, have you?"

"Somewhat. But our show is a new show. It's not like one of the professions full of old gentlemen who think they have uttered the last word on everything."

J.J. struck a match.

"I doubt whether I am made for doctoring."

"Too——"

"Yes, too many doors slammed on you. Horrible confession, Peter, but I don't think I like the sick."

Peter looked at him questioningly. This was a rather staggering confession.

"But, I thought——"

"So did I. The healing touch and all that. A noble tradition. But we don't heal; we only diagnose. Perhaps it is the hospital atmosphere. That's the worst of institutions, they are so apt to become museums."

Peter bit hard on his pipe.

"Too much convention and humbug. Well, what's the idea?"

"I don't quite know."

"Your trouble, J.J., is that you have one of those damned questioning minds which don't mix with the professional stock mixture."

"I don't take things for granted."

"Exactly. I believe you'd be happy in a wild corner of your own, digging things up and examining them."

"That's about it. But I shall qualify. One can earn money as a practising doctor."

"Even if you don't like the sick? Not very good for doctoring, old man. Rough on the patients."

"I wonder! Perhaps if they were my patients, and my problems——"

Peter's pipe had gone out, and he relit it.

"One doesn't always know, does one, how things are going to pan out? Life gets you in funny ways. I suppose we youngsters have to do a lot of groping."

J.J. smiled at him.

"You're right. I'm in the groping phase. There is one thing that does matter."

Peter nodded. He saw that J.J.'s eyes were fixed on Kitty's empty chair.

It was the quietest of quiet weddings. The unkind might have said that there was a secrecy about it that was suggestive, and that nature had intervened to hasten the ceremony. J.J.'s side of the church was empty save for Mr. and Mrs. Joe Clements, and Kitty's was hardly more populous. An uncle who resided in Balham turned up to give her away, and disappeared again with a somewhat forbidding wife after the minute reception at "Nanette's." The shop and the workroom were made to serve the day's good deed. An aunt, three dull cousins, and two or three friends completed the stage-crowd. There was no adequate audience to admire J.J.'s beautiful best man.

There was no show of presents, for an occasional table would have held the lot. Old Pratten sent J.J. a cheque for £25, and Peter contributed a lesser one for ten. They drank indifferent white wine, and ate sandwiches and cakes. J.J. was glad when they got into Joe Clements' cab and were driven to Charing Cross Station. The mere conventions had been satisfied with music and a blessing, but J.J. had a feeling that some wild and pagan ritual consecrated by a sun-worshipping priest or a Druid upon Yatley Heath would have been more satisfying. The one utterly and lovely satisfaction was Kitty, a little shy, but wholly happy, and J.J.'s prayer was "May I never take that smile from your dear face."

A sentimental reflection, but a man must have some sentiment in his life or perish, especially so the man whose urge and whose uniqueness may divide him from the herd. Maybe, J.J. had a feeling that his fate and his future were inherent in his cleaving to this one creature, and that she alone could keep him sane and whole.

They stayed for five days at a quiet private hotel in Wellington Square. They wandered about the old town, climbed to the castle ruins, visited Battle, Winchelsea and Rye. J.J. would always remember Kitty in a pink linen frock having tea in a Winchelsea garden. The sun shone upon them. J.J. felt most strangely at peace.

15

SHORTLY after their marriage J.J. had to serve his month in hospital as maternity-clerk, being called up at all hours to visit the purlieus of Soho, and help to bring little Jews, Italians, Russians, and some little English into the world. It was a messy business, conducted in a world of poverty, ignorance and squalor.

Life to J. J. Pope was a series of phenomena, a kind of jungle-growth into which he probed. As yet he had no ultimate plan for turning the jungle into a garden. He might have preferred the jungle to the garden. He was like one of those separative souls who set out into the wilderness to study the life history of some tropical pest, and who are not concerned in turning a semi-intelligent monkey into a Professor of Eugenics.

Nor did he impress the vulgar. Some large and truculent young man who might and did say to a screaming Italian: "Take that damned towel and stuff it in your mouth," was more impressive to the women. It made them feel that they were being handled by a man. J.J., appearing in the doorway with a large black bag, looked rather like a small boy who had been told to carry in the doctor's impedimenta.

His last night on duty supplied the suggestive climax. He climbed some deplorable stairs to find a bucket of filth standing outside a door. He knocked. A red-faced woman with hair in curlers opened the door to him. She was lively with liquor.

"What d'yer want, my dear?"

J.J. produced the card.

"Is this Mr. Bartlett's?"

"Yes. Don't tell me you're the doctor."

"I happen to be that person."

She broke into hilarious cacklings.

"Why, you ain't growed up. Coo, Polly, see what the 'ospital 'as sent along."

The woman on the dirty bed was groaning, and though she too had drunk herself silly, her sense of humour was not equal to her friend's.

"What's that, Flo?"

"The doctor, hee-hee-hee. You'd better go back and tell the 'ospital to send along a growed man. Why, you don't look old enuff ter be a faver."

J.J. pushed past her.

"Go and sit down, you drunken fool, and leave me to get on with the job."

That, in the vulgar parlance, tore it. The lady in the curlers flared into a screaming rage, but so unsteady was she on her feet that she tripped over a crumpled and dirty rug, and falling against a decrepit wash-hand stand, upset the whole contraption. She arose, maudlin and still screaming, but with a bloody head; the groans of the prospective mother added to the din. J.J. put down the bag, took the woman by the shoulders from behind, and pushed her out on to the stairs.

"Get out and stay out."

He locked the door on her, and she subsided on the stairs, holding her head and weeping. Fancy a gentleman treating you like that!

J.J. safely delivered the mother of twins, after he had broken the news to her that it was to be a double event.

"Oh, Gawd, sir, don't say there's two of 'em!"

"Where's your husband?"

"Out sellin' pipers."

"At this hour! Isn't there anybody to help you, but that——"

"No, doctor."

"Can I find anybody presently?"

"There's Mrs. Bunce on the ground floor."

The second baby was born dead, and when J.J. told the mother that it was dead, the poor wretch gave thanks.

"Well, that's a blessin', doctor. Thank Gawd for that."

J.J., going in search of a possible Mrs. Bunce, found the other lady snoring on the stairs. He stepped over her, descended, eschewing the greasy handrail. Mrs. Bunce proved to be sullen and elderly, and not too ready to play the nurse. Polly Bloomer was drunk, was she! Well, that wasn't anything very original. Mrs. Bunce grumbled, but she did consent to help in the emergency.

"Two kids and one of 'em dead. Well, that should be a blessin', with 'er 'usband carryin' on round the corner."

Mrs. Bunce straddled scornfully over the snoring Polly.

"Nice sort o' slut to 'elp a friend on a night like this."

J.J. did all that was necessary, and then left the mother, the live baby and the dead one to Mrs. Bunce. What happened to such dead babies? For the life of him he did not know. Such incidents were not recorded in the text-books. Had he any duty in the matter? Who could tell him? He might ask old Crabb the night-porter. Old Crabb was completely wise as to the technique of these affairs.

J.J., being young, should have asked himself why London was like this, and why it should not be otherwise. He might have accused the Industrial System, the wicked Capitalists, International Finance, Grub Street or God. He did nothing of the kind. He supposed that it was human nature, and that London had just grown like this, which explanation was nearer the truth than the diatribes of the wavers of red flags. What he did was to rush back to Kitty and cleanliness, wallow in a hip-bath which Kitty helped him to fill, and rejoice in the sweet sanity and order of that obscure little home. He wanted to wash the smell of midwifery away from him. It might be some men's job, but, most certainly it was not his. The polished efficiency of a lab., however small, was more to his liking than the operating theatre and the post-mortem room. Such places were the termini of disharmonies; J.J.'s urge was to work for a rhythm that had not yet suffered from fatal discords.

"Let's have a week-end in the country."

"Oh, yes, let's," said his wife.

"I want to see if the stone is all right over Aunt Jane's grave. They can put us up at 'The Checquers'."

Kitty kisssed him.

"What a lovely idea."

That was part of the loveliness of Kitty. She enjoyed the simplest of things. She was like one of those May mornings when the earth is the earth of a dream.

Old Killick, of The Chequers, welcomed them. He put them into the big bedroom overlooking the garden. It was bluebell time, and when, after tea in the garden they climbed up to Yatley Heath, the beech woods were full of the smell and the colour of the flowers. Kitty's face became tender, her eyes luminous. She kneeled down and put her face to the flowers.

"Oh, J., I've never seen anything like it before."

"Like to live in the country?"

"I don't know."

Living in the country could be a strange business after Roper's Row and Mortimer Mews. J.J. did not press the project. He would be a qualified doctor at the end of the year, and in theory capable of earning an income.

There were the house-appointments to be considered, and they were living on his invested income and Kitty's earnings. But why these problems on such a day in May? J.J. put his arm round his wife's waist and drew her to the immense beech tree, which was a symbol of the past.

"What do you think I did here, my sweet?"

They sat, side by side, on one of the great claws of the beech.

"What?"

"Guess."

Kitty looked puzzled. What could you do here but sit and stare and dream.

"Give it up?"

"Yes."

"Well, I took my clothes off and danced. Disgraceful exhibition, what?"

"Did you really, J.?"

"Yes, really. Like to try it now?"

She crooked an arm round his neck.

"I wouldn't mind dancing, but——"

"There are limits! Midsummer madness. But you can fancy things here. Look at the darkness under those trees."

Kitty looked, and suddenly her arm tightened, and then withdrew itself.

"Oh, look—someone."

A white figure was rising out of the glooms. It came by the sunken way, slowly, silently, almost like a drifting ghost, and J.J. felt a strange tremor flicker down his spine. His dark lady of the old days rising to remind him of those strange and haunting thoughts, the poignant provocation of beauty! He looked. His arm was round his wife, and it remained there.

"Mrs. Strange. Do you remember, the one we saw married?"

"Yes, I remember."

The white figure passed into a patch of sunlight, and stood poised there, and somehow, to J.J., it expressed tragic things, sadness, bitterness, frustration. Was Miss Sybil Marwood finding in the Strange world——? And then she saw them. She seemed to stiffen with a vague resentment, as though her secret self was being spied upon. But should one show that one was aware of idle curiosity? Of course not, if you were sensitive and had humiliations to conceal. Mrs. Strange walked on and past them, head up, her profile that of a great lady walking in some grave, ceremonial show. Not an eyelash flickered. They saw her disappear down one of the green rides which spread from the great beech like the rays of a star.

Said Kitty: "She's very lovely, but——"

"Not lovely inside, my sweet."

"I shouldn't say that. How does one know?"

"Would you say she looked happy?"

Kitty pondered a moment.

"No, I should say not."

On the way home they turned into Yatley churchyard to inspect the headstone which a Dewhurst mason had erected. It was a very simple stone, bearing Miss Jane Pope's name, and nothing more. Why date the dead, or hand a text over a memory that may be sacred? J.J., hatless, held his wife's hand.

"No one knew how good she was."

"You did, dear."

"Yes, but the village may have thought her hard. May I cherish that sort of hardness."

Before supper Kitty went to change her frock, and J.J. strolled into the private bar and found Mr. Killick alone there. Mr. Killick

stood J.J. half-a-pint of ale, and J.J., remembering the incident on Yatley Heath, asked Mr. Killick a question.

"How is the Strange show progressing?"

Mr. Killick put his pot down on the counter.

"Hum. Now you've asked me one. Well, they do say young Strange is on with Milly Eastwood. You know, the Squire's cowman's kid."

J.J. looked incredulous.

"What, little Milly Eastwood. Why, she's not sixteen yet."

"Eighteen, my lad, and a big, strapping girl now. Young Strange is a fellow who can't keep from the women, and it seems you can't keep the women from him."

J.J. stared at the tawny liquid in his pot. So, that was that. His dark lady's wine was poisoned.

The name of J. J. Pope should have been a comet trailing a fine, academic tail behind it, those symbolic letters which denote scholarly distinction. No doubt he had expected to see his name in print followed by F.R.C.P., F.R.C.S., etc., but the tail of his comet was abruptly curtailed. When people looked him up in the Medical Directory, before his name had been erased from that record, they discovered that all that he could show was a mediocre M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., London, with a B.A. Cambridge tagged on to it. The world might have concluded that Mr. J. J. Pope had no academic honours to his credit, and that he was something of a charlatan, a fellow who had just grabbed a qualification, and then boosted himself on paper.

For, it must be admitted that J.J. did two very indiscreet things during the last period of his hospital career. The Puck in him perpetrated one of them, the research-student the other.

He wrote and posted a letter to the Dean, enclosing the marriage certificate, and asking for the return of the latter. The Dean considered it a very impertinent letter, and he showed it to a number of his colleagues. The marriage certificate he returned without comment. But the senior staff were agreed that J. J. Pope was not a person to be encouraged.

J.J.'s second indiscretion was the publishing, at his own expense,

of two pamphlets, one on the inadequate activities of the Pharmaceutical Society, the other upon research work he had carried out upon colloids, with suggestions as to their future therapeutic value. Moreover, he posted copies of those pamphlets to members of the staff. A most impertinent proceeding. Here was a little fellow, not yet qualified, daring to criticise an august society and to suggest to his seniors certain new developments in the preparation and administration of drugs.

Sir Thomas Padiman, having discussed the matter with some of his colleagues, took the opportunity of snubbing J.J. in public. Sir Thomas was going round his wards with a large following of students, and J.J. was among them.

"Oh, Mr. Pope."

"Yes, sir."

"I am obliged to you for sending me your pamphlet. May I suggest that, for so inexperienced a young man, it is a little previous."

J.J., knowing that all eyes were on him, compelled himself to casualness and a smile.

"I am afraid all new work is rather previous, sir. Pasteur was terribly previous."

Arrogant young cub! Sir Thomas seized the opening.

"Do you bracket yourself with Pasteur, Mr. Pope?"

"Hardly, sir."

"I am glad."

The crowd tittered, but J.J. had the last word, another indiscretion.

"I know, sir, that the young are penalised for asking questions."

Sir Thomas ignored the remark, but he made a point of remembering it.

J.J. took his final that winter. Only one of the examiners was a St. Mark's man, nor is it suggested that had they all been St. Mark's men, J. J. Pope would have been ploughed. There are far more cultivated and subtle ways of side-tracking a dangerous member of a profession. The papers were mere child's play to J.J. The examiner in Pharmacology, when he came to viva J.J., complimented him upon his paper, and elevated the viva voce catechism into a

conversation on new drugs and methods. Being innocent and impartial he happened to say to his St. Mark's confrere: "That's a rather remarkable young man you have at your place."

"Who's that?"

"Man named Pope."

"Much too remarkable."

"I think we shall hear more of him."

Quite a number of eminent gentlemen were conscientiously determined that as little as possible should be heard of this young man. After all, it is only human nature to bestow favours upon those whom we like, and to ignore those who provoke prejudice. It was not a question of pragmatical hostility. All that a professional clique may have to do is to ignore a particular person, and grant him no opportunities.

J.J. Pope passed his final test. Results were posted on the hospital board, and successful candidates interviewed and congratulated by the Dean.

"Now, Mr. So-an-So, what of the future? Do you propose to take up hospital appointments? Useful experience. Two house-surgeons and a house-physician will be needed during the next two months. Obstetrics, also."

J.J. was not interviewed. He was aware of the omission, but he could claim no prerogative. He carried the news of his success home to Kitty, and found her, not at Mortimer Mews, but at Roper's Row.

"I'm through, Kit."

She had some piece of millinery on her knees, and while still holding it in one hand she both embraced and draped him.

"How splendid! Of course I knew you would be. Mary, Mary, J.'s a real live doctor."

Mary Rackstraw looked both enigmatic and amused. Kitty's enthusiasms were of the simplest, but they did carry a rich flavour.

"I don't see any difference."

J.J. understood her.

"No, save that I shall have to mind my p's and q's, or the Great Panjandrum will tread on me."

Kitty, lying at night with her head on J.J.'s shoulder, talked of the future, but not as her own self saw it. What next for J.J.? Of

course the hospital would need him for a while, for Kitty, in her innocence, believed that her husband was destined for greatness. No doubt she dreamed her own feminine dreams, of a little house in some street sacred to the distinguished members of the profession, of old Georgian furniture, and china, and pictures, of eminent patients attending in J.J.'s waiting-room, of a brougham or one of the new autocars, of dinners and little celebrations. Somehow Kitty was not afraid of confronting the social responsibilities that might be hers. She had too much vitality for fear, or for those self-conscious shrinkings which afflict the poor in spirit. She had found the world kind to her, for few people could look at her and feel unkind. She did not suspect how unkind it could be to a little person like J. J. Pope.

J.J., stroking her head, was guarded.

"Oh, well, we'll see. I may put up a plate somewhere."

"How long will it be, J., before you are in Harley Street?"

"Years, my sweet. Do you want to live in Harley Street?"

"I want you to be there."

No adequate reason now remained for J. J. Pope to attend at St. Mark's, unless the hospital desired to make use of him. The alternatives were obvious and familiar. He might take a sea voyage as a ship's doctor, squat or buy a share in a practice, or serve as an assistant to some G.P., but J.J. continued to go daily to St. Mark's. A mood of ironical curiosity possessed him. He was waiting to see whether any minor post would be offered to him, and how the new vacancies in the wards would be filled. The magnanimity of his seniors was on trial.

He attended at out-patients, followed surgeons and physicians round the wards, and was ignored. He needed no more educating, and his seniors had no intention of submitting to being educated by him. There are quiet and inobtrusive ways of freezing a fellow out. When the two new house-physicians were selected, J.J. was not one of them.

That decided him. He would shake off the dust, but not before he had raised the dust with his particular enemy, the Dean.

He walked into the Dean's room one morning in January when Dr. Parkhurst was feeling the first symptom of flu. It was not a happy occasion, nor did J.J. expect it to be so.

"Oh, Mr. Pope. Excuse me, I'm afraid——"

"I shall only keep you a minute, sir."

"Very well."

"I wanted to thank you, sir, and all the staff for the very great help and encouragement I have received here."

The Dean blew his nose, and glared. He was feeling shivery and irritable.

"Leaving us, Mr. Pope?"

"I hope so. I think research is more in my line. If I can produce anything of value I shall, of course, realise that the hospital inspired it."

Dr. Parkhurst felt a surge of heat. This polite, cold sarcasm was no ice-bag, but like the prick of a needle.

"I'm afraid certain personalities, Mr. Pope, are not—popular. But please excuse me, I——"

J.J. rose, smiling and suave and ruthless.

"Quite so, sir. I quite realise that I have made mistakes. Enthusiasm can be very foolish. I will take it where it will not cause discomfort."

The Dean sneezed, and groped for a handkerchief. Could not this little prig see that he was a sick man?

"I'm afraid, Mr. Pope, I am not in a mood to——"

"Have you taken your temperature, sir?"

"No, I have not. Good morning, Mr. Pope."

"Good morning, sir. If you will excuse me I think bed is indicated."

J.J. walked out of the hospital and into the familiar forecourt. Nor was he ever to re-enter its doors.

16

So, very early in his married life, J. J. Pope was faced with the question of how much he should tell his wife. To confess to a woman that you are anathema to other men may be either easy or very hard. That will depend upon the texture of a man's pride, and J.J. had the devil's own pride. If poor Kitty's eyes were turned towards ultimate social splendours, it seemed dastardly to disillusion her, and J.J. decided to keep secret the smart of ostracism.

But a plan was necessary, and when he had meditated upon it, he confided it to Kitty with an air of wilful cheerfulness.

"I want your opinion, Kit."

"Yes, dear."

"Will it hurt you to leave this place?"

Of course it would not hurt her. Her dreams already were packed up for the change.

"No, darling. Have you got to live in hospital?"

"I'm realising that is not necessary. You see, my sweet, I want to halve my days, one half to doctoring, the other to research. The idea is to find a corner near here where I can put up a plate."

"A new house, all our own?"

"Yes."

"How lovely! I suppose it will only be temporary?"

"We'll see about that. You and I will have to spy out the land."

"Go and look for——"

"Where doctors are not too thick on the earth. My idea is to run a dispensary, which can work in with my lab. I must have my guinea-pigs."

She did not see the bitter joke. Maybe she divined the gold, not the sick humanity that would be necessary to J.J.'s dual purpose. He must earn his fees, however paltry they might prove, and retain the patients upon whom he would experiment with the products of research. Kitty might have been a little shocked had she realised how dispassionately he viewed the sick. It was their disharmonies that interested him, not their claim as human beings to be well.

Which goes to show how much J. J. Pope had yet to learn about the subtleties of healing. At this period of his career he was thinking more of the mucous membranes than of the mind. Being himself so strong in his pursuit of that which piqued him, he had not yet divined that both the will to be well and the will to live may be absent. He was a laboratory man, a master of material technique, unqualified as yet to practice in that larger laboratory, humanity.

So, each afternoon, J.J. and Kitty took a bus ride and spied out the land. Both of them were agreed that Bloomsbury would not be a suitable neighbourhood for a man who had lived in Mortimer Mews, and that new ground should be searched for. They wandered round Highbury, Canonbury, Stoke Newington, Clapham, Kensington and Chelsea, and their choice fell upon Chelsea. Probably, it was Kitty's sudden passion for a particular little house which was empty and to let in Chellwood Terrace that persuaded J.J. to choose the suburb of the Sage. Moreover, Chelsea did not appear to be plastered with physicians, and a squatting doctor might count upon collecting a small practice.

Kitty stood looking at No. 5 Chellwood Terrace.

"Isn't it sweet?"

J.J. smiled at her glowing face.

Chellwood Terrace was William IV, a row of little white houses, each with four steps ascending to green front doors. It was comely and intimate, and pleasantly proportioned. Each house had a small front garden enclosed by low iron railings, and perhaps its charm was emphasised by the fact that it was confronted by a row of hideous, red brick monstrosities of the Victorian period, houses that suggested a parade of tall, lean, attenuated maiden aunts.

"Let's look over it, J."

The keys were to be had at a house-agent's in the Fulham Road. J.J. was wondering what the rent would be, and whether a long lease would be insisted upon. Inquiries at the house-agents produced the

necessary information. The rent was £55 a year, the rates in proportion. No. 5 had been re-decorated, and the owner would prefer to grant a seven years' lease. The gentleman behind the desk was polite but realist.

"We like references, sir. May I ask——"

"I am a doctor. I suppose there is no objection to my putting up a plate?"

"Oh, none at all. That makes a difference, a distinct difference."

"May we have the keys?"

"Of course, sir."

"Just one point, supposing I might wish to move into a bigger house, would there be any difficulty in disposing of the lease?"

"Oh, none at all, sir, I think."

J.J. and Kitty went off with the keys. Kitty held on to J.J.'s arm. She was as excited as a child. "Bless her," thought J.J. He insisted upon her unlocking the door. The lady of the house should perform so significant a ceremony. They found themselves in a hall-passage, with cream walls and skirting-boards. The place smelt of fresh paint, and Kitty's pretty nose savoured it.

"So nice to start clean."

No. 5 Chellwood Terrace surprised them. It was more roomy than it appeared. A semi-basement house, it had a sitting-room below, which could serve as a dispensary. Kitty was enthusiastic. J.J. could see his private patients in the back sitting-room, and the humbler folk in the basement. There were four bedrooms, and one of them could be converted into a laboratory; yes, the one with the nice big window looking on the back garden. Kitty was delighted with the back garden. It had high brick walls, a little lawn, and an old pear tree, and a tool-shed attached to the end wall. It was a wintry spot at the moment, but Kitty was dreaming dreams.

"We could grow flowers here, J., lots of flowers. I do love flowers."

J.J. put his arm round her.

"Think you'd be happy here?"

"Oh, darling, of course I should."

J.J. was granted a seven years' lease of No. 5 Chellwood Terrace.

He estimated that their expenditure would be round about £250 a year. His own private income amounted to £100 and Kitty, who

was selling her share of "Nanette's" to Mary, could count upon £200 in cash. She had decided, and quite rightly so, according to the conventions of that generation, that the wife of a physician in Chelsea could not be associated with the retail trade. Moreover, she was now both wife and housewife, and proposing to supervise the work of one small maid. It was Kitty who suggested that her two hundred pounds should be spent on buying furniture, for Mortimer Mews would not garnish No. 5 Chellwood Terrace, and J.J. agreed. His own capital would remain intact, though a small portion of it might have to be sacrificed in fitting up his dispensary, and in filling the gap between his private income and his expenditure, until he had gathered a few patients and was earning fees. Meanwhile, Kitty had to be safe-guarded, and J.J. wrote to Mr. Roper and instructed him to prepare a will in which J.J. left all his possessions to his wife.

J.J. bought a frock coat and a top-hat. He liked neither of these decorations. Maybe, he realised that a frock coat made his little legs look shorter, and the hat emphasised the largeness of his head. Did Kitty notice these bizarreries? As a matter of fact, she did not. She loved a person, not a fashion-plate. That she was just as tall as her husband somehow did not matter. She was conscious of J.J.'s inward stature.

Chellwood Terrace was not so urban and anonymous that it could fail to be interested in new residents, especially so when a brass plate appeared upon the gate of No. 5.

"Dr. J. J. Pope, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P."

New furniture, etc., was being delivered at No. 5, and Chellwood Terrace saw a pretty young thing appearing and disappearing with a flutter of happy activity. No. 4 housed a solicitor's managing clerk and his family, a rather meticulous person who immediately pointed out to his secretly bored wife that the fellow next door had no right to inscribe Doctor on his place. Only a Fellow of the College of Physicians could claim that distinction. Mrs. Megby asked him whether it mattered. A Mr. Stout and his wife occupied No. 6. Mr. Stout managed a wine shop, and looked it. He was fat and florid, and had a roving eye. The descent upon this suburban dullness of such a pretty young blonde made life seem more colourful to Mr. Stout.

"Seen the wife? She's a looker."

Mrs. Stout was not interested. Percy was far too sentimental and polygamous.

"Don't think much of the doctor fellah. Funny little bit. Looks as though Moses had fitted him out with someone else's frock coat."

Neither Kitty nor J.J. were aware of faces at windows, or of the critical interest of their neighbours. Their new little world absorbed them, and if Kitty loved the garnishing of the new home, J.J. was no less proud of it, for No. 5 expressed for him something he had never possessed, even in the Yatley days. This place was his, most intimately his, to be shared with a creature who was the one person in the world with whom he felt whole and at his ease. Kitty and the house were one. It was his bed, his fire, his armchair, his dinner-table, his workshop. He could do in it what he pleased. J.J. had suffered from so much antagonism and disharmony in the world of men that Kitty and Kitty's house gave him a new sense of security and peace. Almost, he could think of himself as a drake in a nice green pond, inspired to exultant quackings.

The immediate future did not trouble him. Settling in was a fascinating business, though it had its adventures. J.J. in his shirt sleeves, struggled with pieces of furniture which his wife wished to try in alternative positions. He laid stair-carpet and linoleum, fitted up his lab. and put up shelves in the dispensary that was to be. J.J. was proving himself handy about the house. But how often they were to laugh over the incident of the bed!

It was a bed with one of those new wire mattresses. The furniture movers had offered to erect it for them.

"Shall we put it up for you, guv'nor?"

"No thanks, we can manage."

J.J. wanted the fellows out of the house. He was prepared to tackle the bed. The erecting of the frame was easy. Then the wire mattress had to be stretched until two bolts poked their noses through a wooden cross-piece, and nuts could be slipped on. J.J. began that tug-of-war with easy confidence, only to discover that this steel devil was malicious and obdurate. J.J. tugged and panted. The conquest of this stubborn thing was a question of pride, for though J.J. was something of a genius, he was sensitive about his stature and his lack of brute strength. With set teeth he fought with

that mattress; he would get one of the bolts nearly into position, but not quite far enough for the nut to take the thread. He sweated. Again and again he tugged at the thing, only to find that his strength was just too small for the final conquest, and unless that mattress was conquered he and Kitty would have no bed.

At last he realised that he was beaten, and that Kitty would have to help him. He went to the head of the stairs and called to her.

"Kit."

"Yes, dear?"

"Can you give me a hand for a moment? This is a non-conformist bed."

She ran upstairs to find him flushed and sweating, with the veins standing out on his forehead, both exasperated and exhausted, and trying to hide his anger behind a flicker of fun.

"It's the wire mattress. No sense of humour."

"Oh, J., why didn't you call me before?"

"Foolish male pride. Come here and pull. If we can get these damned bolts through so that you can slip the nuts on, the spanner will do the rest."

Side by side, and each with a foot against the bed-frame, they tugged at the thing, and the added force sufficed.

"Now then, while I hold it. Quick."

Kitty slipped the nuts on and the struggle was over, but J.J.'s underwear was sticking to his body.

During the first two or three weeks at Chellwood Terrace neither Kitty nor her husband worried about the appearance of possible patients. No. 5 was not yet prepared to welcome the sick, and both J.J. and Kitty were busy. J.J. had ordered a very modest supply of drugs, and had purchased such instruments as might be essential, and the little dispensary was garnished and prepared. Moreover, J.J. was glad of the leisure in which to fit up his lab., and resume work upon his various lines of research. He was experimenting with pepsin, and one or two new coal tar products as analgesics, and an intestinal antiseptic in colloid form.

As yet they had engaged no maid, for they were enjoying having

the house to themselves. Kitty was doing the housework and the cooking, and it must be revealed that in those early days her cooking was experimental and somewhat a frying pan affair. If J.J. needed a stomach upon which to try his products, he discovered it in himself. Kitty's early efforts as a cook gave him indigestion.

In fact, Kitty never knew what qualms her early efforts had caused him, which, indeed, was pure devotion. Moreover, one test case, even though it was personal, was utterly inconclusive. Hundreds of such cases would be needed before the efficiency of any such product could be proved.

Then arose the question of a maid.

"Do you think we ought to have one, J.?"

"Well, yes."

"I could manage, you know."

"Prestige, my sweet. Someone must answer the door. Besides——"

"Couldn't I do it?"

J.J. smiled at her.

"In a rational world, yes, but this isn't a rational world. It lives on appearances."

Service was no problem in those days, and Kitty obtained from a local agency a young girl named Ethel. Kitty engaged her because Ethel had a smile, and all the symptoms of good nature. It was about all she did have to begin with. But Ethel was educatable, and attachable to a mistress such as Kitty. She took life rather as a joke, but as a joke that was worth enjoying.

However, when some six weeks had passed, and no prospective patient had rung the bell of No. 5, both J.J. and Kitty began to worry. J.J. kept his anxiety to himself, though every idle day that passed meant wastage of capital. As for Kitty, she displayed a bright face, but she would sit at the dining-room window and watch for someone to open the green iron gate. If she was elsewhere she listened for the bell, and whenever it rang, she hoped for a patient.

"There's the front door bell, Ethel."

"Yes'm."

"It must be someone to see Dr. Pope."

About three o'clock one afternoon the bell rang, and Ethel went to answer it. She found a seedy and elderly gentleman on the doorstep. His nose was red, and his breath alcoholic.

"Is the doctor in?"

"He's just gone out."

"Is the lady in?"

"Yes, she is."

"You go and tell her, my girl, there's a gentleman to see her."

Ethel showed the caller into the dining-room, and dashed off to Kitty who was working in the garden, sowing the seeds of hardy annuals.

"A gentleman, ma'am, to see the doctor. I told 'im as 'e was out."

"Oh, Ethel!"

" 'E's wanting to see you."

Kitty rushed in to wash her hands, and making a smiling entry, found the strange gentleman arranging a number of dog-eared leaflets on the table.

"Good afternoon, I'm so sorry the doctor's out. He——"

"You'll do just as well, madam. I've called to bring to your notice a number of most interestin' books. Now, 'ere we 'ave a new domestic compendium, published in twelve parts, price three guineas the twelve."

Kitty's radiance was dimmed. The possible patient was just a cheap tout whom it took her twenty minutes to convince that none of his wares were needed, even though you had not to pay cash down. In fact Kitty was still struggling with his impertinent persistence when J.J. returned and took over the argument. The debate looked like beginning all over again until J.J. feeling puckish and irritated, looked the gentleman in the face, and made a suggestion.

"I'll treat your dyspepsia gratis for a free edition of that encyclopedia."

The tout was non-plussed.

"I 'aven't got dyspepsia."

"Not even a liver?"

"Not even a liver, sir."

"I'm sorry, then I'm afraid we can't do business."

J.J. became more worried. He might have infinite leisure for his experimental work, but such work could not continue unless some shekels were poured into the treasury. A professional gentleman is

not allowed to advertise, though he may symbolise his success by the house he occupies, the carriage he drives, the dinners he gives, and the dresses his wife may wear. J.J., pondering this problem, was compelled to realise that if no patients came to the house, then he must make some show of leaving the house to visit hypothetical patients. After all, a fellow could take a walk and make it appear a professional pilgrimage without being guilty of excessive humbug. So, J.J. put on his top hat and walked with the brisk air of a doctor who had patients to attend. Some days he walked miles, wore out much boot-leather and became familiar with nearly every street in Chelsea. He had a preference for the embankment and the river, and sometimes he would cross the Albert Bridge and stroll round Battersea Park. The trouble was that he could not linger or sit on seats, for busy professional gentlemen did not do such things. To maintain the illusion he sometimes carried a black, surgical bag with him, but if a cat was in the bag he could not let the poor beast out.

Mr. Percy Stout of No. 6 suggested that his wife should call on No. 5.

"Seems a poor sort of show for the kids. Ought to be kind and neighbourly."

Mrs. Stout demurred. Percy's altruism was apt to be inspired by a passion for the opposite sex, especially so when they were lookers like Mrs. Pope.

"I'll think about it."

"What's there to think about?"

Mrs. Stout was given to sour candour. She said, and frankly so, that if the doctor's wife had been fat and fifty Percy would have suffered from no urge towards neighbourliness. Mr. Stout was equally frank. He said that if a woman was jealous she might look in her mirror to find out the reason.

Yet, fate and dressed crab had marked down Mr. Stout as J.J.'s first patient. Both the Stouts were exceedingly healthy people, and having been in residence only a year, they had not engaged the services of a medical man. Mr. Stout liked to celebrate on Saturday nights; he might bring home a lobster or a crab, and on this particular occasion it must have been the crab that was responsible for

his inward disorder. Mr. Stout woke about midnight in acute pain; he was sick.

He gasped at his wife.

"I've been poisoned. It must have been that crab. I feel like dying, Maudie."

Mrs. Stout did not want him to die. She was fond of the creature and of her comforts, and death would be a financial disaster.

"Fetch a doctor. Next door will do."

Mrs. Stout dressed herself hurriedly and incompletely, and went out in person to ring the bell of No. 5. It woke Kitty, and she sat up in bed. The bell went on ringing.

Kitty shook her husband.

"Oh, J., there's the bell. It must be a patient."

J.J. got out of bed, slipped into a dressing-gown and went downstairs. He found what appeared to be a large black bundle on the doorstep, an agitated bundle, with a frightened face.

"Oh, doctor, will you come at once and see Mr. Stout. Something's disagreed with him. He's in awful agony."

"Eaten anything?"

"Yes, crab."

"I'll come at once."

J.J. found the wine merchant in a state of collapse due in the main to pain and panic. Mr. Stout's interior appeared to have dealt so thoroughly with the invader that J.J. decided to treat the pain and the panic. Was there any brandy in the house? What a question! J.J. administered to Mr. Stout two ounces of neat brandy and a hypodermic of morphia. Mr. Stout lapped up the brandy. This young doctor seemed to be a man of sense.

"I'd like him to have a hot bottle."

"Yes, doctor."

"I'll wait awhile downstairs. I'd like to see how he reacts."

"Do you think it is food-poisoning, doctor?"

"I should say most certainly so."

J.J. sat for an hour in the Stout drawing-room, contemplating the smug awfulness of it. Mrs. Stout appeared to have a liking for every sort of ornament, and clashes of red and yellow. The lady was upstairs, sitting by her suffering mate. The house was very still,

and J.J. himself was beginning to feel sleepy when footsteps came creaking down the stairs.

"He's asleep, doctor."

"Good. Let him sleep."

"Thank you so much, doctor. So sorry to have disturbed you. Will you call again?"

"Early in the morning. Send for me earlier if the symptoms should recur."

J.J.'s treatment of Mr. Percy Stout was so very successful that in forty-eight hours Mr. Stout was back at business. He was a dramatic person, flamboyant in his description of anything that happened to Percy. He declared that he had been on the edge of death, and that Dr. Pope had saved him.

"Gave me brandy, my dear fellah. I was feeling like passing out. Yes, and a dig with a needle. A dashed clever young beggar, if you ask me. Knew what to do at once."

Mr. Stout became a good publicity agent for Dr. J. J. Pope. A fellow who prescribed brandy was the right sort of fellow. And Mr. Stout called on Kitty, and in twenty minutes was calling her "My dear."

17

On a large graph attached to the wall of J.J.'s lab. three mysterious words began to appear:

Genasol—Pepsonol—Iodol.

They might have been the names of Three Graces, or the members of a mysterious Trinity; in actual fact they were the three principal products of J.J.'s researches waiting to be tested out upon sick humanity. Dosage and results were to be recorded on the graph, and also in a case-book which J.J. kept locked in a drawer. Not that he expected anyone to steal his secrets; it was just part of his puckishness to make a mystery of things and to chuckle behind the back of a hostile professionalism.

Patients, human guinea-pigs, that was his need. He had no hospital wards at his service. He needed equipment of his own designing, and since he could not afford to have it made for him even in miniature, he improvised. A part of his big room looked like a Heath Robinson museum.

Patients!

J.J.'s receipts in petty cash and book-debts during the first six months amounted to £23 7s. 6d., and a quarter of the book-debts were duds. Certain people who had exhausted the patience of other medical men in the neighbourhood came to the new young doctor to exploit him. They would pay him when the moon became cream-cheese.

J.J. found himself suffering from frustration both financially and in the matter of human material. His need was a clinic to which he might attract the sufferers from the particular disharmonies upon

which he was concentrating. He had asked himself a very simple question. What were the two disorders which were most prevalent? Why, just dyspepsia and chronic rheumatism. Nothing dramatic and disastrous like cancer, or poetic like the White Death. A bio-chemist who could produce reliable remedies for these two work-a-day ills might be conferring more benefits upon his fellows than the most brilliant of surgeons.

During the second six months at No. 5 Chellwood Terrace Dr. Pope's private practice showed a considerable improvement, and the receipts were sufficient to enable him to live. As yet there was no jam for Kitty, and Kitty did not complain. But his human, experimental material was lacking in mass. He needed scores of patients for his human lab., people of the poorer classes who would be attracted by small fees. For weeks J.J. pondered the problem until the solution suggested itself. No. 5 Chellwood Terrace might suffice for his more profitable patients, but it would not serve the purpose he had in mind.

J.J. confided his plan to Kitty.

"What I need is a dispensing practice, a kind of clinic."

Kitty might be bearing more than he knew, but her vitality and her happy nature were, for the time being, adequate.

"How could you work it, J.?"

He explained his plan, and it troubled her. It seemed to promise infinite labour, much expense, and it did not encourage her feminine dreams. Kitty still thought of J.J. in another world, a world in which she would share his triumphs.

"Won't you be working too hard, dear?"

"I'm pretty tough."

"And the expense?"

"I think I can manage."

So, J. J. Pope put his plan into action. He rented an empty shop in the Caroline Road. He had the windows painted brown to a height of six feet, and upon the door was inscribed in gold: "Dr. J. J. Pope's Clinic." The interior was partitioned off in two small rooms, and fitted up with austere simplicity.

Other medical men may have looked askance at the experiment. It could not be condemned as advertising, though it could be damned as lacking dignity. This Pope fellow was a sixpenny cheap-

jack. That was all there was to it. And as for the penurious patients who might visit him, well, J.J. Pope was welcome to them. There was no profit in such people.

J.J.'s practice might be said to have separated itself into two groups, representing respectively those who ate too much and those who ate too little. In both cases, however much the diet differed in bulk, it was often deficient in quality and in wisdom. That might be largely the fault of the social scheme, but J.J. was not tilting at windmills or setting out to alter human nature. He did not believe that some particular class or party was responsible for all the social injustices. A fool would always eat like a fool, and an indifferently bred animal remain a scrag. He was interested in the human hotch-potch as an investigator.

Patients began to visit the shop in Caroline Road. Mostly they were elderly, either in age or in tissue-quality. For many of them J.J. might have prescribed a social incinerator, but this human brash was material to be used. J.J. was a curiously hard young man during these days. Separative as ever in his attitude to the crowd, he had no feeling that he owed humanity anything, and in fact he owed it very little. He did not see Christ crucified in some poor hobbling querulous old man. He loved where he chose, and where love was inevitable. He might give of his best to obscure humanity, but he did not love it. Why should he love it? Was there anything singular and splendid in it to deserve love? In some respects he was as scornful as the Sage of Chelsea. So many million people, mostly fools!

Mary Rackstraw, visiting them sometimes on Sundays, began to wonder whether this marriage would prove a happy one. Mary was an observant person and not one of Carlyle's fools. It seemed to her that J.J. was developing what she described as a "Shut-up Face." Mary always had felt that there was a fanaticism, a potential hardness in this little man. Let him become absorbed in some particular purpose, and he might forget everything in his work, his tie, his wife, his meals, the very child in himself. Mary might have said that such men should not marry, and especially so not a joyous creature like Kitty.

If the weather was fine they would have tea in the garden, which was very much Kitty's garden. To begin with, J.J. might not

be there, though a chair was waiting for him. He was up above in what Mary would come to describe as that damned monastic cell. Kitty would have to call to him.

"J."

"Hallo!"

"Tea. Mary's here."

To them would come a man who seemed half awake, a man who had left most of his essential self in that upper room. The surface of him was social, and perfunctorily so, but his mind was still probing problems which other people were not supposed to share.

"Well, Mary, how are hats?"

Mary might try the prod of an ironic hatpin on him.

"I shut up shop on Sunday."

He did not catch the implication. J.J. was developing into one of those dreadful creatures who never shut up shop.

Now and again Kitty might look a little anxiously at her man. J.J. did not notice it, but Mary did. She wanted to say to him "Wake up, you self-absorbed idiot. Haven't you the eyes to see that which wants to be played with?" Mary thought that her friend looked thinner; her child's face had become the woman's. She was quieter. Laugher had become a rare thing. She made Mary think of someone watching a cloud-shadow spreading over a summer landscape.

When tea was over J.J. would light his pipe and begin to fidget. Mary understood that restlessness. J.J. wanted to be back with his blessed or accursed work. She noticed that his eyelids were red, like those of a man who sat up late reading for an exam. She let him go. She wanted to talk to her friend.

"J.J. looks rather tired."

Sympathy was the lure, and Kitty fell to it, but there was no evidence of self in her confidences.

"Yes, he's working so hard."

"How's the practice?"

"Oh, growing. But it's the clinic and his lab. work that take up so much time."

"No margin left for play."

Kitty's face seemed to close up like a flower.

"Oh, I don't mind. You see, J.'s not like most men. I feel he's made for big things."

Mary divined the secret resistance she might encounter if she pressed her sympathy too far.

"I know. But, after all, my dear——"

"If you think I'm not happy, you're wrong."

"I was not suggesting that. But what I do mean is, dear, that a man should be able to relax."

"For my sake?"

"No, hang it all, for his own."

J.J.'s private practice was proving mildly lucrative, but, somehow, he forgot to increase Kitty's dress-allowance or to give her more money for housekeeping. Actually, it was the sixpenny clinic and his research work which were becoming parasitic upon his practice, for a sixpenny fee did not cover the cost of the new preparations with which he was experimenting. The various ingredients cost money; in fact they ate up all J.J.'s spare cash, and if his case-book was growing fat, the same could not be said of Kitty.

"Pope's Shop," as other doctors called it, was collecting a crowd of habitual chronics. It cannot be said that these people liked Dr. Pope; he was too cold and rational and business-like, but he took great trouble with them, for they were his experimental material. Most of these folk were unaccustomed to being treated as though their ailments mattered, and this Dr. Pope did take trouble. It was not just a lick and a promise for six coppers. The young man was thorough, dreadfully thorough, but without a smile or a joke. These people were puzzled.

As one old woman said to another: "He makes me feel some'ow that I might be one o' those paupers whose bodies go to the 'ospital to be cut up."

"Yes, but 'e does take trouble."

"Yes, in a funny sort o' way, as though he was fonder of my rheumatics than 'e was of me."

Her gossip giggled.

"What's there to laugh at in that?"

"Well, you ain't exactly the Belle o' New York, or Lottie Collins, dearie, are yer?"

An atmosphere of scientific detachment may be necessary for research, but for the art of healing more one-ness with the patient is desirable. J.J. may have treated his chronics rather like guinea-pigs, but he was not such a fool as to fail to take into account habits and environment. Here he was up against all the "isms," and in conflict with the enthusiastic interferers who hold that education will solve all problems, or nearly so.

Inevitably he was pushed to the conclusion that even planned healing should be selective. There were patients who would not or could not help themselves to be well. In the case of diet they would fail to follow instructions, either because original sin was too strong in them, or they and their fellows were too ignorant or lazy. There were cases, of course, where facilities were lacking. The frying-pan was too universal, and English cooking too obvious and crude.

When J.J., who was becoming something of a kitchen expert, and persuading Kitty and Ethel to carry out his experiments at No. 5, attempted to persuade some old woman to cook and eat certain unusual dishes, the reply might be "I can't do with things messed about like that." There was no subtlety, no fastidiousness in many of these people. They were a fried potato, boiled cabbage class.

So, to try and prove his theories, J.J. was compelled to become selective. He began to choose his particular patients, the more intelligent, those who were actively willing to be well, and to help in the process. Adaptation and self-restraint were necessary, and in spite of the Reformers, these qualities are somewhat rare.

J.J.'s private practice was increasing, but owing to his expenditure upon research he was saving no money.

Did he realise that he had not bought his wife a new frock, or even so much as a box of chocolates since their marriage?

What had become of those happy, irresponsible Sundays when they had wandered off to Kew, Hampton or Richmond? J.J. had no workless day. Sunday gave him more leisure for work in his lab.

Had he no suspicion that fellow practitioners upon whose toes he had trodden as a Squatter, were watching him carefully, and that one of them had written a letter to the Powers That Be, suggesting that Dr. J. J. Pope was guilty of advertising, in that he kept what

might be described as a medical shop. Authority investigated the complaint, but decided that J.J.'s Clinic did not sufficiently transgress against the laws of professional etiquette. It might be cheap and undignified, but it was not an offence. Had Dr. J. J. Pope added to his name upon the glass door such words as "Specialist in Rheumatism and Gastritis," that would have been Sequah Stuff, and the Council might have taken action.

Kitty was troubled. A woman may forgive a forgetfulness that is material, but emotional isolation can wound her. Were they to have no holidays, no contrasts, no play? She had put her house in order, and created for her comrade a smoothness which, like a summer night in the deeps of the country, was so peaceful that it passed unnoticed. Mary Rackstraw would have said that this little fanatic needed a shock, and that Kitty was too sweet-tempered and too easy with him. If she lost her temper now and again, J. J. Pope might sit up and take notice. Mary Rackstraw was both right and wrong. Life may have other ways of shocking a man into wakefulness.

"Genasol—Pepsol—Iodol."

It was Kitty, who, with infinite care, dusted J.J.'s lab. for him when he was elsewhere. He was fussy about his workshop, and she was careful to refrain from interference. But those three words began to haunt her. They were like the deities of some fatal Trinity, imposing upon her world a sedulous, puritanical deadness. Almost it seemed that J.J. might sacrifice everything to these three gods.

One day Kitty wept over J.J.'s table. She was feeling very lonely.

"Tell him," said a voice in her.

Should she tell him, and how? Were there other and less direct ways of making J.J. realise that something was lacking in her life? What if she had a child? What if she asserted herself more obviously? Was J.J. the kind of man to react to such methods?

She conceived a plan, a very simple and pathetic plan.

"Oh, J.?"

"Yes."

"Can't we have a holiday this year?"

A holiday? How could he take a holiday? Who was to do his work?

"Afraid it's not possible."

"Don't doctors ever take holidays?"

"Yes, but in my case it would mean a locum. I can't afford it just now."

He passed her a cup to be refilled.

"Without sugar."

"No sugar?"

"We moderns eat too much sugar."

Was he growing faddy? Could there be too much sugar? He seemed to be cutting out the sugar in other ways.

She passed him his cup.

"Can't we have a day now and again in the country? We haven't had one——"

"I might manage a Sunday afternoon."

"Do, J. I'd so love it."

"All right. Where would you like to go?"

"Oh, let's go down to Yatley."

J.J. drank his tea like a man reflecting upon some profound problem. Yatley, yes. He had not seen Aunt Jane's grave for nearly a year. Was he forgetting Aunt Jane?

To Yatley they went, and Kitty put on a new frock which she had been making for herself, and the sun shone, but J.J. did not notice her frock. Disappointed she might be, but she passed that over. Before tea at The Chequers they went to look at Aunt Jane's grave, only to find that the man to whom J.J. paid a fee of ten shillings a year to keep the grave tidy had neglected his job. The simple mound was covered with tangled, uncut grass. J.J. was angry. He said that he was going to hunt up the gentleman and curse him.

Kitty demurred. Was her day to be spoilt?

"Isn't it our fault for not coming before? Perhaps the man forgot. People do forget."

J.J. was deaf to the inner meaning of her words. He had not forgotten. He had been too busy.

Mr. Killick was able to resolve that problem for them. What, Tom Tranter? He had been in hospital for three months. The poor devil was dying of cancer. Kitty looked poignant. Was there to be nothing but shadow on this particular day?

"Let's go up to the heath, J."

They went. They sat under the great beech tree, and J.J. lit a pipe. Then he drew from his pocket a small note-book and began

to pore over it. Kitty, glancing obliquely at it, saw that the pages were covered with strange formulae. She felt that she was going to cry. Couldn't he forget his work for one afternoon and give his whole self to her?

But she did not cry. She found a sudden, wholesome anger. She snatched the book away from him, and sat on it.

"It's too bad. You never give me any thought now."

J.J. was greatly astonished.

"What d'you mean, Kit?"

"Damn it," said she, "are you so blind as all that? Don't you ever notice things?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well?"

He glanced at her blankly.

"Isn't there anything new about me?"

"Is there?"

"My frock."

He looked her over.

"It's pretty, very."

"Don't you see anything else?"

"Well——"

"I'm going to have a baby. You're a doctor, and you've never noticed that!"

18

J.J. was wide awake. He had his arm round his wife, and Kitty was in tears.

"Oh, J., I've been so lonely."

J.J. was shocked. It was one of those moments when the hard skin of some other self was peeled from him, leaving him feeling raw and ashamed. Had he indeed been so blind? He had. And what could he say about it? It was one of those very simple occasions when a man can say nothing, but accuse himself of being a selfish, purblind fool, and with self-anger discover in himself strange new tendernesses.

"Kit, why didn't you——"

Half way through that silly question he tumbled over his own fatuous egoism, and turning angrily kicked it.

"I suppose you thought I should be——"

Again his voice faded off. No, there was nothing for it but complete confession, a humbling of himself in the presence of this wounded mate.

"Are you going to forgive me, Kit?"

"Oh, J., of course. I——"

They clung together, and with sudden passionate tenderness he kissed her wet face.

"Oh, what a damned, self-absorbed fool I've been! Good Lord! Give me that confounded book."

"Do you want it, J.?"

"Yes."

She made a little wriggling movement, recovered the thing from

beneath her, and gave it to him. J.J.'s arm went up. He flung the thing into a patch of fern.

"There goes the fool, J. J. Pope."

"Oh, J., you mustn't do that? It's got all your precious notes, hasn't it?"

"A lot of stupid——"

"Oh, no."

She scrambled away from him, and going to the patch of bracken, groped for the book and found it. She came back with a wet yet shining face, and gave it back to him.

"It's precious to me, too, dear."

Yatley Heath had been for J.J. a place of phantasy and romance. Always, he had had a feeling that strange things had happened here, and that if the veil of the senses were rent, or Time played tricks with you, those who were dead in Time might walk again. Had he not danced here naked as a child, piping some imaginary tune, conscious of mystery and the strange afflatus that sweeps your spirit into a tangle of sunlight and of shadow? So, on this summer day J.J. was moved to a simple service which might have caused the unregenerate to mock him. He twisted over on to his knees, and kneeling at his wife's feet, kissed her hands.

"Kit, you shall never be lonely again. I swear it."

"If you do love me, darling——"

"What an ass I have been!"

She bent over him, her arms about his head. How soft and warm they were! Oh, lovely emotion! How had he let it slip out of his life? What was life without feeling? Just a damned little notebook stuffed with formulae.

He put up his face to her. He was laughing.

"Kit, I must have been asleep. God, to think that one can——"

"Oh, J., don't go to sleep again."

"Never."

"I do love you, J. There's nothing I don't know about loving."

He kissed her.

"My sweet, I know now what comes first with me, and always will."

"Oh, J., I'm so happy."

In the train going home they sat holding hands, and an elderly

couple who shared the carriage with them exchanged significant smiles and glances. Young lovers these in the spring of that lovely season. Bless them! J.J. may not have known it, but his face had recovered its youngness. He had been taken to a high place and shown his world as it should be. And what an arrant prig he had been to his patients! He held his wife's warm hand, and its warmth seemed to spread through him.

So, Kitty was to have a child. That both frightened and inspired him. Did he want a child? He did not know whether he did or not; all that he knew was that Kitty was to be treated with great tenderness.

Dusk was seeping into their familiar little street when they returned. J.J. looked differently at the house. This was Kitty's house and home, and it was included in his new feeling about things. A motor-car, and a very dashing car for those days, was standing outside No. 6. Had the Stouts become car-folk? J.J., arming his wife through the gate, felt for his latchkey, and wondered.

Someone sitting in the hall heard their voices, and Dr. Pope's key clinking into the keyhole. It was Ethel, a rather scared and responsible Ethel who dashed at the door and opened it.

"Oh, ma'am, I'm so glad you've come back. There's a man here."

"A man?"

Ethel was voluble.

"Yes. Fair scared I was. I wouldn't let him in at first. He came in that there car."

"Did he tell you his name?"

"No, sir. He's in the garden. I thought I'd best sit here and see he didn't——"

But J.J. was laughing.

"I know who it is. Very big and young and handsome, Ethel?"

"Yes, in a way, sir, reg'lar toff, but you never know, do you——"

"Kit, it's old Peter."

"Mr. Pratten?"

"Of course."

Peter it was, prowling up and down the garden like a large and restless lion. He looked very brown and well, and somehow sug-

gesting emotional excitement. When J.J. appeared on the garden steps and hailed him, Peter swung round and waved an arm.

"Hallo, J.J.!"

"Hallo, old man! Been here long?"

"About an hour. Your girl rather thought I was some sort of flash sneak-thief. Just come up from Pollards."

"How's Mr. Pratten?"

"Excuse me, Sir Thomas Pratten, Bart. Happened a month ago. The old man's tickled to death."

"Glad to hear it. So you'll be——"

"Oh, I suppose so. How's Kitty?"

Peter had come to the foot of the steps, and the two men looked at each other with amused affection. There seemed more glow about Peter's Phoebus-head, and his eyes suggested some inward flame.

"Kitty's splendid. You'll stay to supper, such as it is?"

"Love to. But tell Kitty——"

"She's wise, old man."

For Kitty had swept Ethel down the kitchen stairs, and planting a flowery hat on the dresser, had rushed to her store cupboard. Thank heaven, Sunday supper was not too thin. Cold meat and salad, and plum tart. But custard was indicated, and Welsh Rarebit; as college men both J.J. and Peter had been pigs about toasted cheese, and J.J. was a connoisseur. Also, coffee would be needed, and her pretty set of Coleport china. Kitty fluttered about, and sang.

"Get the cheese, Ethel."

"Yes'm."

"Have you laid the table?"

"Yes'm."

"It will be for three. Is there a fire in the range?"

"Yes'm, for Sunday baths."

"Oh, splendid. Get me the frying-pan. Is there enough milk?"

"Plenty, ma'am."

Kitty appeared in the garden for a moment to shake hands with Peter and to assure both men that supper would be cold, yet adequate, if a little late. Peter looked at her with appreciation. He might be disastrously in love, and with someone who was unhappy, and Kitty's happy face was a provocation and a challenge. Peter, hands in pockets, and lounging beside J.J. towards the end of the little lawn, let fall a remark which, in its significance, was tentative.

"Seems a success, J.J.?"

"What, old man?"

"Your marriage, judging by Kitty's face."

J.J., conscious of self-accusation, and feeling humbled by it, paused to state a tone of his wife's flower beds.

"Yes, I hope so. Thanks to Kitty."

Peter also stood and stared at the flowers.

"Funny business, marriage. I suppose, if a man's a rotter——"

"He needn't be a rotter," said J.J.

"Oh, just how?"

"Merely blind and blundering along some completely selfish path."

Peter glanced at his friend.

"But what if the man's a cad and a rotter?"

"Ethics. Don't ask me to pose as a parson."

"Yes, all that old rubbish. We're dreadful humbugs, J.J."

"Or spoilt children?"

"Seems to me much of our goody-goody business is dressing up the spoilt child in a nice clean Sunday frock. Sailor suit and white socks, and a hat with *Invincible* or something on it in gold letters. Mind if I have a talk with you after supper?"

"We can smoke our pipes out here."

"Will Kitty mind?"

"I don't think so. I'll tell her that. Well, we've had a good day down at Yatley."

Peter's head seemed to rise with a jerk.

"Yatley! Well, I'm blowed! But, of course—— Know a man named Strange?"

"Of him. I did not move in the Strange world."

"What do you know of him?"

"Nothing particularly good."

"Gossip or fact?"

"Fact, I should imagine."

J.J. sought out his wife while Peter was having a wash. Would she feel hurt if he and Peter had a pow-wow about something that was on Peter's mind? J.J. was so hesitant about it that Kitty laughed, and very gently patted his face.

"Am I as exacting as all that? Of course I shan't mind, J."

Dr. Pope kissed his wife's fingers.

"Peter thinks it's a great success."

"What?"

"Our marriage. I told him it was due to you."

Kitty's supper was also a success. Peter might be very much in love with someone, but instead of spoiling his appetite, it appeared to stimulate it. He and J.J. exchanged glances over the toasted cheese. Yes, that had been Kitty's inspiration, and it caused Peter to become reminiscent. Did J.J. remember the college ball, the one at the end of their second year? J.J. did remember it, and that incident when he had watched Miss Sybil Marwood tantalise the little obscure and awkward boy in him. Peter was staring at his plate like a crystal-gazer, and both Kitty and J.J. were looking at Peter.

"He's in love," was their mutual thought.

Would they like their coffee in the garden? Yes. Well, Ethel would bring it out. Kitty effaced herself; she said that she was going to help Ethel with the washing-up.

"No nonsense about Kitty," said Peter, filling a pipe before descending into the dark garden.

"Only beautiful nonsense."

"I say, old man, that's a good phrase. Well, let me get it off my chest. I'm in love with a married woman."

J.J. saw it all in a flash.

"Mrs. Strange."

"How the devil did you guess that?"

"Mixture of inference and inspiration."

Peter paused at the foot of the steps to put a match to his pipe. The little flame lit up his face. It was not the face of Boy Peter, but the face of man.

"Shocked, J.J.?"

"Not a bit. How did it happen?"

"Oh, I'll tell you. The fellow, Strange, bought one of our cars. I did one or two trial trips with him, and he asked me to pilot him down to his place at Yatley. The old lady's dead, and Master Lawrence is a Bart. I didn't like the fellow. Dirty-minded brute. And when I saw Sybil—— Yes, we danced about six dances that night, the night I was talking about. Smitten, somewhat. Yes, but I didn't follow it up. A rather frightening young woman. Well, this time it was different. I saw her, not as something frightening, but a thing

that was frightened. Scared of life, if you know what I mean. I stayed three nights. Acute infection, J.J."

They were strolling about the little lawn, and Ethel coming out with the coffee, looked like a lost ghost in a white apron.

"Where do I put it, sir? I can't see, after the light inside."

"Give it to me, Ethel."

"Thank you, sir. The milk's 'ot, if the gentleman likes it like that."

There were two deck-chairs in the garden, shut up and leaning against the trunk of the pear tree. J.J. dealt with them, and particularly so with the one that was warped and had a spiteful temper.

"Try this one, old man. It doesn't play tricks. Mind the tray. There you are."

"Thanks, J.J. Do you think I am a thrice damned fool?"

"For falling in love?"

"No, but with——"

"You couldn't help her being married, could you? Black or white?"

"White, since the girl was so kind as to warn us about the hot milk."

"Hold on a moment. Pouring out coffee in the twilight needs concentration."

J.J. was squatting over the tray which he had placed on the grass. What surprises life kept for you! And did Sybil Strange know?

"Sugar?"

"Please."

"Here you are, Peter."

"Thanks, old man. Rather good, this darkness, for getting a thing off your chest."

"Does she know?"

"Do women know?"

"Well, I suppose that depends."

"If you mean I looked it, well, I couldn't help it. And I asked her——"

"Yes."

"To meet me in town."

"And she's going to?"

"Yes."

There was silence between them. J.J. was balancing his coffee-cup

and groping for his chair, and remembering that when Peter got going he took a devil of a lot of stopping. But why should he be stopped?

"Told your father?"

"Yes, to-day. Afraid we had something of a row. You know what the old man's like. Apt to be hot in the head, and spit things out. He said it seemed a pity that when I had dozens of girls to choose from I must go and fall for a second-hand woman."

"Rather harsh."

"I know. We had it out then. But what I like about the old man is that there's nothing mean or slimy about him. He may curse you, and that's that, but he doesn't go on being Jehovah."

J.J. sipped his coffee.

"Has the baronetcy made any difference?"

"Not a bit. He just chuckles about it. But what do you think, old man?"

"Think? One doesn't think oneself into that state. It just happens."

"Absolutely. If she—— Yes, I'm going over the cliff, old man, if she—— After all, the other fellow's a cad. Habitual womaniser, I gather."

"Yes, just that," said J.J. "That's one of the social savageries that need exploding. The sanctity of marriage! Bosh! The only sanctified marriage is the happy one."

"Like yours, J.J."

"Yes, like mine."

When Kitty was told of Peter's love-affair, as told she was that same night, she held her breath and her verdict. Kitty was not quite so emancipated as Mary Rackstraw who held that if a thing worked it was to be accepted, and that if it did not work it should be thrown on the scrap-heap. The young of those days were still groping towards reality, and though J.J. might be half a century ahead of his fellows in some of his views, he was chary of forcing them upon Kitty.

Kitty was conservative. She had a little kingdom of her own, and she was ready to defend it in practice and in theory. What, if another woman had come into her house and attempted to seduce her

husband? Would she have been tolerant and complaisant and shrugged her shoulders? Hardly. What was precious to her was hers.

"It seems such a pity, J."

"Well, these things happen. I don't see why one should perpetuate a mess."

"But Peter's so innocent."

"Innocent! Well, I don't know."

"Oh, yes, he is. I have feelings about things, J."

"Go on having feelings about them, my sweet. I'm not sure that intuition does not travel further and faster than mere logic."

"What is logic, J.?"

"One might call it the art of proving the other fellow wrong."

But Peter Pratten's romance was a mere stage-play compared with J.J.'s own problem. Kitty was with child. J.J. sent her to see a specialist, not a St. Mark's man, and the specialist's opinion was Kitty's. She was about two months gone, and a very healthy young woman, though the curious thing was she had not suffered from morning sickness. J.J., still blaming himself for his blindness, became the tender tyrant. Kitty was not to do this, and she was not to do that, and though Kitty did not quarrel with his concern, she protested.

"But I'm quite well, J., really. I like doing things."

"Yes, I know you do, my sweet, but I'm taking no chances. You leave most things to Ethel."

19

J.J. DEVELOPED a certain cockiness during those pregnant days. He was to become a father, and he was happy in being a husband, and as though to flatter him, some of his pet patients began to respond to treatment and show definite results. Joints seemed less glued up, stiffness and pain less irksome. Bright faces greeted him.

"Yes, I really am better, Doctor."

So, also with some of the gastric disharmonies. Diet and J.J.'s new protective preparations appeared to be having a very soothing and curative effect upon irritable mucous membranes. J.J. was feeling cocky, and rather a clever little fellow, strutting along and brandishing the Torch of Science. Knowledge was the thing, knowledge and yet more knowledge, exploration and experiment, and the exploding of prejudice and theory.

But J.J., the cocky little fellow, was to receive lessons in the seemingly incalculable. You might swear that all was well with your world and that Science was up in the Heaven, and then some puckish circumstance would kick your stool away and leave you puzzled and sprawling.

Days passed peacefully. Patients and practice appeared to be prospering; Kitty was carrying the new life in her with very little discomfort. J.J. had everything arranged with characteristic efficiency.

There was one excitement during late August. A telegram arrived for J.J. It was from Peter Pratten.

"Looking in for a moment this afternon about three. Hope to see you. Important."

Peter arrived by automobile, but he was not alone. J.J., waiting

in the front room, saw the dark lady of his dreams follow Peter from the car. The hood was up, and the back seat full of luggage. J.J. stood and stared. Were these two setting out on the great adventure?

He went to meet them at the door. It did not need the eyes of a physician to discover that these two were utterly and recklessly in love.

"Sybil, this is J.J."

She smiled at the little man and her face seemed strangely different. It was as though the hand of a healer had passed over it, leaving it smooth and rich and radiant.

"I am glad to meet Peter's friend."

For the first time in his life J.J. touched her hand. A sudden shyness possessed him. She seemed to symbolise for him all that past of struggle, frustration and desire.

"Peter's friends are mine."

What a bald and sententious sentence! He felt the need of Kitty, Kitty with her gaiety and naturalness, to rescue him from his self-consciousness.

"Do come in. My wife——"

Peter laid a hand on J.J.'s shoulder.

"Just five minutes. Yes, Dover. We are going over, car and all. France, Spain."

Peter had an envelope in his hand, and he passed it to J.J.

"I couldn't get down to Pollards. We came straight from Yatley. Keep this for me. I wonder if you could go down and see the old man, and say——"

"Yes?"

"And say we looked happy."

It was a whirlwind visit, and in five minutes they were away, with Kitty and J.J. standing at the top of the steps to wave them off. Months were to pass before J.J. was to hear the full story. There had been nothing secret and surreptitious about Peter's intervention. He had walked into Hardacre House, sent a servant for Lawrence Strange, and in the library calmly announced the purpose of his presence there.

"I am taking your wife away, Strange. You don't seem able to appreciate her. That's all. I'll give you the name of my lawyer."

Young Strange had flared.

"Oh, are you! And what the hell do you think——"

"Better take it calmly. Come and look."

Peter had taken Lawrence by the arm and led him to a window. The car was there, with Sybil seated in it, and a manservant was loading luggage into the back seat.

"That's final, my lad. Anything more to say?"

"Well, you can make a whore of my wife——"

Then, Peter had knocked him down, walked out of the house, and gone off with his lady.

J.J. was never likely to forget his visit to Pollards. He had sent Sir Thomas a prepaid wire.

"Can I see you to-day about four o'clock?"

Sir Thomas' wire came back promptly.

"Certainly. Expect you tea."

It was not the visit, but the happenings that were to be bracketed with it which bit themselves into J.J.'s mind. Kitty came with him to the gate, a Kitty who was wise as to the purpose of his journey and wished him well of it.

"Do try and smooth things over, J. I'm sure they are going to be happy."

"Take care of yourself, my sweet. No tricks, mind."

"There's nothing to worry about, darling."

A car met Dr. Pope at the station, and drove him to Pollards. The old place was looking serene and lovely, and J.J. found Sir Thomas on the terrace, and if Sir Thomas could not be described as lovely, he did exhibit a formidable serenity.

"Well, J.J. Arriving as a deputation, what?"

"In a sense, sir, yes."

"Sit down. We'll have tea here. Well, what have you got to say about my bloody fool of a son?"

J.J. sat down and passed old Pratten Peter's letter.

"I might quote my wife, sir."

"Is she an authority?"

"Perhaps. She says she is sure they are going to be happy. Besides——"

"Besides, what?"

"Peter has a rather lovely nature. I can't see any woman quarrelling with him."

Tom Pratten gave J.J. one of his shrewd and porcine looks. There were occasions when he resembled a very intelligent pig. He opened his son's letter, read it with complete deliberation, refolded it, slipped it back into the envelope and into his pocket.

"You don't look particularly miserable, J.J."

"I'm not, sir."

"Never met my wife, did you? Of course not. I always think of her as Lady Pratten. And she would have loved it, and laughed over it. That damned boy of mine is just like his mother."

"Then, she must have been——"

"No soft soap, young man. Well, I suppose I knew, even when I lost my temper, that I should forgive the young devil. I suppose you've seen the lady?"

"I have known her by sight for years."

"A looker?"

"Quite beautiful, sir. She and Peter are a pair."

"Yes, he got all his mother and nothing of me. What sort of fellow is this Strange?"

"A rotter."

"Then why the devil did she marry him?"

"Sex is a strange——"

"Yes, yes, damn it, I know. Off with one, on with the other. The question is, will she play the same trick on Peter?"

"Peter and the other fellow are completely different propositions."

"So, you are on Peter's side?"

"Absolutely."

The tea arrived and there was silence between them until the servant departed.

"Pour out, J.J. And just one word, if you ever want a friend, come to me."

"Thank you, sir."

"No thanks needed. If you can stick up for a friend, so can I."

J.J., feeling pleased with his day's visit, opened the green gate of No. 5. He looked up at the front window. Kitty was fond of sitting

there when he was out, with her work or a book, and since his coming back to life, J.J. rather expected that face at the window. Kitty was the one person in the world to whom he could prattle with the naturalness of a child and J.J. that separative creature, was developing the habit of perching and chirping to his mate. He saw a face at the window, close to it, and it was Ethel's face. It disappeared with a suddenness that somehow suggested that a scared Ethel had been waiting for him. She had. She opened the front door before J.J. had put his key into the latch.

"Oh, sir, I'm so glad you're back. There's been a h'accident."

J.J. went cold.

"What?"

"Mrs. Pope fell off the step-ladder. She would get up it to put up a new valance."

J.J. pushed in past Ethel.

"Where is she?"

"I got 'er to bed, sir."

"Has she broken anything?"

"No, sir. It's inside, sir."

"Did you send for anyone?"

"No, sir, she said she'd rather wait for you."

J.J. thrust his hat at Ethel and went up the stairs at a run. If there was any conflict within him between anger and a frightened tenderness, it was the latter that held him. Kitty was in bed and lying on one side, her face towards the door, and it did not need the physician in J.J. to see that she was in pain.

"Oh, J., I'm so sorry."

Gently he closed the door, and going to the bed, bent down and kissed her.

"My darling, you shouldn't——"

"I can't think how it happened. I was just leaning over a little——"

"Never mind now. Where's the pain?"

"Here. I'm afraid——"

"Any bleeding?"

"Yes."

J.J. was worried. Any old woman could have told him what the trouble was, and he did not need the telling. He was aware of his wife's face puckered with pain and emotional distress. Kitty was going to miscarry.

"J., does it mean——"

"I'm afraid so, darling. But we'll try."

"Oh, J., how terrible of me! It means I've killed our——"

She covered her face with her arms, and writhed, and her anguish was both physical and spiritual. J.J. was profoundly moved. Sitting on the side of the bed, he bent over her, and gently drew her arms down from her stricken face.

"There, there, darling. It may be all right. And even if it isn't, all that matters to me is you."

"Hold me, J., I'm frightened. I've done such a terrible thing."

"No."

"Oh, yes, I have. You know I didn't mean it, don't you?"

"My darling, such a thought would never enter my head. Now, lie straight and quiet, as quiet, as you can. Just give up and leave things to me."

J.J. spoke confidently in order to soothe her, but the doctor in him was all too wise as to the chances of saving that other life which was theirs. He did all that a man could do, but in the small hours Kitty gave birth to a five months' child, and all that J.J. cared about was the safety of the mother. Nature, when frustrated or interfered with, is prone to play spiteful tricks upon humanity, and though J.J. may not have shown it, he was frightened as he had never been frightened before. Had he followed his own impulses he would have called in his very enemies in this crisis, but he did send for the gentleman who had promised to attend Kitty as her accoucheur.

He came, looked sympathetic and solemn, examined Mrs. Pope and everything that needed examining. His opinion was that there need be no danger and no complications. The danger, as he put it, was much more likely to be psychological.

"Bad luck, Pope. No, I think she ought to do all right. Everything has come away, and there's been no signs of bleeding. Your wife's a fairly cheerful person, I take it?"

"Yes."

"Good. Well, my advice is, try again."

J.J. was in no mood for further adventures in pregnancy, and said so, but his very senior confrere read him a little homily.

"Yes, that's all very well, but I have known these affairs shock a

woman rather badly. Emotional reactions. Such a thing may make her feel rather a failure."

J.J. stood looking out of the window.

"I see. That aspect of it hadn't struck me. I dare say you are right."

"Well, see how things go. If you're worried about anything, ring me up. The sooner a woman gets back to normality, the better."

J.J.'s immediate fears were not to come to fruition. No complications arose, and in a fortnight Kitty was up and about, but it was a different Kitty. Some of the bloom and the gaiety had gone from her. She was more silent, slower in her movements, and even her voice had a gentle lassitude.

J.J. watched her and was worried. Did she need a tonic? He tried her on iron, quinine and strychnine, but that which was drooping in her did not respond to drugs. J.J. was moved to wonder whether women did not take life differently from a man, and whether there were not all sorts of subtleties in sex of which he was ignorant. But J.J. had learned his lesson, if the positive and lusting male is ever to learn it, that though you may be tempted by strange women, and naturally so, in spite of the pietists, there may be only one woman in the world with whom you may wish to share all the intimate contacts of living together in one house.

J.J. was very gentle with his wife. They were sharing their troubles together, and under such a regime tempers either wear thin or grow more rich and tolerant. The new and rather languid Kitty touched J.J. to tenderness more than the mere gay child-woman had done. Maybe the physician in him was learning that man is not made well by drugs alone.

"I'd like you to have a change, Kit."

"I'd rather be with you."

"I'm not sea-air. I'm going to send you down to Ramsgate or Cromer for a change, before the winter comes in."

"Do you want me to go?"

"Yes, because I think it will do you good."

"Then, I'll go."

Kitty chose Ramsgate, and J.J. took her down in person and

settled her in the best of Ramsgate's hotels, with its windows on the sea. When it came to leaving her, he did not like it, nor did she. They clung together for a moment in her small bedroom.

"Oh, J., must I stay a whole fortnight?"

"Yes. Think how I shall want you back, and how good it will be. Get out in the air, and eat like a——"

"Like a what, J.?"

"A little pig."

She laughed and kissed him.

"I've felt such a failure, darling."

"That you will never be. If you feel like it we'll try again."

20

J.J. had other things to worry him.

While Kitty was away he looked into their finances, and this audit compelled him to accept the fact that the expenses of research and of his clinic were absorbing most of the profits of his private practice. He and Kitty were living very simply, but, with the domestic budget added to his professional expenses he discovered that he had no margin. Actually, there was a small deficit, and even such an item as Kitty's holiday would have to be met out of capital.

What could he do about it? Rent and rates could not be cut. As for asking Kitty to manage with less money, that was an economy he could not bring himself to accept. He was not capable of such meanness to the one person who mattered. If there had to be economy it behoved him to make it in person by limiting the money he spent upon his financially unproductive work.

Moreover, if Kitty wished to repeat her experiment in motherhood could he deny it to her? A child would entail additional expense, but he had not forgotten the words of his confrere. "Starve a woman of certain things, and she will be ill because she is unhappy." J.J. sat and looked at his ledger. No, if Kitty wanted her child, she should have it. The urge in her might be more valid than his dabbling in disease.

But there were other worries.

Two other doctors who were in partnership and who could claim to possess the most lucrative and respectable practice in the neighbourhood had taken to themselves a third partner and planted him in Chellwood Place, almost immediately opposite No. 5. Was this

a hostile and competitive gesture? Did it suggest that these older men proposed to squeeze out the Squatter? It might be so. Moreover, the new young man was everything that J.J. was not. J.J. met him in the street, big and blond, with hard blue eyes that stared at you insolently. These two young men did not acknowledge each other. Dr. Charlie Steel was a type which had become very familiar to J.J.; it had looks, manners that could be over-mannered, clothes that were above criticism save that they might be described as flashy. The Steel type was conventional yet quarrelsome, limited in outlook but aggressive in its opinions, stuffed with clichés, and with prejudices against things that were not done. That they disliked each other, even in silence, was natural. Dr. Charles Steel looked down at Dr. Pope like a stupid and full-blooded young Viking passing a Mediterranean monkey in some Latin street.

Moreover, Dr. Steel owned a small car and a wife, a very decorative young woman, a suburban flower with cornstalk hair, china blue eyes, and a voice that was throaty. Such rivalry would put the Pope *ménage* in the shade, and make it look like sixpence beside half-a-crown. And in a world that judged things by their appearance, and preferred well-pressed and distinguished-looking trousers to baggy ones, the Steels might prove a very real menace to J.J.'s precarious position.

J.J. had heard a cynical elder deliver himself of a piece of professional wisdom. "Try to remember that private practice wears petticoats. Please the women, and especially the mothers by patting the heads of the dear little children, and you will be the beloved physician. Men don't matter in the nursery. Get the nursery, and you will be pretty safe."

Now, J.J. long ago had confessed to himself that he was not a success with children. Somehow, he did not impress them. He could not play the hearty-humbug, pay court to Irene, or bump Baby Joan on his knee. That, again, was one of his limitations. He was more concerned with the sickness than with the child. The little egoists and savages among them made his secret and sensitive self become consciously critical. Maybe he was a little afraid of children, and the young beggars are devilish quick at spotting a victim. Some of them were ready to mock him as the rude children mocked Elisha, but J.J. could not call upon convenient bears.

Dr. Steel was otherwise. Actually, he did not care a damn about other people's children, and he and his corn-stalk wife had agreed to refrain for a while from peopling a nursery, but Charlie Steel had a breezy and buccaneering way with the kids, and he was gallant to their mothers. As a professional gentleman he found the restraints upon vicarious sex somewhat irksome, but being a very vain young man he allowed his patent provocation of the other sex to flatter and console him.

But this potential rivalry was, for the moment, mere dust in the sunlight. J.J., trotting about on his little legs, was counting the days. Kitty was coming back to him, a Kitty who desired a child, and Kitty had brought to life the man in her husband. His desire was to give her a child.

J.J. met her at Cannon Street. Funds might be low, but there were occasions when pure economy should go to blazes. It so happened that Kitty's compartment stopped just where J.J. was waiting on the platform. He saw his wife at the window, a Kitty who was the Kitty of the old days, douce and joyous and jocund. There were sparkles in her dark eyes, and the cream of her skin had recovered its bloom.

"Oh, J.! It's an omen."

She leaned out, put her arms round his neck, and he kissed her, and it was not a husband's kiss.

"Feeling better? You look it."

"Do I?"

"Yes, you're lovely."

To be wanted in this way was better than sea air or a tonic. He opened the door for her, and his eyes could not leave her face.

"Where's your trunk?"

"In the front, I think . . ."

"We'll take a cab to Chelsea, and another one back to Frascati's."

"Oh, J., ought we to? I've been such an expense."

"You're worth it. Give me your bag."

It was a very happy home-coming, though Dr. Charles Steel did chance to come out of his gate while they were leaving the cab. Dr. Steel paused to stare. Certainly, Mrs. Pope was a looker, and

though he had married a pretty blonde, he was finding other women provocative. And how had a saucy bit like Mrs. Pope managed to marry that little bun-head with the didly legs? Sex was a funny business.

Kitty had to go all over the house, and J.J. went with her.

"Darling, it's lovely to be back."

"It's lovely to have you back."

"I'd better unpack, hadn't I? Then we'll be free."

"Can't Ethel do it?"

"No, I'd rather do it. I hope she's been looking after you properly."

"She has."

"Shall I change my frock?"

"You look rather pretty in that."

"Do I? How nice to be told——"

"Do you need telling?"

"But it's nice to be told."

At Frascati's J.J. did a thing he had never done before; he ordered a bottle of champagne. Certainly, it was only a half-bottle, and of a fairly recent vintage, but the gesture pleased his wife. She sat with her elbows on the table, and her chin cupped in her hands, and looked at him with velvet eyes. In those days young gentlewomen, amateur or otherwise, were not supposed to put their elbows on the table, but J.J. liked his wife's pose. It was so easy, unpremeditated and natural.

"I've only drunk champagne once before."

J.J. also put his elbows on the table, and his eyes were level with hers.

"Well, we'll call this the second edition."

"But nicer, don't you think? One's not so shy."

She looked it for the moment, and gave a little laugh, and her eyes caressed him.

"Yes, much nicer," said J.J., "no apologies needed."

A waiter with two plates of soup and an "Excuse me, madam" parted those clinging glances. Dr. and Mrs. Pope smiled and sat back and picked up their soup spoons.

"Rather like one of the ten commandments, J."

"Thou shalt not look lovingly in public at thy wife."

"Oh, J., people will hear!"

"Do you mind?"
"Not really."

It took more than a year to convince them that Nature, having been outraged by Kitty's carelessness in climbing a step-ladder, refused to give them a second child. To J.J. it was no great sorrow, but in Kitty this sterility seemed to rankle. That which she desired she desired and this frustration depressed her. J.J. took her to see a very eminent specialist who diagnosed a certain condition, and suggested a particular line of treatment. Kitty went into a nursing-home for a fortnight and was operated upon, and came home to Chellwood Terrace full of hope, but barrenness remained her portion.

She was sad about it, so strangely sad that J.J. paid a visit to his specialist friend and asked for further counsel. There was an awkward moment between them when Harley Street asked Chellwood Terrace a particular question.

"Forgive me, Pope, but I am going to be frank with you. Are you sure it is your wife's fault?"

"Her fault? You mean——"

"There is the alternative, isn't there?"

"You mean it might be mine?"

The great man nodded, and J.J. flushed up, and then suddenly went pale.

"She had one child, you know, so——"

"Would you care for me?"

"No thanks. I can examine my own potency, if I want to."

Yet, J.J. went forth hot and uncomfortable. Even your philosopher may feel peeved when his maleness is questioned. J.J. took steps to test the truth of it, and if those little active bodies seen under the microscope satisfied him, it was not so with Kitty. Planted in her was that sad weed, a sense of failure, and she brooded upon it.

Moreover, Mrs. Steel across the way had produced, owing to some slip in technique, the very thing she did not desire. A very lusty infant was wheeled out daily from the Steel doorway, and sometimes the mother deputised for the nursemaid. Kitty, sitting at the window, would bow her head and lower her eyes when that pram appeared.

Moreover, not only did the Steel world tantalise Kitty; it was threatening J.J. himself with competitive effacement. His private practice was falling off. There was no doubt about it. And why? Dr. Charles Steel might be popular. He was more like the people he doctored, and J.J. was not. During those rather sad months J. J. Pope was moved to question his rightness as a physician. Was he cut out for the job? It seemed that he was not. He could and did confess that some essential bond of sympathy was lacking. He was a student to whom cases were cases, and signs and symptoms scientific data. Pain was a puzzling phenomenon to be studied. Why—pain? What happened when you gave a patient morphia? He did not know. But what he did begin to know was that pain was to him a symptom to be studied and not just human anguish to move you to sympathy. Did he lack humanity? Was he sinning against humanity in pretending to heal it, when his essential self hastened to shut itself up in a laboratory? Was he travelling in the wrong train, and would that train get him nowhere?

He had no one to speak to of these things. Kitty would not understand. That was his illusion. He too was a failure. He began to suffer from that most terrible of obsessions, the loneliness of genius that is baffled.

About this time Ethel, who was walking out with a baker's roundsman, decided to get married, but Ethel was a good girl and promised not to leave until Kitty had engaged a successor. Mrs. Pope applied to the agency which had supplied her with Ethel, but "Generals" seemed short at the moment, and Mrs. Pope was told that she might have to wait. A month passed without result, and then a distressed Ethel confessed to her mistress that the need was urgent.

"You see, ma'am, if I get married now, it won't look so bad, will it? I mean, if Tom and I 'ave been married eight months when the baby arrives, it may look quite natural."

Kitty was a little shocked, but full of understanding.

"Of course you must get married, Ethel. I can manage till the new girl comes."

"You've always been very good to me, ma'am, and what I says is

it's 'elping those as 'as 'elped you. I could ask Tom to let me come in and do a few hours——"

"Tom is your concern now, Ethel. I know I can manage."

"Thank you ever so much, ma'am."

So, Ethel was married to her roundsman, and Kitty carried on. Moreover, it so happened that J.J. let fall one of those unfortunate remarks about economy which may slip from a man's mouth, but Kitty took it to heart. Economy! She carried on, telling herself that so long as she was maidless, a third person would not have to be fed or paid.

J.J. was not so blind as to fail to notice the absence of domestic help.

"When's the new girl coming?"

"There is not one to be had at the moment. I can manage, J."

After all Kitty was only doing what hundreds of thousands of working women were doing, and she had no children to wash and cook for and send to school, and J.J. had worries of his own. It may have provoked him to know that the Steels possessed three maids, a housemaid, a nurse and a cook, but Dr. Steel's quarter share in a prosperous practice rendered him fairly secure. J.J., footing it in all weathers to visit the few private patients he did possess, began to see failure chalked up on pavements and walls and grinning at him from street lamps. Even his beloved clinic was becoming an incubus in the matter of expense. Either he would be compelled to charge these poor people more, or close the shop.

He decided to raise his fees, and within a month the number of patients attending his clinic has fallen by a half. Oh, damn money! All he asked for was peace and security and the chance to follow his urge without being pestered by the petty problems of finance. In an enlightened and well-regulated world the accredited searcher and inventor would be sponsored by the state, and given the right to pursue other things than profit. Profit might be a test of efficiency among those who had to trade, but it could be mere superstition to those few who were the pioneers of a new order. If J.J. had been put in a corner and catechised by some super-intelligence he would have confessed that his ideal was to remain an individual in a community that was planned for by the wise and the humane. J.J. had no wish to be a eugenised super-slave in a card-indexed

crowd. He was still something of a mystic despite his shabby worries.

He was being made aware of other and actual shabbiness. His umbrella needed recovering. His top-hat had lost its gloss, and his trousers showed signs of becoming frayed. Appearances were so important! The world did not look under your hat for the ability it might cover; it looked at your hat, and if it was shabby, you were damned.

But J.J. was still blind to certain things. Kitty slipped out of bed at some unholy hour, and her excuse was the housework. It had not occurred to J.J. to wonder how the steps of No. 5 were kept so white. A man may go up and down such steps in a state of worried preoccupation that transcends such trivialities. Kitty was out, cleaning those steps at an hour when she hoped that Chellwood Place would not observe this unseemly labour, but observed she was, and the information spread. Mrs. Steel's housemaid saw the act, and Mrs. Steel was told.

"She cleans the steps."

"What, haven't they a maid yet, Bessie?"

"No, madam."

"Really, how disgraceful!"

Mrs. Steel passed on the news to her husband at breakfast.

"Fancy a doctor's wife cleaning her own steps."

"Mean little tyke! He looks it."

"Perhaps they can't afford——"

"Quite likely. I should say that the little blighter's in Queer Street. Can't be doing much. Little cranks like that don't cut much ice."

"Well, I think it's most undignified."

No doubt it was, in rather a stilted and stuffy period of English history. The whole neighbourhood came to know that Dr. Pope allowed his wife to clean and stone the front steps. Mr. Percy Stout, who had suffered from no further attacks of acute gastritis, became sentimental and changed his opinion of Dr. Pope. Fancy letting a pretty little lady like that clean steps, and after a miscarriage too! Mr. Stout was indignant. Pope did not deserve to possess a wife of such quality. J.J., meanwhile, was quite ignorant of all this gossip, and he might have remained in ignorance had he not

come downstairs a little earlier than usual, and seen the front door open, and Kitty on her knees with bucket and swab.

J.J. was both touched and shocked.

"Kit! I didn't know you were doing that."

She smiled at his solemn and shocked innocence.

"I like them to be white."

"How long have you been doing it?"

"Oh, since Ethel left."

J.J. was conscious of swift self-accusations. He had not noticed those steps.

"I'm not going to have you doing this. We must get a new girl at once."

"I don't mind."

"But I do. Pass me that swab. I'll finish the things off."

Kitty straightened and stiffened on her knees.

"Oh, you can't, J."

"Why not?"

"I mean, a doctor can't——"

"Damn it, if you can do it, I can. You go in and leave it to me."

"Oh, J., please!"

But he was utterly determined about it. He took off his coat, relieved her of the bucket and swab, and almost pushed her into the house. Damn Chellwood Terrace, damn a snob world that forgot that Kings had washed the feet of beggars! Dr. Pope finished the job, and refused to feel humble about it. In fact, as he wrung out the swab, he stood and faced Chellwood Terrace like Ajax defying the lightning.

The news was all over the place that same day. Dr. Pope had been seen washing and whitening his front-door steps!

21

HENCE—Ellen.

Ellen was the sister of one of J.J.'s patients, a ruddy, roundabout little woman in the early forties, with massed plaits of brown hair and a merry eye. Ellen had finished with one place, and was taking a holiday while looking round, for Ellen was a very independent person, and never in a hurry. She was one of those cheerful, rhythmic people who get through an amazing amount of work without any great appearance of activity.

J.J. had done Ellen's sister much good, and when J.J. asked Kate if she happened to know of a maid, Kate said: "Of course, why there's Ellen."

But J.J. had to be made to understand that Ellen was very much an individual.

Her motto was "At my time of life I go where I like and when I like," which was a good text for such a treasure.

Ellen's other name was Tribute. She paid tribute only where she pleased.

"Perhaps your sister would come and see Mrs. Pope?"

"She might, doctor. I'll ask her."

Ellen came, saw, and liked. She and Kitty somehow fell for each other in the first five minutes. Kitty talked to you as though you were a human being and a friend. Ellen was shown the kitchen and her bedroom. She liked to be comfortable, and she liked her food.

"You have what we have."

"The same, ma'am?"

"Yes, just the same."

For, whatever worries life might produce in the economic sphere, Kitty could never bring herself to feed the kitchen on the dining-room's leavings. She loathed that sort of meanness, and J.J. loathed it with her.

The coming of Ellen made a considerable difference in the régime of No. 5. Ellen was an excellent cook, but also she was a hearty eater, and Kitty's bills began to increase, for Ellen was not a lick and a scrape cook. She was melted butter. Yet how could you tell a woman like Ellen who was so capable and good-tempered that funds were low and that extreme economy was necessary. Ellen brought Kitty both solace and worry. She was spared much housework but given more problems to carry.

During Ellen's fourth week Kitty realised that she had not enough money to pay the weekly bills. What should she do about it? Tell poor J. or let the bills run, or try to borrow? And from where? She had nothing of her own to sell, and never in her life had she entered a pawn-shop. Kitty's forehead began to carry a little and perpetual frown.

She decided to let the bills run. Things might improve, though at the moment she suspected that J.J. had not more than six patients on his visiting list. She threw out apologetic hints to Ellen. Could they manage with a little less butter and lard, and make the meat go further, and the coal last longer? Kitty did not yet know her Ellen, or that Ellen was not blind to the trouble in another woman's eyes.

"Yes, I could, ma'am."

"You see, we have to be careful. My husband's practice is new."

Ellen was rolling out pastry. She had gathered from her sister and from others that Dr. Pope gave more than he got from the poorer patients who attended at his clinic, and Ellen's wisdom and sympathy were real.

"Yes, I can manage."

"I don't want you to go short, Ellen."

Ellen had appreciated the absence of kitchen parsimony and the lack of meanness that lay behind it.

Ellen co-operated, and the bills decreased. Kitty paid the grocer, the milkman, the baker and the greengrocer, but she decided to let the butcher wait. The butcher was, on the surface, such a polite,

ruddy, affable person, and Kitty believed that he was more human and complaisant than the others. She was wrong.

The butcher might be a ruddy and jocund person to his paying patrons, but he liked his accounts settled regularly. Moreover, Dr. Pope's financial position did not inspire great confidence, and the butcher posted the bill to Dr. Pope in person, with a polite demand for its settlement. J.J. opened the envelope at breakfast. It was his only letter, and it seemed to put him in such a state of silent preoccupation that Kitty was troubled.

"Anything important, J.?"

J.J. hesitated, emptied his coffee cup, and then passed her the bill.

"Just that."

Kitty's face went all puckered. So, the secret was out, and in trying to spare J.J. such worries, she had exposed him to this insult, for that was what she felt it to be.

"Oh, J., how horrid of the man. I've paid all the other bills, but this had to wait."

"Not enough money?"

"Not quite, but I've talked to Ellen, and we are cutting down some of the expenses."

J.J. was feeling for his pipe and looking thoughtful. One thing he had noticed, that Kitty's appetite appeared to have fallen off. Had she been going short in order that he—— Damn it, he could not have her starving herself!

"I'll settle this, Kit."

"J., I'm so sorry. I just didn't want you to be worried."

J.J. looked at her with strange tenderness.

"Don't I share in the worries, Kit? It's I who ought to be sorry. Look here, you mustn't scrape too much. I can cut some expenses."

"What?"

"Never mind; I'll see to that."

So, Dr. Pope closed his clinic, and Kitty did not know of it until she happened to pass that way and saw that her husband's name had been painted out, and that the premises were to let. She was so shocked that she stood and stared at the notice. She wanted to weep. It was as though J.J. had had to sacrifice the thing that was most precious to him, just because he had a house and a wife. She

crept home feeling ashamed, and that the whole of Chellwood Terrace must know that her husband was a failure.

The thought stung her. She rebelled against the suggestion. J.J. shouldn't be a failure. It was this silly world which failed to understand that Dr. Pope was not like other men. She climbed the steps and opened the familiar door. She did not call to her mate, but went in search of him, and found him, as she had expected, in his improvised lab.

"J., you shouldn't have done it."

"Done what, my sweet?"

"Given up the clinic. Oh, J., I feel it's all my fault. Why didn't you tell me?"

He went and put his arms round her.

"Just because you would have wanted me to keep it on. It has served a purpose. I've got my material. And I managed to get rid of the lease."

"Won't you miss it terribly?"

J.J. lied to her.

"Not a bit. And we'll be better off. That damned butcher can send us sirloin and sausages and kidneys every day!"

He laughed and took her face between his hands.

"I want you fatter. Not eating enough. That won't do."

Two people who came to the house about that time both saw a change in its occupants.

Peter Pratten, dashing through town on one of his exhibition stunts to parade a new model before a Royal Personage, pulled into Chellwood Terrace, and rang the bell of No. 5.

Ellen opened the door to him.

"Is Dr. Pope in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good, I'm lucky."

Ellen showed him into the front door.

"What name, sir?"

"Pratten. Peter will do."

"A patient, sir?"

"Do I look like one?"

Ellen crinkled up her nose at him.

"No, sir, I can't say you do."

She climbed the stairs and knocked at the lab. door.

"A Mr. Pratten, sir."

J.J. got off his stool.

"Ask him to come up, Ellen."

"Very good, sir."

To come suddenly upon a familiar face after not having seen it for many months may provoke a mutual scrutiny which may reveal the more sensitive changes in the other self. To J.J. Peter was the same Peter, the young lion, tawny and most obviously the king of his own world, but to Peter J.J. looked shabby, like one of those sad English summers that have seen no sun. The texture of him seemed different. There was a tiredness, a tinge of bitterness in his voice. That mordant mouth of his looked more ironic.

"Sit down, old man. Kitty's out. No need to ask after the Pratten health."

Peter laughed, but his laughter covered a question.

"Am I as brazen as all that?"

He sat down in the old cane chair with its faded cushions which was sometimes Kitty's, and J.J. returned to his stool.

"Smoke. I'm afraid I haven't got any cigarettes. I don't smoke the damned things."

"Then have one of mine?"

"Don't be sardonic. Well, how's——"

"Life. Pretty good. That sweet lad Strange has got his divorce. Next month Sybil and I sacrifice to the conventions."

"Some things seem so superfluous."

"Well, I don't know. One has to conform, to a point. How's the work going?"

J.J. gave a little twisted smile as he filled a pipe.

"It isn't."

"Oh——"

"Fact is, old man, I don't think I'm made to be a G.P., or even a physician. Not enough soft soap. Too many prickles. And I don't love my neighbour as I should."

Peter lighted his cigarette.

"You always were separate. Research, really, is your job, J.J. Pure science."

"And pure penury."

Peter's head lifted sharply.

"Is it like that?"

"No, not quite as bad as that. I'm pretty tough, in my own way but life isn't all self."

"You mean——"

"Well, Kitty. There may be all sorts of things you want to give to a certain person, and pure science doesn't run to that sort of self-expression. There can be a shabbiness about life that makes one angry. I don't like feeling apologetic towards my butcher."

Peter sat smoking and looking at his own feet in their well-polished brown shoes. Explosive little person, J.J.! If you suggested a loan he might scarify you. Besides, that sort of pride had to be treated delicately.

"Aren't there alternatives?"

"Of what kind?"

"Don't you remember my suggesting years ago, that the pater might find you useful. Now, don't fly off the deep end. I had ideas myself till the petrol engine got me. A man like the pater never sits still."

J.J. was frowning, but attending.

"You mean——"

"Not the Pratten Pill idea. I think the old man is rather sick of P.P. Something more basic and gentlemanly. Floating a show that would put useful products on the market, a kind of private pharmaceutical concern."

"Like Hallows and Wellborn?"

"Well, yes. Quite clean business. You don't send out fakes, but new stuff that has been tested."

"Yes."

"In the firm's private lab."

J.J. seemed to huddle up on his stool with his teeth clenched on his pipe.

"It's an idea, but not for me. I should be defrocked."

"Would that matter?"

"Perhaps, not a damn."

"Mind if I sound the old man?"

"Not a bit, but not on my account."

"Don't be such a Lucifer. Do you think I'm out to patronise?" J.J. grinned at him.

"You'd better not."

Mary Rackstraw saw things otherwise.

She saw Kitty, not as J.J. saw her, but almost with the impersonal eyes of a stranger. Kitty looked older, thinner, with little lines of strain on her forehead, and yet, when you analysed the situation, what serious reason was there for worry? The Popes were not starving; they had a comfortable home and a comfortable maid, and they appeared happy together. Young people might expect struggle, and be the better for it, and if J.J. dreamed of being a Sir James Paget there was plenty of time for that yet.

Was Kitty grieving for the loss of her child, and the absence of any signs of a second? Was J.J. feeling balked, and troubled about the future? Mary had the sense not to ask such questions, nor did she blurt out to Kitty: "My dear, how thin you look. Quite wretched."

For Mary Rackstraw was a woman who was growing wise, to the extent of becoming a mystic. She lived by serving the vanity of other women, or that, in her ironic moments, was how she phrased it. Mary was to traverse the red season when the material needs of humanity seemed to bleed like open wounds, and to emerge from it with other wisdoms. A day would come when she would say to herself: "Supposing one has given them everything, houses, fur-coats, champagne, oysters, silk stockings, motor-cars, what then? Will they be any happier? Will they not be like children with too many toys? Concentrate upon material things, and they will become mud. It is the spirit that makes alive. When faith in some Otherness is dead, and the world is a glorified pig-trough full to the brim with super-swill, what then? When God goes, War enters in. Children will quarrel, not over the mere toys, but because they are bored, and some divine urge is denied them."

Yes, in the future Mary was to say "Take the too many toys away from them. Put them back in the nursery with an old rag doll and

a woman who can tell them fairy stories. When man becomes too clever and too much a spoilt little prig, he is nearer to being a devil than a god."

Mary was troubled about both of them, but more so about Kitty. J.J. gave her the impression of being older and a little shabbier both in clothes and his philosophy, but Kitty had lost her bloom, which was sad. Mary could not say that she looked ill, but faded and droopy. Yet, again, how few women of the people retained their bloom; it was, in a sense, a luxury product, and if Kitty looked a little haggard she was but a sister of the majority. Mary had never had any looks, and yet she had not been jealous of Kitty. Kitty's prettiness had seemed part of a douce and loveable nature.

Nor could Mary Rackstraw detect any disharmony between these two. J.J. might appear rather casual and absent and clouded, but he looked at Kitty with eyes of kindness and affection. But how much did he see, or would he allow himself to see it? And did it matter? Mary understood that when the passion passed out of such a relationship, its place was taken by a more profound and lasting love, an almost sacred comradeship consecrated by understanding and compassion.

Mary had one or two half hours alone with J.J. and some snatches of conversation in which the personal element was concealed in the impersonal attitude of both. If J.J. did express views upon science and research, and the professional world and economics, it was as a dispassionate critic. He would not suffer emotion to enter into his analysis. As for Mary, had she been the ordinary, female egoist who dresses up jealousy and malice in the duty of interference, she might have taken it out of J.J. for taking Kitty away from her, by pretending to be concerned about Kitty's loss of flesh and of colour.

She could have said "Have you noticed anything? I mean, I don't think Kitty is looking at all well."

Had she been so minded she could have got Dr. Pope with both barrels, and chuckled in secret when she saw him wince. Good women are such adepts in the use of emotion, and in assuming a distress that may act as secret poison, but Mary was not a good woman. She did not suffer from the dreadful complacency of her class.

22

The winter too was to be dreadful, dreary and wet and grey, with dark dawns and sodden shabby twilights. Always, the pavements seemed to be wet, and boots and trousers sodden. It was cold too with a raw and acrid coldness, and when it did not rain, there was fog. Such weather should have enlarged Dr. Pope's practice, but it did not. Half the world might be coughing, and indulging in sore throats and suffering from influenza, but J.J. did not function more actively. It seemed as though the neighbourhood had labelled him as a shabby and sunless little person. It preferred the hearty humbug and high colour of a Charlie Steel. Dr. Steel appeared to be terribly busy. He drove off early in his small car, dashed back to lunch and dashed out again. And at nights his car would be waiting for him, its yellow eyes dimmed by the rain or blurred by fog.

In November No. 5, Chellwood Terrace developed flu. Kitty was the first to go down with it, and Ellen followed, leaving J.J. to function alone. The two women were still in bed when J.J. himself developed a temperature, which was disastrous. He had patients to attend and the elements of the housework to do, light fires, heat milk, clean his own boots, and feed himself, mostly on cheese, tinned meat and fruit. He carried on for a day, one of those dastardly days when a north-east wind blows sleet in your face, and then nature rebelled. He staggered home and collapsed on the sofa, and felt so deadly sick and cold that he dragged a rug off the floor and covered himself with it.

Something would have to be done. But what? His head ached to

cracking point, and when he tried to get up, he was overcome by acute nausea and giddiness. God, what a mess!

It was Ellen who saved the situation, an Ellen who was challenged by the silence of the house, and who dragged herself up to explore. Going downstairs in slippers and an old dressing-gown she found Dr. Pope *hors de combat* on the sofa, collarless and wild of head, and physically incapable of making any effort.

Poor Ellen looked frightened.

"Oh, dear, sir; it's you now."

"Can you get help in, Ellen?"

"I daren't go out, sir. You ought to be in bed."

"Can you find me some aspirin. I'll take a dose and then get upstairs. Is the spare-room bed made?"

"No, sir. But there are blankets."

"That will do."

J.J. had his aspirin and some warm milk, and when the drug had eased his head, he managed to get upstairs, take off his outer clothes, and slip in between blankets in pants and vest. Ellen, meanwhile, had an inspiration. If she hammered on the wall, would someone from Nos. 4 or 6 hear the knocking and translate it into an appeal for help? And which wall should she choose? Mrs. Stout did not look a very sympathetic person, and Ellen chose the Megby wall. Mr. Megby might be a dry stick, but his wife was otherwise, and it was Mrs. Megby who heard Ellen's knocking, and came to No. 5 to explore.

Mrs. Megby had not had influenza, but she was a kind soul, and she came to the rescue of No. 5, only to be involved in a squabble with her husband, who was careful and mean.

"I forbid you to go next door, Mabel. Think of your own family first."

Mrs. Megby defied him.

"Nice sort of good Samaritan you'd make, George, and you a sidesman at St. Jude's."

J.J. had to remember his patients. The most combative among us surrender, as Cæsar did, when the body is sick with fever, and Dr. Pope suffered the humiliation of realising that he had no professional friend. One of his patients was dangerously ill with bronchopneumonia, and someone would have to act as his deputy. But who?

Dr. Charles Steel? With that problem twisting in him he began to sweat and feel that he was sinking through the bed. If he asked his rivals to deputise, would those patients be taken from him? Professional etiquette forbade it, but patients can be fickle, and reconsider their choice. Well, what did it matter? What did anything matter? All that he asked for at the moment was to be left alone to grovel in bed. But the crisis had to be surmounted. Tottery and anguished he got out of bed, slipped on a dressing-gown and went downstairs and wrote a note to Dr. Steel, asking him to take over the cases and giving the names and addresses. Mrs. Megby was in the kitchen, warming up meat extract, and J.J. called to her.

"Oh, Mrs. Megby."

"Yes."

"Would you be so very kind as to leave this letter at Dr. Steel's. I have patients who——"

Mrs. Megby came trotting up the stairs.

"Of course. Really, you oughtn't to have got up. Do go back to bed, Dr. Pope."

"Thank you so much."

J.J. pulled himself upstairs by the hand-rail, feeling that he was going to be sick. He tumbled back into bed, and his soul surrendered itself to that blessed place. Well, that problem was settled. No more effort was needed.

Dr. Steel was amused. The secret vanities of Dr. Charles Steel were inordinate, and Dr. Pope's letter sounded so very humble, being the appeal of a sick man, that Dr. Steel became gracious. He would go and see the poor little blighter. As a practitioner and a rival Dr. Pope was pretty well finished, anyway; the popular verdict was against him. Psychologically Dr. Steel was a very primitive creature; the appeal was to his appetites, especially so to the sex urge, and the flattery associated with it. Dr. Steel was quite sure that all his women patients were in love with him, and no doubt some of them were so. He could hear them chanting "What a man!" Dr. Steel was particularly attracted by Mrs. Pope. Rumour had it that her little husband had somehow failed to give her a second child. Well, what could you expect from a little squit like

that! Pope was inadequate. What Mrs. Pope needed was a real man, a Dr. Charles Steel.

So, Dr. Steel not only visited J.J.'s patients; he crossed the road and rang the bell of No. 5, and was admitted by Mrs. Megby who was one of the firm's patients.

Dr. Steel was gallant.

"Very kind of you to do all this. I have come across to see Pope. Yes, professionally."

Mrs. Megby said that it was very kind of Dr. Steel.

"I am sure that all of them need looking after."

"My duty, dear lady. Very ugly form of flu this year. How is Mrs. Pope?"

"Better. But I think she has it on her chest."

Dr. Steel looked grave and sympathetic.

"Is that so? That mustn't be neglected."

"There is the maid, too."

"I'll attend to them all."

Dr. Steel began with the male member of the household. He sat down by J.J.'s bed. J.J. wild of hair, unshaven, with a foul mouth and heavy eyes, mumbled something about it being good of Dr. Steel to come. Sickness and its sordid accessories may make you feel so horribly inferior. Charles Steel was kind, as a school prefect can be superior and kind to some rather grubby little brat. He felt J.J.'s pulse, took his temperature, asked a few necessary questions, and was autocratic. J.J. was to stay there and not to worry. He, Dr. Steel, would take care of J.J.'s patients. There were seven of them.

"My list runs into the thirties, Pope, but we'll manage. Now you stay put until I tell you to get up."

He left J.J. feeling dimly rebellious and exhausted and inferior. He knocked discreetly at Mrs. Pope's door and opened it two inches.

"It's Dr. Steel. May I come in? I've come to look after you all."

He was much more kind to Kitty. She looked very attractive in bed, not like that poor tousled, squalid little creature, her husband. Was she coughing? Yes. That must be seen to. He proceeded to examine her chest, and look concerned about it. He suggested a nurse, but Kitty demurred. They could not afford a nurse. Moreover, the good Ellen was on her feet again, if rather feebly so. Dr. Steel patted her hand.

"Now, Mrs. Pope, you must stay in bed. No risks, mind, I'll have a cough mixture made up for you and send it along. Light diet. I'll come in again this evening."

Kitty smiled upon him gratefully.

"How is my husband? Have you seen him?"

"Oh, yes, he'll be all right in a day or two."

"Thank you so much."

"Dear lady, it's a pleasure."

Dr. Steel went above to see Ellen, but he did not bestow much time on Ellen.

"Oh, yes, you'll be all right in a day or two. I'll give you a tonic."

Ellen did not take to Dr. Steel.

Ellen was the first of the household to return to work, and J.J. followed her example, but Kitty, who had led the procession, prevaricated and kept a cough and a temperature. Dr. Steel, who was still coming in and playing the charmer, began to be a little puzzled and worried. He could hear nothing in the chest to explain the cough and the temperature. Mrs. Pope might have a pretty colour, and Dr. Steel liked to flirt with her, but a woman who refused to respond either to your treatment or your fascination, became less interesting.

J.J. was resenting Steel's visits, but, after all, the fellow had been useful and kind in a crisis, and J.J. dissembled his irritation. But when Steel confessed that he was worried about Kitty, J.J. was both angry and frightened, and perhaps angry because he was frightened.

"I expect it is just after effects."

"But she has a cough, man, and this temperature. I can't find any bronchitis or any area of consolidation."

"I'll listen myself."

"If you'd like Gates in"—Gates was the senior partner—"I'm sure he would be willing. A very sound man."

Maybe J.J. was suffering from the irritability of convalescence.

"I don't think it is necessary. Thanks, all the same."

Dr. Steel was huffed.

"Oh, very well, but personally, when my wife's seedy I like to have an impartial opinion, and——"

"I quite understand. But I would prefer——"

Dr. Steel pulled on his gloves, looking offended.

"Just as you please, Pope. I have no wish to interfere. By the way, are you up to taking care of your people?"

"Quite."

"Then, I'll hand over. We are run off our legs as it is. You'll find all of them doing well."

"Thanks, Steel."

"Not at all, a professional duty, you know." And Dr. Steel walked out of the house and did not re-enter it, but he had things to say about J.J. to his wife and partners. Pope was an awkward and callous little beast, and it was hard on any woman who had married such a fellow.

Kitty was up and about again, but the little cough remained with her, and at night her temperature was apt to rise above the normal. She had a pretty colour, and her eyes were bright, but J.J. was worried. He could find nothing in her chest to account for the symptoms, and he tried to shrug his worry away, and to remind himself that in actual life the human body confounded the text-books. The weather was in a less English mood, sunny and clear, with night frosts, and since Kitty was craving for movement and air, he allowed her to go out and walk by the river. J.J. confessed to himself afterwards that he never believed his wife to be dangerously ill; he was feeling the after effects of flu, tonelessness and depression, and all things seemed to build a background of worry, and Kitty's slow convalescence was but one of them.

For he had come back to active life to confront a future that was problematical. Instead of increasing with the winter's sickness his practice had diminished, and the fat kine among his patients were very few. Obviously, Chelsea did not desire him as a doctor, and his receipts did not cover the expenses of No. 5 Chellwood Terrace. What was to be done about it? Strike his tent and pitch it elsewhere? Begin all over again? and would success be any more likely? Or he could take a post as an assistant, or act as a locum tenens, but these casual and subordinate jobs did not appeal to him. Research would be impossible, and a wife an embarrassment. J.J. was troubled and depressed.

About this time Peter paid them one of his flying visits. He and Sybil were settling outside Coventry, but that was to be only a tem-

porary arrangement. Peter's eyes were on London, and a luxury showroom in Mayfair. The Pratten car was on the market, and having helped in its making, Peter was becoming interested in the selling of it.

He found J.J. looking worn and worried. Obviously, things were not going too well.

"What you want is a holiday, my lad."

J.J. smiled at him.

"Don't stress the impossible!"

"It's this damned winter and flu. The old man had it badly. The locals and Harley Street haven't had much success with him. Left his tummy like a rag."

Peter looked happy. He was finding life good, and perhaps J.J. envied him.

"How's Kitty?"

"I'm rather worried about Kitty. She still seems to be feeling the after-effects."

"Send her down to Pollards for a change. Take her down yourself and try your luck with the pater."

"But, my dear man——"

"Don't dear man me. The pater likes young things, and Kitty in particular. I'm going down to Pollards for the week-end. Let me fix it up."

J.J. hesitated, and then he accepted.

"If Sir Thomas won't find her——"

"A worry? Don't be an ass. The pater likes them pretty. And you can suggest treatment."

"Most unprofessional."

"Rot. Does it matter who makes a man well? This etiquette business is too full of humbug."

Peter dashed off in his car to demonstrate its beauties and virtues to somebody. Kitty was out, and J.J. returned to his lab. and sat on his stool and meditated. He was not thinking of Sir Thomas Pratten and his post-influenzal dyspepsia. He was wondering about life in general, and a professional life in particular, how it seemed to crab effort and truss you up in a tangle of conventions. No doubt they were protective, but in safeguarding the many they could penalise the particular few.

If only he could break away! But how could he? He was respon-

sible not only for himself, but for Kitty. Did he regret that responsibility? Most emphatically he did not. Kitty was the better part of his life; he would miss her if she went to Pollards. He found himself wanting Kitty back in the house, even though she had been away from it less than an hour. Was that selfishness? Well, if so, it was a good sort of sin.

The inner man in him must have been listening for his wife's return. He heard the front door close, and getting off his stool he went to the head of the stairs.

"That you, Kit?"

Her voice came back to him with the faintness of distress.

"Yes. Come down, J. I feel so faint."

He dashed down the stairs to find her leaning against the wall. Her lips looked bloodless, and her eyelids drooped over dim eyes. J.J. put an arm round her.

"What is it? Did you walk too far?"

"I must have done. And then my legs seemed to go funny."

"Come and lie down on the sofa, Kit. You will have to take things easy for a while. Feel cold?"

"Yes, J."

With one arm still round her he pushed the sofa in front of the fire, and made her lie down. He unpinned her hat for her, and put a cushion under her head. Then he knelt down to stir the fire. It was a rather miserable fire.

"You want a change, darling."

"But, J.——"

"Peter has been here. I told him you hadn't yet thrown off the after-effects. He suggested you should go down to Pollards."

"Do you want me to, J?"

"Yes and no. I want you to be well."

"Oh, I do so much want to be well. I've had flu before, but——"

"It didn't leave you like this?"

"No."

"Well, let's try Pollards, if Sir Thomas asks you. We can't afford the Riviera or Naples."

"But you want a change as much as I do."

"I shall be all right. I'll take a day off and go down with you, if the invitation comes."

Come it did, and cordially so. Sir Thomas would send a car for them, and if J.J. could stay a night or two, so much the better. Old Pratten was feeling rather tired of himself and of his neighbours, and his digestion was completely out of order, nor had any of the experts had any success in restoring to it a sense of responsibility. Sir Thomas was missing Peter, and experiencing one of those seasons of loneliness which trouble old men with suggestions of fate and finality. He liked the young, especially the young who were vital and comely. They seemed to renew his vitality.

J.J. wrote a grateful letter accepting the invitation, and when he packed for a night at Pollards, he stowed away in a little old hand-bag two samples of his private products, Pepsonol and Iodol. Little did he think how the contents of those two bottles would affect the future.

They arrived at Pollards about teatime, with a red winter sun brilliant amid the black beech woods, and the hills like grey ghosts. Old Tom was thorough even in his kindness, and into the car had been packed a hot-water bottle, cushions and two fur rugs. Kitty had travelled as though in bed, with a little nose poking over the rugs, and a hot bottle between her feet. Sir Thomas came out into the porch to meet them, very much old England, in riding breeches and gaiters, a canary-coloured waistcoat and a green Harris Tweed coat. His face was almost like the winter sun, and when J.J. saw it, the physician in him was moved to utter the one word "Diet."

Pollards might be Elizabethan in its tradition, but Sir Thomas had wedded the old to the new. In the great open fireplace of the hall logs blazed on andirons in front of a vast Sussex fireback, but Peter's father had installed central heating, and the whole house was uniformly warm, so that no shocks greeted you in passages or bedrooms. Old Tom had a saying: "I like to be warm in my bath, and I don't want to say brrr when I get out of it." His shrewd old eyes looked kindly at Kitty from their patchwork of wrinkles. He still had a grip, as J.J. realised when his more fragile hand disappeared in a large red paw.

"Tidy up first, my dear, and tea afterwards, or vice versa?"

"Oh, tea, I think, Sir Thomas."

Old P. grinned at her.

"That came out pat, but we won't have too much of it."

They had tea in what was known as the library, before another vast fire. Sir Thomas had bought the books with the house, and rarely, if ever, had he read any of them, especially so since two whole bays had contained theological works and sermons. Sir Thomas had packed all this "Calf" into an attic and filled the shelves with novels and travel books. He had all Anthony Hope, Stevenson, Stanley Weyman, Haggard and Conan Doyle, and lately he had discovered Maurice Hewlett. Hewlett was somewhat literary for old Tom, but he loved the colour and the verve of him, and such dashing fellows as Prosper le Gai.

J.J. observing Sir Thomas during tea as a hypothetical case, noticed that he took three lumps of sugar to each cup, ate a round of buttered toast and two slices of rich plum cake. Well, at sixty-eight what did the dear patriarch expect? At that age you might not be able to have your cake and digest it. Kitty enjoyed her tea, both the toast and the roasting fire, but that little cough remained with her, and to J.J. it was a sound of vague distress. She looked flushed and bright of eye, and Sir Thomas' eyes twinkled at her.

"Like to go and rest, my dear, between tea and dinner?"

"I'd like to unpack."

Said J.J. with authority: "Go and lie down, and leave the unpacking to me."

Kitty left them, and Sir Thomas produced a box of cigars. Would J.J. have one? If Sir Thomas did not mind J.J. preferred his pipe. Very good. Sir Thomas took a cigar and settled down to digest that tea, but certain audible sounds betrayed the struggle within. Obviously, his host was not comfortable.

"Your wife looks better than I thought she would, J.J."

"She's still apt to run a temperature at night."

"The trouble with you doctors is that you know too much, and worry."

"Or, too little."

Sir Thomas tried a new position in his chair.

"Peter seems to be liking marriage."

"Yes, I'm very glad. By the way, he told me, sir, you haven't been very well."

Sir Thomas cocked an eye at him.

"No, I haven't. Gastric flu. But there are other causes. Noticed 'em?"

"Too much buttered toast and cake, sir."

"Get along with you, you young devil. You see too much. Fact is, J.J., I'm bored. And when one's bored, one may eat too much."

"Is it the first attack, sir?"

"Of boredom?"

"Yes."

"As a matter of fact it is. Got everything I want; nothing more to want. That's death."

"Can't you create a new want? Some new enterprise?"

"Think of one for me. Peter said something about your being an expert on tummies."

"I have been working on the subject."

"Like to work on me?"

"What about your own doctors, sir?"

"Damn it, they haven't done me any good. One asks for results, J.J."

"Quite, sir, but I should be drastic."

"Oh, would you! Well, carry on."

"Diet."

"Ha, I thought you would begin on that."

"Unless you agree to diet, sir, I can't——"

"No humbug, what! All right. Go ahead."

J.J. gave Sir Thomas a dissertation on diet, and his host listened with whimsical resignation. Starches, sugars, heavy puddings, too much meat, too much alcohol; all were under condemnation.

"Well, well, my lad, and then?"

"I'd like to try you on some preparations of my own."

"Very nasty?"

"No. And horse exercise, and walking, three miles a day."

"You damned little martinet."

"That, or nothing, sir."

Sir Thomas liked good food and he liked people who liked it. The Pollards' cook had been ordered to prepare a special dinner, turtle soup, sole, game, Christmas pudding and whipped cream, and some etceteras. Kitty and J.J. after the economies of No. 5, were

very ready for the surprises and excellences of such a meal. But there was to be the sauce of humour in it. J.J. allowed Sir Thomas the soup, but when Eves the butler, came round with the sherry, J.J.'s eyes met his host's. J.J. shook his head.

Sir Thomas winked at him.

"Damn it, I begin to-morrow, not to-night. Yes, sherry, Eves."

Kitty had a puzzled face, and Sir Thomas enlightened her.

"J.J. is going to try his skill on me. Hard-hearted brute. Wants to cut me off all the things I like. Now, I put it to you, Mrs. Pope, don't you think all this should be postponed till to-morrow?"

Kitty smiled at him, and then at her husband.

"Yes, I do."

"Good girl. You've got a wife who understands men, my lad."

"I have, sir."

23

J.J. LEFT his wife at Pollards in the care of Sir Thomas and Sir Thomas' housekeeper. He had attempted to tip Mr. Eves, and James who had valeted him, and in both cases the largesse had been refused with kindly politeness. "It's a pleasure, sir." For, Sir Thomas had said to his butler: "If any of you take a tip from Dr. Pope I'll sack the lot of you. Pass on the information. Here is a quid, Eves; you can share it with James." Old Tom was liked for his bluntness and his humanity, and for a magnanimity that remembered the days of his youth when half-a-crown had been very much half-a-crown. The staff said of him that you knew where you were with the old man. Almost, Pollards was feudal.

J.J. also left with Sir Thomas those sample bottles of the products of his research, with full and decisive instructions as to how and when they were to be taken. And once again he had insisted upon a rigid diet.

"If a patient doesn't help his doctor, sir——"

"Yes, J.J., I get you. Your nice medicine won't have a fair chance."

"That's the position, sir."

"Right you are, I'll be a sportsman and play fair."

J.J. returned to No. 5 and Ellen, and without Kitty it seemed a very lonely house. Yet, he was happier about Kitty. A fortnight at Pollards in supreme comfort, and with no household worries, should efface the after-effects of influenza. She had a tonic to take, and the tonic of his daily letters, for J.J. wrote to her each evening, and went out to post the letter before going to bed. Kitty too wrote daily, and her letter contained an informal health report upon which J.J. had

insisted. He had left a thermometer with her, and she was to take her own temperature, morning and evening, and record it for him, and any other symptoms that were of significance.

J.J.'s patients numbered seven, a biblical number, all lean kine, and he spent most of his time in the lab. He had taken up the study of vaccines and serum-therapy, which were still in a primitive phase, and bio-chemistry was to be one of his passions. Worry he did, for his financial position was sufficiently grave to cause him to think furiously of the future, yet, when at work in his lab. he could forget the problem of the paucity of patients, and rent, and tradesmen's bills, and his need of a new frock coat.

But he was never to buy that coat.

He did allow himself to wonder how Sir Thomas was progressing with his doses of Pepsonol and Iodol. Sir Thomas had a supply to cover a week, and J.J. prepared a reserve supply of these two products. One of his problems was how to make Pepsonol completely bland and palatable, and to improve its keeping properties. Like many research-workers he experimented on himself.

Kitty's letters came regularly. They were sanguine and happy, but she had to confess to an evening temperature.

J.J. ran a restless hand through his thick hair over the intractable nature of that rise in the body heat. What could be causing it? Some infection which had not yet been diagnosed? And then, one night, a possible cause occurred to J.J. and threw him into a panic.

T.B.? It couldn't be T.B.! He refused to believe it. Yet, why should it not be that devastating disease?

He went to bed in a panic mood, and for hours he could not sleep. Why had he not thought of this before, or had his inner self thought of it and thrust it aside into the dark limbo of things his secret self wished to ignore? For J.J. it was one of those tragic nights which he was never to forget. All sorts of fresh humanities were born in him, and blazed up into new sympathies and comprehensions. His love was afraid, and when a great love is afraid, man is put to school again in the classroom of compassion.

Certain realities rose up and stood beside his bed. Had he not been a hard young devil to his patients, a clever little prober, who, in exploring a wound, had ignored the pain and the inward anguish? Was that why, as a physician, he had enjoyed such poor success?

He had been more like a clockmaker than a healer, fiddling with wheels and springs, and forgetting that soul-thing which kept the human mechanism going. J.J., turning restlessly in his nightshirt, became the wearer of another shirt, that of the self-accused penitent.

He was up in the grey of the morning after that tortured night. He was a man inwardly shaken. His hand was in sympathy with his spirit, and he cut himself while shaving. A little blob of cotton-wool had to be applied to the spot. No matter. He was going down to Pollards to see his wife. In this fever of fear he simply could not stay away from her.

Two letters came by the morning post. One was from Sir Thomas, the other from Kitty. He opened Sir Thomas' letter first, because he was not afraid of it.

Sir Thomas wrote: "Beloved Physician, whether it is diet or your damned drugs, or both, I feel like a man who has been supplied with a new interior."

J.J. hardly thrilled to the news. With almost hesitant fingers he opened his wife's letter. A single sentence bit into his consciousness.

"I have begun to spit up something after coughing. I thought you ought to know."

J.J. put a little sterilised glass stoppered bottle in his pocket, and set out to confront fate.

They had not expected to see him.

Sir Thomas was but human if he assumed that it was his letter that had brought Dr. Pope to Pollards. A little excitement over his successful treatment of an eminent patient was understandable, and Sir Thomas was pleased and flattered. J.J., driving up from the station in a hired cab, overtook Sir Thomas and his bailiff in the Pollards' drive. Sir Thomas had been going round the farm.

"Well, well, well! All right, Mercer; I'll drive on with Dr. Pope."

He climbed into the cab, and joggled J.J. with his elbow.

"Got my letter, I suppose? Had to come and look at the old man. That's wonderful stuff of yours, my lad. Seemed to put a silk lining inside me."

J.J. raised a smile. He had no desire to destroy the illusion.

"I'm very glad, sir."

"By Jehovah, so am I. Peace, my lad, instead of feeling that I have a couple of ferrets fighting in a bag inside me."

They arrived at the house, to surprise Kitty reading *Treasure Island* in front of the library fire. Her face had a pretty flush, and her eyes were bright, and J.J., as her warm lips touched his, was conscious of a swift pang of wounded tenderness. Was this a sick woman? He refused to believe it. And then, after this sudden movement and spasm of emotion she began to cough.

Sir Thomas stood watching them like a wise old dog. It seemed to him that J.J. winced when his wife began to cough, and that his eyes were frightened under a little bothered frown. Why that cough? Judging by Kitty's looks, J.J. had no need to worry. Sir Thomas, like many people, was prone to assume that if a face had a good colour, the bill of health was fairly clean.

But he was a superfluity for the moment, and he accepted the situation.

"Be back in ten minutes. Something to see to."

He toddled out of the room, and J.J., standing with his hands on his wife's shoulders, held her at arm's length and looked at her.

"Anything in your mouth, Kit?"

"How do you mean?"

"What were you coughing up?"

"Afraid I swallowed it."

"Well, I want some. Next time you cough, spit into this bottle."

He produced the bottle from his pocket and gave it to her, and he saw her eyes grow puzzled and anxious.

"What for, J.?"

"I want to see if any bug is bothering you. Does that cough keep you awake at night?"

"Sometimes."

"I'll give you something to soothe it."

She looked at him suddenly with a questioning steadfastness.

"You don't think, J., that it is anything——"

He patted her arms, and made himself smile, and lie.

"No, I just want to be sure."

J.J. had a peculiar sense of detachment as he sat on his stool in his workshop and handled those glass slides and his staining reagents.

It was some time after midnight and the house was very still. The light shone on the barrel of his microscope, and upon J.J.'s high round forehead. It, too, suggested a sort of serenity, the calm of the student, but this was no impersonal test. When those three specimens were mounted, stained and ready, the objective and the subjective came into conflict. Dr. Pope, the research worker, was to peer with the eyes of experience at the picture magnified by those lenses, but Dr. Pope the man, held his breath, even as the silent house seemed to hold its breath.

What would he see? Pray God, not those little objects which he feared to see!

With deft and sensitive fingers he slipped one of the glass slides on to the stage, adjusted the light, and turned the focussing wheel. He saw a little circle of light, blurred at first, but clearing to a white brilliancy as the nose-piece slid into position.

His head was utterly still. What did he see? Nothing of that which he had dreaded. The breath seemed to come out of him with a great sigh. Oh, thank God! He twisted the ratchet-wheel, removed the slide, slipped another into its place, put his eye to the eyepiece, focussed the specimen, and looked again.

Good God! They were there, those little, sinister, red rods, and as he stared at them shining in that circle of white light he felt a chill run down his spine. His stomach seemed to drop, as drop it does in sympathy with an emotional shock. It seemed that he could not take his eye from the microscope, or cease from staring at those terribly actual little objects. The bacillus of tubercle. His wife had phthisis! Slowly, he raised his head, and sat staring at the drawn curtains. They, too, were symbolical. And Kitty had made those curtains.

He was conscious of acute, inarticulate anguish. A sense of utter helplessness descended upon him. He just sat and stared. He seemed unable to think. It was as though those little rods had sprung out of the picture, clubbed him, and left him half stunned and stupid.

What was to be done? What could be done?

As a physician he knew only too well where the one hope lay.

Air, mountain air, sun. How were these things to be obtained in London? London in winter, raw and wet, and foggy! Where, in England? Clean air, sunlight. The one hope lay elsewhere. Switzerland, or the South Seas, California. Switzerland! How could he send

Kitty to Switzerland? Money. Well, he had some capital left, and the last penny should go on giving Kitty her chance. And what if the disease were arrested? London would be impossible. She would have to live in clean country air. He too would have to leave London.

He pushed his microscope away, put his elbows on the table, and covered his face with his hands. He had to think. He had to fight these feelings of shock and of helplessness. Something had to be done. He would rush off to-morrow and see Sir Herbert Bland, the most capable authority upon chests. He would take these specimens. Bland could tell him of the most up-to-date sanatorium in Switzerland. That would be the first step.

Then, he would have to tell Kitty.

Sir Herbert Bland was kind to the frightened little man. He listened to the story, examined J.J.'s specimens, and admitted the seriousness of the case. If Dr. Pope would bring his wife to see him he would give her a most thorough examination. And the future, the prognosis? Sir Herbert sat back in his chair, and with the calm and leisurely kindness of a man who had no need to hurry, and who was great in reputation and in character, discussed the possibilities. Switzerland, yes, undoubtedly. There was a very efficient sanatorium at Glion, above Territet, run by Dr. Adler in connection with his clinic at Geneva. No, it was not too expensive; Swiss fees were not up to the English or American standard. As soon as a decision was made Sir Herbert would write to Dr. Adler. They were personal friends.

"And, what hope, sir?"

Sir Herbert was moved with compassion. He looked at this frightened, haggard little man, who, in this crisis had lost the judgment and the dispassionate poise of the physician. Dr. Pope had tumbled from the pedestal of professionalism and become man.

"You should know, Dr. Pope."

"Yes, sir, but——"

"In thousands of cases the disease is arrested. Don't you remember the post-mortem room revelations?"

"You mean, old scars in the lungs of people who have never been diagnosed or treated?"

"Exactly. Bring your wife to see me, and we will go over the case together."

J.J. went away, somewhat comforted. He rushed through the little work that was his, and caught an early afternoon train, lunching at the station buffet on a sandwich and a glass of milk. He sat in the corner of a third-class carriage, and rehearsed over and over again that fateful meeting with his wife, and how he could break the news to her, as he wished to break it, gently and tenderly. Pollards knew nothing of his coming, and J.J. walked from the station to save a cab fare. Money was going to be precious, oh, so very precious.

J.J. had reached the lodge gates with their red brick pillars upon which sat lean and angry griffins holding shields. Sir Thomas had a habit of making fun of those stone beasts; he had inherited them and their coat of arms, and Sir Thomas, who had dabbled in heraldry, said that he must have a mason in to chisel off the old stuff and carve the new. A Box of Pills in gold on a Field Azure. J.J. saw the part of Pollards before him, the rolling grassland, the wintry trees, oaks, beeches, chestnuts. A great sequoia rose like Salisbury spire towards a grey and shaggy sky. The old red brick and freestone of the house was partly hidden by the three old cedars.

J.J. was about a hundred yards inside the gates when he saw a figure appear from behind the boles of a group of oaks. It was Kitty, and his heart seemed to turn over. How near was his crisis, and how different from the setting he had given to it! He had pictured himself breaking the news to her before the fire, with the lights dimmed or dead; she would be lying in his lap, with her head on his shoulder. But now, they were to meet in this great open space, under a cold and uncompassionate sky, two little figures in a landscape that was so English in its splendid sadness.

J.J.'s little legs seemed to falter. He saw Kitty pause, and stand still. The surprise was more hers than his. Then, her arm went up. She waved to him, and J.J.'s courage fluttered like a flag whose duty was to show itself.

Kitty was wearing furs. They had belonged to Mrs. Pratten, and had remained untouched and boxed away for years, until Sir Thomas, who had left his wife's room and clothes just as they had been in her day, surmounted the pain and the prejudices of a memory, and chose to give to the live woman that which had been

so precious. He had wanted a daughter and a daughter had been denied him, a jolly affectionate kid like Kitty. Nor would his wife have minded. That was why the memory, even in its pangs, was somehow good. J.J., watching his wife's face with its pretty colour, could almost disbelieve in the reality of her peril.

"Oh, J., why didn't you tell us you were coming?"

He made himself smile at her. He became aware of her steadfast gaze, of a questioning wideness in her eyes. Why did she look at him like that? Was he betraying anything?

"J., you have something to tell me."

He felt himself flinch from the question in those beloved eyes.

"Have I?"

There was silence for a second or two, and it was he who looked frightened. They were side by side now, and she took his hand.

"What is it?"

"What makes you think——"

"Don't you know?"

He held fast to her hand.

"I might guess. That's why——"

"It's something about me?"

"Yes."

"You found something?"

"Yes."

And then the incredible thing happened. It was he who burst into tears; it was he who was weak, and whose head went down into her furs. She put her arms about his head, and for a moment there was word-silence as they stood there, but his weeping was convulsive.

"There, darling, there. Perhaps I can guess. There was something."

"Yes."

"Tell me——"

"Kit—you've got—— Oh, I can't say it. Something has to be done at once. I want to send you to Switzerland."

He felt her arms tighten in a kind of spasm.

"Oh, J., away from you? Must I?"

"Yes."

"I've got——"

"Yes."

Her pity was all for him. Strange courage and compassion! Her face had a radiance, serenity.

"J., I had begun to wonder——"

"Had you?"

"Yes. I felt something must be—— Put your face up, J., and kiss me. But ought you to kiss me?"

"Good God, do you think I'd care?"

He kissed her upon the mouth with a passionate tenderness.

"You've got to get well, my dearest one."

"Yes, J., I'll get well."

24

Oh, the sweet and simple egoism of man! Sir Thomas Pratten assumed that J.J.'s unexpected visit had been prompted by the urge to see his patient, and neither J.J. nor Kitty told him the truth, at least not then. J.J. had recovered himself. If he had asked his wife to forgive him for being so flabby a fool, such emotion needed no forgiveness. Actually, they walked into Pollards hand in hand, both in the flesh and in the spirit, with poor bright, brave little faces. Never had they felt so near to each other as now.

Sir Thomas was knocking the billiard balls about in the billiard-room before tea. It was a form of exercise that suited him, and if for some weeks he had found himself fumbling his shots and getting bored and tired and peevish, the new inward peace had given him back his skill. He had just finished a break of thirty-three when Kitty opened the door and caught him chalking his cue.

"Oh, Uncle Tom, J.'s here."

Sir Thomas had appointed himself her uncle. Why be formal when your rather lonely old self desired affection?

"Bless my soul, that's pretty prompt. Admit the physician. Nearly tea time, isn't it?"

"Yes. I'm just going to take my things off."

"Right'o, my dear. Tell J.J. to come and have a look at his patient and see how he can put the balls away."

The lights were on in the billiard-room, their shades flooding the green table and leaving the rest of the room in shadow. J.J. did not seek the light. A fire was burning, and he went and stood by the fire where his face would not be seen too clearly.

"Don't let me stop your game, sir."

Sir Thomas was in his shirt sleeves. He gave the younger man one shrewd, exploratory look, and posed himself for a stroke.

"See me make a cannon off those two."

It was not an easy shot, but he brought it off and when the balls had come to rest, he turned and put his cue away in the stand. His coat hung on a hook attached to the door. He slipped it on and walked towards the fire.

"Not much wrong with that, J.J. That's wonderful stuff of yours."

"I'm glad you are better, sir."

"Sit down, my lad. We have twenty minutes before tea, and I want to talk. Not only have you smoothed out my tummy, but you have given the old man a new idea."

J.J. sat down in a club-chair, Sir Thomas on the sofa. He put his feet up.

"Why shouldn't we go into partnership, J.J.?"

"Partnership?"

"Well, supposing I took up this stuff of yours and put it on the market?"

"But, sir——"

"Oh, I know what you are going to say, unprofessional and all that. Well, I have been playing with the notion for a new enterprise, not P.P. Pills, but something more, well, shall we say, dignified?"

"Like——"

"Just like the all-over-the-world companies who market their own proprietary products. Own factory, own research expert complete with lab. That's the idea. And you would be our expert."

J.J. sat staring.

"You mean, sir——"

"We take the results of your research and market 'em. Seems to me, J.J., you've got hold of something damned good. Peter always said you were a bit of a genius. But I shouldn't just employ you. You'd be a partner."

"But, sir——"

"It would mean cutting the profession, eh?"

"Yes."

"Are you much in love with academies?"

J.J. sat huddled, gazing at the fire.

"No, I'm not."

"Too cramping, eh, for a man of your capacity? If they cut you off the register would it matter?"

J.J. sat like Rodin's "Thinker." How was Sir Thomas to know that this temptation had an emotional eloquence. Money, money to give Kitty her best chance; money, security, the opportunity to follow his urge! He put his head in his hands and tried to think. After all, what would he be surrendering? A shabby and unsuccessful practice in a London suburb. And the larger issue? If he was to be defrocked, it would mean that his Elders regarded him as a charlatan, that he would be forbidden officially to practice medicine, that he could put his signature to no official document. Did it matter? Good work could be done in exile by an outsider. Perhaps it was his fate to be an outsider.

Old Tom was watching him. J.J. was taking the matter devilish seriously. But then, of course, he would. Sir Thomas did not know how emotion coloured this crisis for Dr. J. J. Pope.

J.J.'s head came out of his hands. The one, final question was security. What if this enterprise proved a failure, or the old man grew tired of it?

"May I ask you some questions, sir?"

"Of course, my lad. Go ahead."

"My taking such a post would mean my ceasing to be a member of my profession."

"Would it?"

"Yes. Almost certainly so. And what——"

"Security?"

"Yes."

Old Tom grinned at him kindly.

"I don't let my friends down. When I start a show, I don't get peevish and throw up the sponge if profits aren't good in the first five years. You want hard tacks, J.J. Well, naturally. Let's get down to hard tacks. I start you on a salary of a thousand a year. But, mark you, as a partner, and I want you to be a partner, you will draw a share of the profits, say, one sixth to begin with, in addition to your salary. The proportion would rise as the business developed."

"You are being very generous, sir."

"Am I? Well, suppose we regard it as sharing brains. You bring in your brains for the research side; I use mine for the organisation and the marketing. I'm getting as well as giving."

"When would you begin?"

"At once. Your salary will start directly you say yes. We shall have to form a company, but we'll keep the shares in the family. I shan't have to look around for premises. I have 'em, but we shall have to enlarge and increase our staff."

J.J. was staring at the fire.

"May I have a night to think it over, sir?"

"Of course. Staying the night?"

"I didn't bring anything."

"Oh, we can fit you out. No need to worry about that."

J.J. slept and slept soundly in a pair of Sir Thomas' blue silk pyjamas in that most warm and comfortable house. He slept, because he knew that though he had temporised and asked for time to reflect, his decision was made, and had been made for him by this crisis in the life of the woman he loved. He had not told Kitty. Kitty might have been troubled by the thought that he was sacrificing something for her, nor should she know of the change in their fortunes until the whole business was settled. Almost, J.J. wallowed in that warm bed, and woke to take his early morning tea with a feeling of gaiety. The winter sun was shining, and hope singing like a robin outside his window. Sir Thomas appeared as some golden god with three mystical words shining like a halo about his head: "Genasol, Pepsonol, Iodol."

J.J. shaved himself with one of Sir Thomas' razors, using a new ivory-handled brush for the lather. What comfort was this! And why not such comfort? Why penury and frustration and the shabby shames of an obscure and futile struggle with the prejudices and the jealousies of professionalism? J.J. went in to kiss his wife, for Kitty breakfasted in bed. He sat on the edge of her bed, and the new light that was in him shone upon her.

"I'll try and borrow Sir Thomas' closed car. Sir Herbert expects us this afternoon."

"Can I stay with you, J.?"

"I'll think about it, sweetheart. We'll see what the great man has to say."

Sir Thomas and J.J. sat down to breakfast together, and J.J. had cream and brown sugar with his porridge. Sir Thomas twinkled at him. Was he to be allowed sugar? Yes, he had taken his dose of Pepsonol.

"Bowels regular, my lad, and no flatus. Well, what about it? I've got the company named."

J.J. stirred his porridge.

"In parliamentary language, sir, the answer is in the affirmative."

Old Tom chuckled.

"Long-winded devils, the politicians. Why not yes? How do you fancy P.P. Products for our show? P for Pratten, P for Pope. No pills this time."

"Excellent, sir, and so alliterative. I think I ought to tell you one of my reasons for accepting."

"Go ahead."

"Kitty has consumption."

Old Pratten nearly dropped his spoon. His kind little porcine eyes came out on stalks.

"What! You don't mean——"

"I do, sir. I've found the bacilli. I'm taking her to see Sir Herbert Bland."

Sir Thomas spooned away at his porridge, and with such shocked carelessness that he slopped some of it over the rim of the plate.

"Oh, I say, J.J.! What a job for you, poor lad! Poor kid. I thought she was looking so much better. But my dear fellow—— What are we going to do?"

"If Sir Herbert agrees with me I want to send her to Switzerland."

"I see."

Sir Thomas was silent, save for the sounds associated with the consumption of porridge. He was thinking hard and fast, and to good purpose.

"Look here, J.J., let's be honest. If Kitty had been otherwise, would you have accepted my offer?"

J.J. was looking at the coffee-pot. He smiled at it, but not because it was a coffee-pot.

"Yes, sir, I think I should."

"Sure?"

"Yes. Because, you see, your generosity is giving me my chance. I take it that you won't tie me down to——"

"I'm not quite an old fool, J.J."

"Did I suggest it?"

"One doesn't, if one is wise, nail up brains in a packing-case. Your job will be free research, to find and produce things that are not humbug. My job will be to put them on the market. It's a partnership."

"You're rather a great man, sir."

"Get along with you! I am going to enjoy this. There's life in the old horse yet."

It might be a winter world, but the sun was shining, and after breakfast J.J. climbed the hill behind Pollards, and from this high place looked out upon the world. The voice of Professional Piety could have said that he had been tempted by the Devil, and that Sir Thomas Pratten had displayed to him all the countries of a man's desire, and offered him power and wealth if he would prostitute his skill in the cause of commerce. Perhaps, J.J. would have laughed, and turned upon any Pharisee who had so judged him and his friend. J.J. was feeling most strangely at peace with himself and with this lovely landscape, this piece of England with its parkland and its trees, and its grey distances fading in the tenuous sunlight into a thin blue sky. For, what had been his choice? To choose between hope for the creature whom he loved, and the heresy that a Hierarchy would condemn, a Hierarchy which had helped him little, and whose prejudices were the shackles of a professional pride.

As J.J. descended the hill he saw the smoke rising straight and softly blue into the winter sunlight. How lovely this world could be, and how sad it would be for Kitty to leave it. But she should not leave it. No, by God, there was hope in the air. J.J. wandered down and through a door in a flint wall, and coming to the paved terrace, paused again to look at the landscape.

He heard a rapping on a window, and turning about saw Sir Thomas' fiery face close to the glass. He had a bulldog pipe stuck in his mouth, and his eyes were merry. He beckoned to J.J. and J.J.

walked on, and entering the old house, made his way to the library.

Sir Thomas was sitting at his desk, with papers before him. He pushed a slip of pinkish paper across the desk towards J.J.

"Better have a half-year's payment in advance, my lad. May be useful."

J.J. picked up the cheque and read "Pay Dr. J. J. Pope the sum of Five Hundred Pounds." He stood staring at it, and a little secret smile spread over his face. Sir Thomas observed him.

"Any regrets, J.J.?"

"None at all, sir. Only gratitude for your generosity."

"Gratitude be damned! I'm not buying you. I'm co-opting you. Look here, I've drawn out an informal agreement to cover the business until the formal document is ready."

J.J. was folding up the cheque.

"I don't need any such contract, sir. Your word is——"

"Thank you, and fudge, my lad. Supposing I fell down dead tomorrow morning? Sign and be good."

"Under protest?"

They looked at each other with eyes of faith and affection.

"To protest against fortune, J.J."

"Is just silly? I'll sign, sir, and I'll give you more than a signature."

"Are you going to tell Kitty?"

"Not yet. Not till she is on the way back to health."

"And you, my lad."

Sir Thomas put his signature to the agreement, pushed it across to J.J. and passed him a pen.

"Better read it."

J.J. smiled at him and signed his name.

"I'll take it as read."

"Well, that's a good job done."

25

SIR THOMAS PRATTEN'S closed car drove them up to London. Kitty wore the furs Sir Thomas had given her, and was tucked up in two fur rugs. She was feeling cold, because she was frightened, and trying to hide her fear. J.J. held her hand under the rugs.

"I seem to have brought you nothing but bad luck."

"Nonsense," said he, and squeezed her hand.

"Oh, J., how can we afford it?"

"What, darling?"

"This illness, and my going abroad. If I died, it would be just waste, wouldn't it?"

To-day his was the courage, even though it trembled in secret.

"You are not going to die, my sweet. I am not going to let you do that."

"But the money?"

He looked at her troubled face, and changing his purpose, decided to tell her.

"I'm quite a rich man, Kit. We've had a stroke of luck."

"Have we?"

"Yes, I didn't mean to tell you. I thought of keeping it as a surprise. No need to worry about money. Sir Thomas is starting a new company, and has asked me to be his research chemist."

"Oh, J.!"

"A thousand pounds a year and a share in the profits. I have a cheque for five hundred in my pocket."

"Oh, J.!"

"Glad?"

"I don't know what to say. Does it mean you will be free to do the work you want to do?"

"Yes."

"How wonderful! Oh, I'm so happy. Somehow, I don't feel afraid any longer."

He drew her hand from under the rugs and kissed it.

"Were you feeling afraid? Of course. So was I, terribly afraid, but somehow I have a feeling that you are going to get well."

"I must get well. Shall we live in London?"

"No. We'll have a little place in the country, perhaps somewhere on the Surrey hills. I can go up and down every day."

"How lovely! I must get well, dear."

"Of course you are going to get well. There will be so many wonderful things we shall have to do together."

Harley Street had seemed a very gloomy street to J.J. on the day when he had paid that panic call upon Sir Herbert Bland, but to-day it seemed less gloomy, nor did it rouse any regrets in him. He would never be Harley Street. In fact, Harley Street might ostracise him, and treat him as a traitor, a little charlatan who had sold away the soul of Science. He was about to sin against the doctrine that you served humanity, not commerce; an admirable doctrine, no doubt, if it could claim universality. But how many men, however eminent, were loyal to the spirit of the credo? A few, yes, a very few.

J.J., sitting with his wife in Sir Herbert's opulent waiting-room, and looking at the pictures and the china and the choice old furniture, wondered what the great physician would think of him if he knew that Dr. J. J. Pope was to surrender himself to commerce. Though that was a crude way of putting it. J.J.'s torch was still alight. He would carry it differently, and perhaps to more purpose. He might command power as well as brains. That which he could discover might still be of service to humanity, though it would be a proprietary product, and not just the latest fashion in professional practice.

A man-servant summoned Kitty.

"Mrs. Pope, please."

"Come in with me, J."

"I think Sir Herbert would prefer——"

"No, do come."

J.J. followed his wife into the consulting-room. Sir Herbert was

sitting at his desk. He rose and held out a hand to Kitty, while the physician in him observed her.

"Would you rather I waited, sir?"

"No, Pope, come in."

J.J., as a professional critic, was reassured by the way Sir Herbert went into the case. He was deliberate, kind, and profoundly thorough. Kitty was sent behind a screen to remove such clothes as were necessary, and with a blanket over her shoulders she sat facing the light and Sir Herbert. J.J. was objectively absorbed in the other man's mental processes, while the subjective part of him seemed part and parcel of his wife. He sat, inwardly trembling, while Sir Herbert was auscultating Kitty's chest. He watched the other man's face, as though he might read the verdict there, but Sir Herbert's face remained calm and unrevealing.

"Dr. Pope."

"Yes, sir."

"Just listen here."

Sir Herbert passed his stethoscope to J.J. and laid the point of a pink finger over the right side below the collarbone. J.J. adjusted the stethoscope and listened.

"Compare the other apex."

J.J. did so. And then he straightened, looked at Sir Herbert and nodded.

"I think that will do, Mrs. Pope. Put on your things, and wait. Your husband and I would like to talk."

J.J. helped his wife to dress. He was very conscious of her anxious little face, and the unasked question in her eyes. He smiled at her. Both of them needed a courage that could smile. Sir Herbert was jotting down notes in his case-book, but he too was conscious of the suspense those two were suffering.

Kitty had gone, and J.J. sat with his eyes fastened to Sir Herbert's face.

"The right apex, Pope."

"Yes, sir."

"Diminished breath sounds and a faint crepitus. A very early case, and a very limited area of infection."

"I hope so, sir."

"You heard what I heard?"

"Yes, but where one's affections are concerned——"

"Exactly. One ceases to be a dispassionate judge. Your wife looks a healthy young woman. No wasting. And I should say she has the right temperament."

"Then, you think, sir——"

"Given every advantage I see no reason why that patch should not dry up and leave just a scar."

"Thank God!"

"I have written to Adler. Can you manage to send your wife——"

"Yes. As soon as possible."

"I expect to hear from Adler any day. Directly I hear I will let you know. Could you manage to go out with her? I think it would be advisable."

"Yes, I can go, sir."

"Well, let us have your wife in again. I think I can speak words of good cheer."

They were back at No. 5 Chellwood Terrace, for, now that they were to be parted for so long, they wished to spend the hours to-.gether. The car went back empty to Pollards with a letter from each of them, and on the following day J.J. travelled down by train to see Sir Thomas.

"We did not want you to feel, sir, that we had left you rather churlishly."

"My dear lad, I understand. All that matters is——"

"Yes, just that. I am taking her out myself directly we hear that Dr. Adler has room for her."

"I would rather like to share, J.J., in the fees."

"No, sir. You have been very generous. I don't want to take every-thing and give nothing."

"Generally, it is the other way about, my lad. I suppose that when you have seen Kitty settled——"

"The more work, the better. When you are ready."

"I have had an architect down."

"So soon?"

"I like to get moving, J.J. You don't know our place at Edgeware?"

"No, sir."

"While the additions are being made I can have a temporary lab. fitted up for you in the old building. I shall want you to supervise the scientific side of the new one. You and Harker, the architect, can work together."

J.J. laughed.

"Then, it seems that I can take down my plate."

In fact, that is one of the first things that J.J. did on his return to Chellwood Terrace. Neighbours saw the little doctor at work with a spanner, removing the brass plate from the iron gate. To Chellwood Terrace the act was symbolical of failure. Dr. Charlie Steel, happening along just as J.J. had finished the job, paused, stared and crossed the road.

"What, leaving us, Pope?"

"Shortly. I shall be here for a while, but I am giving up private practice."

Had the little beggar come in for money, or was he putting up a bluff to cover his retreat?

"I see."

"I was coming to see you, Steel. If you care to take on my leavings, you are welcome to them."

Dr. Steel was offended.

"Thanks. I don't take on any man's leavings. More than enough to do, as it is."

"Splendid," said J.J., standing with his brass plate tucked under his arm, and slipping the bolts into his pocket.

As he climbed the steps to his own door he could not help thinking what a funny business was the life of a professional gentleman. You gave five years of your youth to acquiring qualifications, and then, unless you had money or influence you might be one of the unemployed. You could put your name on a door and sit and wait for the world to notice you, yet, if you had some claim to distinction, you might not record it, and you remained undistinguishable from the man who had scraped a pass. How nice it would be to put on your brass plate "Gold Medallist, Prizeman No. 1 in the Natural Science Tripos—Cambridge—189—." But such struttings and posturings were not permitted, and perhaps advisedly so. You might provoke too much jealousy in the mediocre crowd. You might develop into a professional bounder.

Kitty was much occupied with various matters, matters that concerned J.J. He had closed the door when he heard her calling him.

"Oh, J."

"Yes, darling."

"Come here a moment."

He walked into the dining-room to find the table covered with an assortment of shirts and underclothing. His.

"I've been going through your things. You want some new warm vests, dear. Do buy them."

"I will."

"And shirts."

Her glance fell upon the plate that was tucked under his arm, and her eyes became rueful.

"Oh, J., it does seem rather sad."

"Not a bit. I've removed the prison number from the door of my cell. I offered it to Steel."

"How naughty of you! And J., Ellen and I have been arranging everything. She is going to stay with us. I have told her what to give you, and to spend more."

"A complete weekly menu!"

"I do want you to be comfortable while I'm away."

J.J. laid the brass plate on the top of the pile of underclothing, and went round the table and kissed his wife.

"Mustn't worry about me, my sweet. Coal bills won't be terrifying in the future. What matters, is your future—our future."

"Oh, J., I do love you."

"Why you should, Kit, will always remain something of a mystery to me."

Snorting strenuously the train climbed the mountain track. J.J. and Kitty were alone together in a compartment that was warm and snug. They sat and held hands and looked at Switzerland, snow, dark pines, sunlight, blue sky, blue water. It was a brilliant day and no mist hid the lake below. Kitty had travelled well, amazingly well. They had spent a night at Geneva, and Dr. Adler had come to the hotel and examined Kitty. He was a little, stout, kindly Jew, very black as to hair, with one of those intelligent and benignant

faces. He spoke good English, also French and German, and J.J. had been content to meet Dr. Adler in English. He had little French, and his German was somewhat rusty.

Dr. Adler had been very cheering. Kitty's was a very early case, and from the texture of her he judged that she would prove a hopeful patient. Plenty of fresh milk, eggs, butter, plenty of sleep, plenty of sunlight and Swiss air. J.J. and Dr. Adler had liked each other. There was to be more than liking between them in the days that were to come. Dr. Adler had said: "Since you are a member of my profession, Dr. Pope, I shall charge reduced fees," and J.J. had smiled at him and shaken his head.

"No. That is very kind of you, but I am no longer a doctor."

Dr. Adler had raised expressive black eyebrows.

"But, my friend Sir Herbert Bland——"

"I was a doctor, but now I have taken a post in research."

"But you still remain——"

"No. I am joining a company that will sell proprietary preparations for profit."

Dr. Adler had looked a little puzzled. How stringent were the English! But all that was of yesterday. J.J. and Kitty sat holding hands and looking at the mountains and the snow and the pine-woods and the blue sky. They were both happy together, and sad with the tender sadness of those who loved and were to part.

"I must get well quickly, J."

"Of course you will. But you won't come back, my dear, till Adler is satisfied."

"But you will come out and see me."

"Nothing could keep me away."

"We can afford it now, can't we?"

"Easily. I'm going to look round for a country cottage."

"How lovely!"

"Any choice of places?"

"Could it be near Yatley?"

"It might. I'll look around."

For, to both of them there was assuagement and comfort in speaking of the future as though, already, it was theirs. Who could forecast doom in this consoling sunlight?

Dr. Adler's private sanatorium was a little white building sitting

like a swan on a nest, save that the nest was on the hillside instead of by the water. It had a garden that was snow, a terrace, and balconies where patients could be sheltered, and soak themselves in the light and air. Dr. Adler was both a humanist and a psychologist. He had refused to stress the hospital, and his sanatorium suggested a small and comfortable hotel. Emphasise sickness and your patients might continue to feel sick. Give them light and air and warmth, and comfortable beds, and excellent food, and music and laughter. Dr. Adler had been very particular in choosing his chef, almost more particular than in the choice of his matron.

A snow-plough had been at work, and a closed carriage met them at the station, with a great, big, cheerful nurse in attendance. The sick needed both strength and sympathy about them, and again the choice had been carefully made. Nurse Pauline Muller looked capable of carrying Kitty upstairs and downstairs and into my lady's chamber, but Kitty did not need such succour. She did not look like a sick woman, or behave like one.

The Matron, Madame La Jeune, met them in the well-warmed lounge. She had the face of a capable saint, but a smiling saint. It was she who took husband and wife upstairs, and showed them a room on the first floor. Its walls were cream, its carpet and curtains a soft rose; the bed was a bed and not an ugly steel trestle. There was an armchair, cushions, books, and a folded rug to spread over your knees if you needed it. The tall French window was without lace curtains, so that all the light should enter.

J.J., accustomed to the efficient sterility and the austerities of an institution, blessed the humanity of the man who could be artist as well as doctor.

Kitty had gone to the window. It had a balcony, and a view that was superb.

"How lovely, J.!"

"Yes, you should be happy here."

She felt for his hand. Yes, as happy as one could be when two people who loved each other were to be separated for a season.

But Matron La Jeune intervened with gentle authority. Kitty was to go to bed after the journey. It was essential that no patient should be over-tired. Kitty, turning a rather childlike and "Must I?" face to J.J., saw him smile and nod.

"Yes, wise orders. I agree with you, madame."

J.J. was staying the night at the Beau Rivage in Montreux, and since the sun was still shining, he chose to walk down the winding road and look at the lake and the Dents du Midi. He was feeling at peace with himself. That was a good place up there, and Kitty would be cared for by good women. Yes, imagination had gone into the making of that rest-house, an imagination and a feeling for the human things of life that were rare. Dr. Adler was no stereotyped professionalist, but a man with an artist's comprehension of the world of the sick.

J.J. Pope had a feeling that Dr. Adler could teach him many things, and in the mood of a disciple J.J. came down from that high place to the waters of the lake, and wandered beside it for a while like a man who was apprehending a future that, to him, might be richly revealing. The full vision of it had not come to him as yet, but come it would. A wounded love may be more educative than any text-book.

As though to test his lungs and heart, J.J. walked up to Glion next morning to say goodbye to his wife. He found Kitty in bed, with the window open, and the sunlight pouring in. Never, he thought, had she looked prettier, with her dark velvet eyes, soft skin, and honey-coloured hair.

"Had a good night, dearest?"

"Yes."

"And a good breakfast?"

"Lovely rolls and butter and cherry jam!"

"Piglet!" and he pinched her ear.

His playfulness was wilful, for suddenly he was sad with a great sadness at the thought of leaving her, and there was the same sadness in her eyes. They might smile, and talk tender nonsense, but the anguish was more than skin deep. J.J. felt like a boy who wanted to rush out of the room and blub. He seemed to divine in his wife the soul of a frightened child.

"You don't feel cold, J., with the window open?"

"Not a bit. This central heating is an idea. I think we'll have it in our cottage."

He was sitting on the edge of her bed and suddenly she clung to him.

"Oh, my darling, you have been so good to me, given me so much."

He was inarticulate. He kissed her.

"Nothing to what you have given me."

"Oh, I haven't. I often think that if you hadn't married me——"

It was with a kind of gentle fierceness that he took her face between his hands.

"Mustn't talk like that. Not true. Through you, Kit, I seem to be learning things. I was a hard little devil."

"Oh, no, J."

"Yes, I was."

26

SIR THOMAS drove J.J. down to Edgeware.

Now, J.J. had passed through Edgeware on one previous occasion on a pleasure drive in Peter Pratten's car, and he had seen confronting them an old red Georgian mansion with a long, grey tail attached to it. Across its façade had run in huge gilded letters "Pratten's Pills," and in lesser letters—"Try Them. You Will Feel Better." The cedar trees of Georgian planting still stood there, and that ruddy aristocrat of a house seemed to look down its nose at the world in apologetic embarrassment. Certainly, the Georgians in their royal phase had loved gold, witness Windsor, and the beds and chairs, cornices and picture-frames, but only in the cause of splendour. This advertising business uncovered the tail of your shirt.

J.J. had felt Peter wince. He had accelerated past that rather blatant building.

"I wish the old man would take down those damned letters. They grin like gold teeth."

J.J. had said nothing.

So, when they approached the Pratten building, J.J. looked out for the Pill Parade, and rather shrinkingly so, only to realise that the old house had been stripped of its regalia. It stood there more as of old, decorous and dignified and solid. J.J. was posed by a question, or a series of questions. When had that gold lettering been removed? Recently? And if so had a sensitive consideration for the feelings of his new partner inspired the transfiguration? J.J. wondered.

The car turned in between the brick pillars, and drew up outside the

Ionic portico. A commissionaire in uniform came to open the door.

"Morning, George."

"Good morning, sir."

"Mr. Hempstead in?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Hempstead was the Pratten general manager.

Sir Thomas got out and J.J. followed him, but Sir Thomas did not at once enter the building. He toddled across the gravel, and stood on the grass by one of the cedars, and again J.J. followed him.

"Nice old place."

"Very," said his new partner.

"We'll keep it like that. My idea is, J.J., to build on at the back, good brown brick to tone with our new dignity."

He gave J.J. a shrewd, oblique twinkle.

"Have to consider our dignity, now. Serious business. I've got you to live up to."

J.J. smiled at him.

"Thank you, sir."

"No thanks needed. One grows out of being just a goldbug, or should do. Let's go in and see Hempstead. He should have the new plans, and the builder's specifications."

Mr. Hempstead's office was on the ground floor in a room that retained its Georgian panelling. It was a white and gold room, but the gilding was not too obvious. It had solid office furniture in good mahogany, and a Turkey carpet. Mr. Hempstead also was solid, completely middle class and reliable, with a bald head, a walrus moustache, and eyes that looked vaguely puzzled behind big spectacles. For Mr. Hempstead was a somewhat puzzled man. He had managed Pratten Pills for nearly fifteen years, and had become globular in the process. Adaptation was not easy, especially so when a more subtle atmosphere was being imposed upon the business.

"Morning, Hempstead; this is Dr. Pope."

Mr. Hempstead pushed out a pink hand, and showed a set of very artificial teeth.

"Pleased to meet you, sir."

J.J. and the general manager shook hands.

Sir Thomas went and stood with his back to the fire, his hands in his trouser pockets.

"Got the plans, Hempstead?"

"Yes, sir. They came in two days ago, from the builders."

"And the specifications?"

"Yes, sir."

"What does the figure work out at?"

"Twelve thousand pounds."

"Not too bad. Dr. Pope would like to see the plans, and criticise them."

Mr. Hempstead rang the bell for a clerk, and the rolls of cartridge-paper, and the typed booklet of specifications were brought in. Mr. Hempstead unrolled the plans, and spreading them on a large mahogany table, persuaded them to lie flat by arranging round their margins a letter weight, an ink-pot, ledgers, and sundry other office impediments.

"I presume that Dr. Pope is chiefly interested in the scientific side?"

"Quite so, Hempstead, but I want to see the lay-out of the new works, packing and transport arrangements, and all that."

"Everything is here, sir. Shall I demonstrate?"

"Go ahead."

Mr. Hempstead demonstrated with the aid of the blunt tip of a fat pink finger.

Ground-plans and elevations and sections were new phenomena to J.J., but he soon grasped the efficient simplicity of the lay-out. The upper floor was to be his, the brain of the building, where, with every modern advantage he would labour and produce his goods. There was a laboratory, a little office, and a subsidiary workshop where, under his direction, assistants could prepare samples of his products. The whole of the next floor was the factory where the new Pratten proprietary drugs would be produced in bulk. The ground floor dealt with distribution, checking, packing, and dispatch. A lift connected the three floors. As to the style of the building, it was on Georgian lines, with tall and generous windows.

Mr. Hempstead, having completed his demonstration, paused to blow his nose.

"How does it strike you, J.J.?"

"Excellent, sir."

"The upper floor is your show. What about all the paraphernalia, Hempstead?"

Mr. Hempstead was still polishing his broad, red nose.

"We thought that Dr. Pope would take charge of that. It is a highly technical business. The architect can put us in touch with a firm of chemical engineers."

"That's your pigeon, J.J. Furnaces, and retorts, and all that sort of thing. I'll leave that to you."

"But what about the cost, sir? Some of the new equipment will be——"

"Somewhat expensive, eh? No matter. We'll have all the most up-to-date gadgets. Money saved in the end, you know."

The flotation of the new company, P.P. Products, Ltd., and the erecting and fitting up of the new building, would take time, but J.J. discovered in the older building facilities for immediate production. He was satisfied with Pepsonol as a preparation, both as to its therapeutic value and its texture; it was palatable and it would keep. He suggested to Sir Thomas that temporary equipment could be installed in the old building, and Pepsonol manufactured in marketable quantity. Sir Thomas agreed, but there were other and very important details to be considered. Pepsonol would have to be bottled, and the bottles labelled, and instructions prepared and printed for the purchasers. Here, artistry and originality were indicated. Sir Thomas believed that to catch and please the patient's eye was as necessary as dressing a shop window.

"We'll have special bottles of our own, J.J. I'll send for samples. Æsthetics, my lad. The Frenchies understand that sort of thing. Look how they put up their scents, and their face-creams, and all that. Your stuff may be good, but it won't be any the worse for a nice appearance. Who shows off a frock best? Some blowzy old dame, or a pretty young thing with a figure."

So, a fancy bottle was chosen for Pepsinol, no mere straight up and down glass spinster, but a kind of vase-shaped phial, manufactured in two sizes, a sixteen ounce and an eight ounce. A gentleman who specialised in art-posters and advertising leaflets was commissioned to design the label. He produced quite a pretty apron in white and blue, an apron that would sit nicely on the graceful phial. When the first sample was ready for exhibition, old Tom chuckled over it, and proposed an experiment.

"Tell you what, J.J., we'll try it and others on the female staff,

parade half-a-dozen bottles, with Miss Pepsonol, and have a kind of baby show. Label 'em all alike, of course."

It was done. The various bottles were paraded upon Mr. Hempstead's mahogany table, and Mr. Hempstead's secretary, two typists and three women packers were brought into the room one by one and requested to select the bottle that pleased them most. The votes were five to one in favour of Sir Thomas' own choice.

"There you are, J.J. Popular verdict, what! The next thing will be to get out the adverts, and the literature. Hope I'm not disgusting you?"

J.J. was looking into other and more significant distances. No, he was not disgusted.

J.J. had to admit to himself that when he sat down to write the inevitable letter to the Secretary of The General Medical Council, he was scared by the finality of the confession he had to make. He was asking to be defrocked. He had no intention of waiting until he was hauled before his elders, catechised, and perhaps lectured, before judgment was passed upon him. If he was to be an outcast, he would go into voluntary exile. But how final and fatal the letter sounded.

Dear Sir,

I consider it my duty to notify you that I am joining a company as their research chemist. The company is engaged in the production and marketing of proprietary products. Therefore, I desire to have my name removed from the Register.

Yours faithfully,

J. J. Pope.

For two days he hesitated before posting the letter. What if P.P. Products proved a failure? He knew that he might have very little chance of being reinstated in his profession. He would have failed to conform; he would have flouted a tradition. Professional discipline could be merciless, and perhaps rightly so, but was it not rather hard that to gain his freedom he should have to risk so ruthless a verdict?

He posted his letter. In his innocence he may have thought that the matter was ended. No acknowledgement reached him for nearly a fortnight. In his letter he had used nice, comfortable words, but

he knew that they could be translated into syllables of contempt. For research-worker insert "Quack," for proprietary products read "Patent Medicines." But he had done the honest thing. No one could accuse him of attempting to possess the best of both worlds.

A reply reached him in due course. It was a curt and formal letter. It asked questions.

Dear Sir,

Before arriving at any decision in your case, the Council would like you to answer the following questions:

1. Are you to be engaged as a salaried employee?
2. Does the company propose to sell through the profession, or direct to the public?
3. The name of the particular company.
4. Will its products be advertised to the public?
5. Will any personal profit accrue to you from the sale of these proprietary preparations?

Gosh! It was like sitting down to answer an examination paper! What an inquisition! J.J. felt his mane bristling as he sat down to reply. He did not answer the questions. He repeated his request for his name to be removed from the Register, and stated with some frankness that since he would cease to be a member of the medical profession, his future activities were no concern of the General Medical Council.

Apparently, the gentlemen who composed the council thought otherwise. He received a request to appear before a committee, and to explain his position. The guardians of the flock were not inclined to suffer a member of it to escape without putting him in the pillory. J.J. was angry. He had a very good idea of what such a confrontation would entail, catechisings, homilies.

He was a very busy man these days, and he took the letter to Edgeware and showed it to Sir Thomas. Sir Thomas had had a little private suite fitted up for his use while he was directing and energising the new adventure, spending his weekends at Pollards.

"A summons before the Sanhedrin."

"Just that, sir. It means, of course, that if I refuse to conform, I shall be taboo."

"What's your inclination?"

J.J. hesitated. Did Sir Thomas realise that he would be burning his boats? Sir Thomas did understand the finality of the choice.

"I'd like to tell them to——"

"Go to hell?"

"Yes."

"Well, tell 'em that. If you have any doubts, my lad, about my letting you down, forget them. You are my partner. I'll have a clause inserted in the contract to the effect that should the P.P. business prove a frost, I compensate you. But I don't propose to face a frost."

"That gives me security, sir."

"Exactly."

J.J. wrote curtly to the Council, explaining his position and stating that he had no intention of appearing before them. He received an equally curt reply, notifying him that his name would be removed from the register, and that as a commercialist he was disqualified from acting as a medical man.

J.J. placed the letter before Sir Thomas.

"So you are an outcast, J.J. You join me as a bad citizen. Well, well, it may be that, eventually, we may be of more service to the public than some of these gentlemen. We shall see."

This scuffle for his freedom may have angered J. J. Pope, but he had been hurt by it in the secret places of his self-esteem, J.J. had other visions, though they might be distant and nebulous at the moment. The P.P. Products Co. was a ladder up which he would climb until his head was securely in the sunlight. It was a means to an end. It promised him leisure, freedom, power. He could carry his work unhindered into significant and surprising explorations. If and when power was his he chose to give the fruits of his labour to the world, that would be his privilege. That his brother men might damn him as a charlatan, dub his products quackery, and refuse to test or use them was a possibility that he had to face. Other men greater than he had had to face it. Genius is always suspect until it has become history.

But, if official letters angered him, and all his life J.J. was to despise officialdom of every description, and elude it, there were letters to cheer him. Peter, parading the new power somewhere in Spain, wrote from Madrid to congratulate his friend.

"Don't worry about the High Priests. We lads have to break with tradition, and then, I suppose, recover that which is worth while. It makes me chuckle to think of you and the pater in double harness. Take it from me that though the Bart has a cayenne temper, I've never known him do a mean thing."

Kitty's letters came thrice a week. They were happy and affectionate letters, and spiced with fun. There was no self-pity in this vital, sanguine creature.

"I've got a most awful appetite, J.J. I shall expect any cow I see to look at me reproachfully.

"The snow is going, and I've seen the grass full of crocuses. They say the flowers here are wonderful, a real colour spangle. And the apples and the cherries. Every other tree seems to be a cherry."

"I've put on eight pounds. I must be all milk and butter."

"I do hope Ellen is looking after you properly. Did you buy those new shirts and woollies?"

"They are all so kind here. Who do you think came yesterday? Peter and Sybil. She frightens me a little, but I like her. They seem very happy."

"Have you got into the new lab. yet? Do tell me all about it."

"Have you had time to look for a cottage?"

J.J. kept all his wife's letters tucked away in a secret place. And there were other letters to reinforce the cheerfulness of Kitty's. Dr. Adler posted a weekly report upon Mrs. Pope's progress, and with it he enclosed a short, personal letter to her husband.

Mrs. Pope was proving a most promising patient. Her appetite was excellent, and she had put on weight. The moist sounds at the right apex had disappeared, and so had the expectoration, nor did her temperature rise at night. Dr. Adler was the most cautious of men where prophecy was concerned, but every indication pointed to steady progress. That wet spot in Kitty's lung seemed to be drying up.

J.J. wanted to thank somebody: God, Providence. He would have liked to thank God, but he was vague in his postulating of the Diety. Yet, life seemed good, and he was ceasing to be worried by the professional murmurings of The Mighty. His name might have been removed from the sacred scroll, but he was dreaming of drafting diplomas of his own.

27

In the spring of the year J.J. began seriously to search for that country cottage. Kitty was writing of the floweriness of the Swiss hillsides, the crocuses, the blue squills, the primroses, apple and cherry blossom, narcissi like scented snow. She had spoken of Yatley, and J.J. had so little snobbishness in him that he did not shrink from contact with a world that had known him as the child of the village shop. Moreover, Yatley, or the southern slope of the green-sand ridge beyond it, would be a perfect habitat for Kitty, a great wall shutting out the north wind, clear to the south and the sea wind, spacious and free. J.J. gave up his Sundays to exploring the old neighbourhood only to realise that the cottage Kitty dreamed of did not appear to exist. And Yatley was all Strange, Larcombe or Tufnell, so far as real estate was concerned, and none of these old families would welcome the builder, or part with property that might be regarded as sacred soil.

Frustrated, J.J. walked up the Larcombe drive one Sunday afternoon, and asked for the squire. Mr. Larcombe was more than pleased to see him, for, at the moment Mr. Larcombe was rather bored with the increasing godliness of his wife, who, like an old hen turned cock, was crowing good works though all the countryside. Her passion for the ethical values of life as she saw them, included certain of her husband's foibles and their chastening, his love of port and of colourful language, and his fancy for pretty faces.

Mr. Larcombe liked the young about him. He walked J.J. off to the peach-house, where, as he explained, they could smoke in peace. Her husband's pipe was one of the things to which Mrs. Larcombe

was objecting. Such a dirty habit, and so indicative of a lack of self-control! There were occasions when Mr. Larcombe exploded, and said "Damn it, Sarah, if I were ten years younger, I'd kick the bucket over, and go native." Vulgar fellow! So, Mr. Larcombe welcomed J.J. What, Mrs. Pope was in Switzerland with phthisis! Dear, dear, what bad luck! But she was going on well. Splendid! And J.J. wanted a cottage and couldn't find one.

"Why not build?"

"Where is the land, sir?"

"Land? Why, five hundred acres of the Strange estate are coming on the market. They say young Lawrence has blued thirty thousand pounds in two years. Drink and the gee-gees, and pretty ladies."

Mrs. Larcombe would have blushed, and as yet there were no peaches to blush, only the blossom.

"Look here, J.J.——"

"But I can't buy five hundred acres, sir. I need about one."

"Yes, yes, but the land will be split into lots. I've got my eye on Beechanger. Remember it? Well, if I get it, for preservation, I could sell you a plot."

"That's very good of you, sir."

"Not a bit. I believe Tufnel is going for the rest. Doesn't want the country spoilt by speculative cads."

"What would the price be, sir?"

"Oh, about fifty pounds to you. For a thousand you could put up a nice little place, everything included. Water? M-yes, you'd have to have a well. And a cesspool or septic tank. And acetylene gas. You could mortgage, you know, or raise money on a life insurance."

J.J.'s eyes were bright.

"I dare say I could manage. Might we go and look?"

"Rather. I've got one of the new toys, eight horse Rover. Look here, we'll go and have tea at old Killick's, and trundle up to Beechanger afterwards."

"What about Mrs. Larcombe?"

"She's got all the Sunday-school teachers coming to tea."

"I see. I want to have a look at Aunt's grave, sir."

"Of course. Great woman she was."

"Unique, sir, in her way. And when is the sale?"

"Auction next week at Dewhurst. Come along, my lad."

Mr. Larcombe got out his new four-seater tourer, being minded to make The Chequers before his wife left from the Sunday-school, but half way down the drive they met Mrs. Larcombe and her little crowd of teachers walking under the elms. Mrs. Larcombe held up a black-gloved hand like a police-constable ordering a motorist to stop, but Mr. Larcombe did not stop. He pretended to take his wife's signal as a salutation, and waved his hat. He accelerated. He let out an unseemly toot on the horn. One girl, and a pretty one, giggled. Youth might be in secret sympathy with the squire, even when equipped with a little black bible.

While The Chequers was preparing tea for them, J.J. strolled across to the churchyard and looked at his aunt's grave. He had had a headstone put up, and the grass was neatly kept. J.J. took off his hat to Miss Jane Pope's headstone, and stood for a minute in meditation. He would so much have liked to have asked Aunt Jane's advice upon the hypothetical cottage, and he had a feeling that she would have said: "Build. No one can run away with bricks and mortar." Miss Ivy Killick served their tea in the private parlour, and Ivy had a merry eye, and a high colour, and auburn hair. Mr. Larcombe and she exchanged badinage upon the eternal subject of swains and matrimony, and Mr. Larcombe got as good as he gave, which pleased him. When a pretty girl joked with you and looked sly, you weren't quite finished.

Afterwards, the new green Rover pumped them up to Beechanger. This piece of high ground lay on a secondary road leading to Hamley Green, and about three quarters of a mile from Yatley church. Mr. Larcombe parked the car in a field gateway, and they climbed another gate into Beechanger Wood. They were glorious trees these beeches, just coming into leaf, their grey trunks soaring into clouds of glimmering green. Passing through the wood they came to a little alp or grassy plateau, and below them lay all that sweet valley, Sussex in the Spring, with the grey downs dim in the distance under a cloudless sky.

"By Jove, J.J., what a site!"

It was, and J.J. stood at gaze with a shimmer of light on his face.

"But isn't it too far from the road, sir?"

"Not a bit. There's the road, just down there. Swings round to take the hill. You could have a frontage."

"I see. Down by that hedge with the yews in it?"

"That's it."

J.J. was thinking of many things, but he asked Mr. Larcombe a significant question.

"Is old Purvis still building?"

"Well, he would be, if he had the land."

"Good, sound craftsman."

"None better. No jerry about Tom Purvis. You couldn't find a more honest chap. It would cost you less, J.J., and you'd get good stuff."

"I'm very tempted, sir. If you get the land, will you let me know?"

"I will, my lad, most certainly."

J.J. did much thinking on the question of the country cottage. He had named it in his own mind "Kit's Cot." Should he buy, build, and keep it as a surprise for her, challenging fortune and fate in the survival of her whom he held most dear? Life was being very much of an adventure, and J.J., feeling like a soldier of fortune, was in a mood to throw his glove in the face of fate and say "I will it. Therefore it shall happen."

Good philosophy, in spite of the Drearies. J.J. did not speak of the matter to his partner, for he was so deeply in Sir Thomas Pratten's debt that he shrank from adding to it, but, as it happened, Sir Thomas himself broached the subject.

"Reports good, J.J.?"

"About Kitty?"

"Yes."

"Very."

"How long do you think she will be out there?"

"I should say six months, sir, if all goes well."

"I wish you'd shut up calling me *sir*. What about the winter? Not—London."

J.J. hesitated and then confessed.

"I have a country cottage in mind. On the Surrey hills overlooking the Weald."

"Found one?"

"No, I am considering building if I can get the land."

"Good idea."

"You see, I could lodge in Edgeware during the week, and go down there for week-ends."

"Cost much?"

"About a thousand."

"I'll advance it to you."

"You won't, sir."

"There you go again. Damn it, can't I——?"

"No, you can't. I am not going to——"

"Don't you say sponge, young man! Very well, if you like I'll take a mortgage, two thousand at two per cent."

"That would be more than the full value of the property. No cover. I would accept a thousand."

"What an obstinate little devil you are! All right, a thousand."

"Thank you. I can manage the rest."

"Good. Let me know when the business is on."

J.J. waited for news from Mr. Larcombe. At the moment he was working twelve hours a day, supervising the preparation of Pepsonol in bulk, and preparing improved samples of Iodol and Genasol. Also, he was experimenting with a new anodyne, a coal tar product, plus a mild dose of a certain alkaloid. Needing subjects upon which to test the combination, he appealed to Mr. Hempstead, who appeared to regard the proposal as a joke.

"Better consult my secretary, Dr. Pope."

"I'm not Dr. Pope now."

"Ought you to order medicine?"

"I'm not. I can play chemist on the human subject."

"All right. Ask Miss Mitford. She's always away three days a month with a thing she calls migraine."

J.J. approached Miss Mitford, a little, thin, dark woman with a nose prone to redness. Miss Mitford looked slightly embarrassed. It wasn't exactly migraine from which she suffered, but the pains and flushes and discomforts which afflict women once a month.

"I'm quite ready to try it, doctor. I'd give anything to find something——"

J.J. gave her samples of his powder, with instructions as to its use, and three weeks later Miss Mitford, gently blushing, waylaid him in a corridor.

"Excuse me, doctor——"

"I'm not a doctor now; just a chemist."

"Does it matter? What I wanted to say was that I haven't had such a comfortable time for years."

"I'm very glad."

"I know two or three others who suffer. Might they——?"

"Certainly."

"Is there any fee?"

"No. I don't charge fees."

"Thank you, so very much."

Further evidence proved to J.J. that this product gave to women just that assuagement which they craved for, especially to those women who had to work. The compound was simple, harmless in moderate doses, and could be made up in tablet form. He found it to be very useful in relieving all pain, neuritic, rheumatic, migraine, toothache. J.J. put the details before Sir Thomas, and Sir Thomas understood the possibilities of such a product. It might go big all over the world.

"Better than a bromide, J.J.?"

"It has none of the disadvantages of bromide. Poor old Dame Bromide is out-of-date. With caffein added it stimulates as well as soothes."

"The thing is to find a good name for it, J.J. Get an inspiration."

J.J. sought that inspiration. It came to him while he was in his bath, and almost he cried "Eureka." Of course! Anodynia! It was simple and expressive, and easily remembered. He placed the name before Sir Thomas.

"Absolutely it, my lad. We'll put it on the market after Pepsonol."

Mr. Larcombe wrote to say that Beechanger was his, seventy-five acres of wood and heath and meadow. Had J.J. decided upon a cottage? J.J. had. There was no time to be wasted if the cottage was to be ready by the winter. J.J. trained down to Dewhurst one Sunday in May. He had warned Mr. Larcombe of his visit, and Mr.

Larcombe, snatching at a good reason for avoiding church, met J.J. at the station with his car. Mr. Larcombe was delighted to have a vicarious interest, and not only did he bring the car to meet J.J., but he brought Tom Purvis, builder and decorator, with it. They drove straight to Beechanger, and pottered about in consultation. Tom Purvis was a silent, comely old man with a pointed grey beard, and eyes that dwelt lovingly and steadfastly upon this English scene.

"Won'erful site, sir."

J.J.'s choice was a little grassy plateau above the road, with the beeches behind it, and a waste of gorse and heather spreading below. Would Mr. Larcombe consider the sale of an acre here? Most certainly he would, but he expressed a desire to hear what sort of cottage J.J. proposed to build. The red, mock Gothic villa had been in fashion, complete with ornamental tiles, stained glass, and a horrid air of genteel affectation. Mr. Larcombe was a countryman, and he abominated what he described as the suburban lobster style.

J.J. smiled at the landscape.

"A miniature farmhouse, Sussex or Surrey, plain brown brick and tiles, with a brick porch and green shutters. That's my idea."

"Good egg," said Mr. Larcombe, "it won't shout so that you can hear it five miles off."

Tom Purvis played with his beard.

"I could do that for 'ee in local brick. Brick all through, sir?"

"Yes, good and solid. I want a warm house. What about plans, Mr. Purvis?"

"Why, sir, if you be wanting a farmhouse, it would be easy to copy. I know 'em inside and out. There be Lavender Farm, f'instance, and High Wood, and Brook Bottom. You know 'em all. Is that your notion?"

"Exactly, with the ceilings higher and the windows bigger."

"If you tell me, sir, how many rooms you want and the size of 'em, I could get out a plan in a week. And the specifications."

"Go ahead, Mr. Purvis. When could you start building?"

"At once, sir. But what about the title? Them lawyers do mess 'ee about."

Mr. Larcombe chuckled.

"You write me a cheque, J.J., for fifty pounds, and I'll agree to Tom getting busy."

"Very good of you, sir."

"You'll be wanting a bit of a drive, sir, and a gate, and some fencing. I could do 'ee a light wire fence, if Mr. Larcombe won't object."

"No, Tom."

"I could plant it out," said J.J. "A hornbeam hedge would be the thing."

It appeared that life for the time being was to be all bricks and mortar for J.J. at both ends of his new world. The extension at Edgeware was rising swiftly in brick and steel, for in those days official interference, otherwise known as planning, was less obstructive, and each morning J.J. and Sir Thomas would walk amid the piers and pillars and girders, and climb ladders, and chat with foremen. The old Pratten building was also to be altered, when the new one was complete, but for the moment it was busy with the production, bottling and labelling of Pepsonol. Sir Thomas had had drafts of the advertisements submitted to him, and he and J.J. passed judgment upon them. They were to be varied in style according to the atmosphere of the paper or journal in which they were to appear, for that which might suit *The People* or *The Pink Un*, might appear out of place in *Punch* or *The Queen*! Sir Thomas was proposing to spend large sums on advertising. Publicity was essential if "P.P. Products" were to become as much a part of English domestic life as Pear's Soap.

Mr. Tom Purvis had produced his plans and his estimates, and J.J. had accepted them, though he arranged for one or two modifications and additions. A glass-roofed and glass-screened loggia was to be built at one end of the house, and the living-room window was to be of plate glass and suggesting a shop window. Also, there was to be a furnace, and radiators in the living-room, the hall-passage, and the chief bedroom. Tom Purvis was perplexed by this newfangled idea, but a firm was discovered who could supply such strange luxuries. The addition would cost J.J. an additional hundred pounds.

One Sunday early in June he travelled to Yatley, and walked to Beechanger to inspect the foundations of Kit's Cot. They surprised and shocked him; the oblongs they enclosed looked absurdly small. Had old Purvis made a mistake, or tampered with the measurements?

He had not. When J.J. paced out the distances he found them to be according to plan. J.J. laughed at himself, and was moved to realise that though you might think yourself a very clever fellow, you were a mere child in the nursery when you stepped into some other fellow's workshop. He found a plank supported by two piles of bricks: Tom Purvis' staff-perch during the dinner hour, and he sat down on it. The plank was moderately clean and J.J. had no cause to worry now about professional trousers, but could feel at ease in a rough Tweed suit. That was yet another sign of freedom. He looked at the view. It was indeed a lovely landscape, but modern man—and woman—did not live on landscapes. Kitty would have air, sky, as much sun as England could produce, but would she have happiness here? You chased happiness, and it eluded you; you planned for it, and the thing vanished like smoke. Well, well, the modern scheme was supplying Arcady with new wings. It was possible and more than probable that if P.P. Products prospered, the Pope partnership would possess a small car. Kitty could go shopping in it. They could put up a garage down there by the road.

J.J. meditated. He saw himself as a human marionette suspended on two threads, his wife's health and the good will of an ageing man whose whimsies might be incalculable. Very slender threads, but was not life itself sensitive and slender? You might feel yourself dangling over the edge of the unknown, but if you were roped to the one thing that mattered, you might enjoy the exhilaration of suspense, without fear. J.J. filled a pipe and lit it, and in this clean air the tobacco tasted good.

Suspense! The thrill of it!

Next week he would see Kitty. He was taking a seven-day holiday. He was going to Switzerland.

28

J.J. FOLLOWED the narrow road or lane leading to Dr. Adler's sanatorium. It skirted the edge of a grassy plateau, and ploughed between banks of flowering shrubs, gardens, and stone walls. Here and there a plantation of spruces spread dark green hands over it and gave it shade. The sky was an utter blue, and snow peaks brilliant wedges in it. The sun shone as it shines so rarely in the northern island. Roses poked their faces over fences and tosssed their scent at the little man. From somewhere came the smell of mown grass.

J.J. loitered. He savoured both his suspense and the sunlight. He thought: "No ugly fate can be waiting round the corner on a day such as this. Kitty ought to have two months of sunlight each winter."

He turned a corner and saw the white house sheltered by its rampart of dark spruces. Awnings were up over some of the balconies, and people were lying there. Too much direct sunlight could be dangerous. J.J. looked at the balcony that might be Kitty's. It was empty, and the windows were open wide. He came to the gate, and beyond a bank of flowers saw a figure in a chair under the shade of a young tree. It was Kitty, and she was reading.

J.J.'s tenderness knew a puckish moment. He puckered up his lips and whistled softly, a kind of bird note. He had been an expert bird-mimic as a boy. He saw the book lowered, and the head turned. Next moment his wife was out of the chair, and running down the slope of grass. The flower border separated them, and J.J., with shocking impulsiveness, walked through it. He was seeing nothing

but his wife's face, a young and glowing face, alive, like the face of the Kitty of Mortimer Mews.

"Oh, J——!"

J.J. cared not a damn about the people on the balconies. He clutched his wife and kissed her as a man kisses for the first time the mouth of his beloved.

"Oh, J., all the people on the balconies!"

"Do you mind?"

"No, not really. Do it again."

J.J. did it again, ignoring those other humans, nor suspecting that he might be tantalising some other man or woman. Two separate balconies were interested, but differently so; a woman with grey hair and a gentle, wasted face smiled upon them benignly; a dark man, with a starved, fierce visage, stared for a moment and then hid such passion behind a book. Never again would he be able to kiss like that; never would the woman he desired feel his kisses. Such frustration was like a spasm of harsh pain.

The Pope children became decorous, and abruptly shy. Holding hands, they walked across the grass to the shade of Kitty's tree. They had become conscious of all those windows as eyes.

Said J.J.: "You look just as you used to look."

"Do I?"

"Yes, and more so. What's the weight?"

"Eight stone, three."

"How much in kilos?"

"Oh, I've forgotten. They worked it out for me."

"Walking?"

"Yes, all the way down to the lake, yesterday."

"Mustn't get overtired."

"No."

She sat down in her chair, and J.J. on the grass at her feet. He let his head rest against her knees. What a glorious day! He felt like his old small self, ready to throw off his clothes and dance in the sun.

"Has Ellen been——?"

"Quite a mother to me. Sir Thomas sent you a kiss."

"Have I had it?"

"Not that sort of kiss, young woman. When did Dr. Adler see you last?"

"Two days ago."

"Say anything?"

"He said I might go back in September."

J.J. clasped his knees, and looked at the sky. Should he tell her about the cottage? There were moments when secrets could not be kept.

"Kit."

"Yes, darling."

"I have found the cottage."

"Have you? Oh, do tell me about it."

"It isn't quite a cottage yet. It's becoming one."

"Oh, how?"

"I'm building it."

"Oh, J., where?"

"Yatley. Lovely spot, on the hills. Not too far for shopping. By the way, we shall shop at the old shop."

He felt her fingers in his hair.

"Tell me about it, everything."

J.J. felt in his breast pocket. He had plans there, neatly folded and enclosed in an envelope. His secret was out, and inevitably out now that Kitty was a sick woman no longer. He spread out the plans, and bending forward with her hands on his shoulders, she listened while he demonstrated Kit's Cot.

"See, dear, full south, with a beechwood behind. All that's view," and he gave a southward sweep of the hand. "Here's the road, and the gate and the drive. There's Yatley. Yes, we've got a whole acre. That's heather and gorse."

"But, the house, dear?"

"Like an old farm house, long and low. Only one flight of stairs. Here's the living-room with a big window, fills half the wall. That's a glass loggia where you could sun yourself. Here's our bedroom. Radiators, in the living-room, bedroom and hall."

"Radiators!"

"Yes. Keep you warm. I've arranged for a small kitchen. Have to make our own gas."

"Oh, J., you are clever!"

"Too clever, sometimes. Then there is Ellen's bedroom, and a spare-room, and a bathroom. See down here. We can put up a garage. You'll have to learn to drive a small car."

She patted his ears.

"How lovely! Oh, J., I'm so excited. When is it going to be finished?"

"End of October, I hope. My builder has taken on extra men. I said he must hustle."

"Can we go in, when I——?"

"That will depend on the weather. If it is a dry summer, and we get good fires going for a week, we may manage it. Not going to let you go into a damp house."

"Have you told Ellen?"

"Yes."

"Will she——?"

"Yes. She's country, and she won't mind. Besides, she's rather attached to you."

"Dear old Ellen. Oh, J., I'm so happy."

"Well, so am I."

Two people standing at an open French window on the ground floor, watched them benignly.

Said Madame La Jeune: "Shall I? Your time is so precious."

Dr. Adler fondled his beard.

"No. Let them be for a moment. I'll go up and see all the others first. I'm glad my news will be good."

Madame La Jeune touched his sleeve.

"You do good things. That—is life."

The little Jew smiled.

"It should be."

Circumstances were so kind during the summer that J.J. began to wonder whether there was some catch in the story. So accustomed had he become to frustration, prejudice, and trouble that he was like a solitary traveller in a strange land, glancing right and left and expecting some enemy to leap on him from an ambuscade. Nothing untoward happened. Mr. Purvis pressed on with the building during a summer that was exceptionally dry and sunny. Dr. Adler's

reports upon Kitty continued to be favourable. The first consignment of Pepsonol was on the market, and had been taken up with surprising friendliness by druggists all over the country, which after all, was not so surprising, for Sir Thomas and Pratten's Pills employed travellers who were experienced and persuasive, and who knew their clients from Newcastle to Torquay. P.P. Pills were, in a sense, to act like ballbearings to the new products, helping them to roll smoothly into windows and on to counters. These travelling salesmen could spin a story. P.P. Products was to be one of the big things of the century; the company had engaged the services of one of the ablest research-workers in Europe. Pepsonol was given prominence in the advertising columns of the Sunday papers. Testimonials began to arrive, strange, naïve letters which J.J. read with a kind of whimsical shyness. Was this to be the kind of fame he had dreamed of; not Harley Street and professional reputation, but laudations from the cook and the bus-conductor, the postman, and housewives whose cooking was indifferent, and who ate too fast!

When Kit's Cot's roof was on J.J. took Sir Thomas to see the place, or rather Sir Thomas drove J.J. down in his car. It was a sweltering day late in August, and Sir Thomas, who was no mean hustler, was astonished at the speed with which the building had gone up. Well, after all, they could do things in the country. Tom Purvis' men were not ca-canny. They did not hold on to the job, and work out overtime. Tom had a head-bricklayer whose boast was that he could lay twelve hundred bricks a day and lay them well and truly. Sir Thomas poked about, and tried to find something jerry, but both work and materials were good. He had to confess that these country craftsmen put the erectors of the new P.P. building to shame.

"Tradition, my lad, that's what it must be. I suppose these fellows still have some sort of pride in the job."

J.J. supposed so too.

But Sir Thomas did make a suggestion. If land was available, why not buy more of it now that the price was easy, and the lawyers were on the job? They were sitting side by side on the craftsman's dinner-plank under the shade of a beech tree, and Sir Thomas looked at the landscape, and found it more than good. It was a financial asset.

"Why not take another ten acres, J.J.?"

"What should I do with it?"

"Sit on it. What did you pay?"

"Fifty pounds for my acre."

"My lad, it's a gift. Besides, think of the future."

J.J. looked puzzled, and Sir Thomas amused.

"I don't quite see—— I mean, this place should do for Kitty and me."

"Now, yes. This is a unique spot, J.J. If I were you I'd have more of it and insure against interference."

"Yes—but——"

"Question of capital?"

"Yes. Besides, we shall have to be careful."

Sir Thomas' kindly, porcine eyes twinkled at him. How innocent was science in the ways of the world! It would create all sorts of nice theories, and forget to budget for human nature.

"What's your idea of the future, J.J.?"

"A thousand a year."

Sir Thomas chuckled.

"You seem to forget one thing."

"What's that, sir?"

"That you are a partner in the show. Have you ever troubled to ponder on what our profits may be?"

"No, I don't think I have."

"You sweet babe! Do you know what my income is from my portentous pills?"

"No."

"Round about fifty thousand a year. P.P. Products may go bigger than that. Put it at sixty thousand in ten years. Your share would be about ten thousand a year."

J.J.'s face was almost the face of an astonished boy. He had not contemplated such affluence.

"Seems rather incredible to you, J.J.?"

"It does."

"Well, it's more than a possibility. You may be thinking in terms of a hundred acres, instead of in one. If you don't want to buy, I will, and hold it for you. What's the use of money if it doesn't give you space and elbow-room?"

While J.J. was arranging to dispose of the lease of No. 5, his neighbours were wondering how the little man earned a living. They saw him set out each morning at a very early hour, wearing a lounge suit and a soft hat, and carrying a little brown attaché case. Ellen was questioned by other maids who had been prompted by their employers' curiosity, and all that Ellen could say was that Mr. Pope was in business.

"Funny business!" said Dr. Steel.

In later years, J.J.'s neighbours were to remember their conjectures, and feel, somehow, that the little devil had fooled them. Who would have thought— Dr. Steel, who, behind a bland bedside manner, concealed the soul of a commercialist, would speak scathingly of the little outsider who had sold himself to the charlatans, and yet Dr. Steel was to be surprised and shocked by some of his patients dosing themselves with P.P. Products. They even dared to assert that these quack nostrums had done them a great deal of good. As for "Anodynia," Dr. Steel was to discover it in his wife's medicine cupboard, and lose his temper over the scandal.

"What! You take that damned stuff?"

"I do."

"Bloody rubbish!"

"Oh, shut up, Charles. It has given me more relief than any of your prescriptions."

So shocked and incensed was her husband that he snatched the bottle and threw it out of the window into the back garden.

"That's the way I treat such muck."

"Well, that's rather wasteful. It will cost you two and sixpence when I buy a new bottle."

"Let me tell you, Florence, that if I find that stuff in the house——"

"Then you had better not look for it."

Dr. Steel would have been still more angry had he known that J. J. Pope received twopence on each bottle that was sold.

And where did the little man go each Sunday? When Ellen was asked, she replied that Mr. Pope went down into Surrey. He was building a house in the country. Building a house! Where, the devil, did the money come from? Ellen rather enjoyed talking for effect and piling up the sensations. Yes, it was a wonderful new house, with radiators, and a garage, and grounds. Chellwood Terrace was

puzzled and annoyed. When you have labelled a man as a crank and a failure, it is displeasing to the mediocre mind to discover an object of pitying contempt hatching out as an eagle.

J.J. cared for none of these matters. They were below his purview. He was watching a little house grow and complete itself, and open its eyes to the landscape, and dry its feathers in the sun. His land was being fenced. His gate and Kitty's gate was up, nice and white and private, for this little house on the Surrey hills was giving to J. J. Pope that which he had always lacked, a sense of security, a happy corner which was his own.

He took Ellen down with him one Sunday. Ellen was to criticise the kitchen economy, the stove, the sink, the cupboards, the larder. J.J.'s idea of a kitchen was that it should be an efficient and labour-saving sort of lab. Ellen was a pleasant person to take on such an expedition. She threw herself into the adventure, bounced into it, splashed and chattered. Wasn't the country lovely! But when Ellen saw the little red-brown house sitting on its grassy plateau, with the towering woods behind it, and that deep valley flowing below, she stood like a good countrywoman, stared and was silent.

J.J. waited. Ellen drew a deep breath, appeared about to speak, and remained dumb. There was nothing to be said about that landscape. It was England.

"Come and look at the kitchen, Ellen."

"Yessir."

J.J. was to discover that country eyes were not city eyes, and that they saw or saw differently all that the city eyes did not see, but Ellen also had eyes for a kitchen. She stood in the middle of the floor, and slowly revolving, took in all the fittings in detail. Ellen was getting her bearings. If the kitchen table was just there, you had not to walk five miles for everything you wanted. You reached for the cupboard, and it was there; you took two steps to the right, and lo, the dresser and shelves were waiting for you.

"Coo," said Ellen, "a woman must 'ave done this."

J.J. laughed.

"I'm the woman."

"You, sir?"

"Well, one wants everything to hand. What do you think of the stove, Ellen? It was put in only on Friday."

"You're a marvel," said Ellen, and went to open the oven door.

Yes, the oven had two stories, and was not like a great barrack of a house.

"Has it got a boiler?"

"Rather. The hot water storage-tank is in that cupboard."

Ellen went to look at the cupboard and boiler.

"Nice and handy for my linen."

"Come and look at the hot-water furnace."

"Another one, sir?"

"To warm the house. No, you won't have to stoke it. It's off the scullery. I shall have to have a gardener, I expect, and he'll do the stoking."

Ellen paused to look at the sink. She stood and rested her hands on it.

"Just my height, sir. Shan't get a crick in my back."

"That's as it should be, Ellen."

Ellen had to go all over the house, and when she had seen it all she said: "Coo, won't the little missis be pleased!"

When J. J. Pope went to Switzerland to bring his wife home he did a thing which he had never done before, he gave a dinner-party, and not at his own mild old hotel, but at Territet's colossal caravanserai, The Grand. At least, it appeared colossal to J.J. The guests were Madame La Jeune and Dr. Adler, and the wine was champagne. The Grand was very full of English who appeared formidably important in evening dress, but like so many of those who look somebodies, mostly they were nobodies. Neither J.J. nor Dr. Adler wore boiled shirts; J.J. was in a dark lounge suit, Dr. Adler in a frock coat. Doubtless their neighbours deemed them rather obscure and uncivilised persons, and it was a concession on the part of the *maître d'hôtel* to let them in at all, but Dr. Adler was a somewhat distinguished person, and on the Continent brains may matter more than boiled shirts.

It was a very happy meal. J.J. had taken Kitty down to Territet to buy a frock. It was a French frock, the colour of amber, and Kitty looked very exquisite in it, or so J.J. thought. Her soft skin had caught from the sun a delicate brown tint; her eyes were dark velvet, her hair matched her frock. J.J. was in a puckish, exultant mood, and he was rather new to champagne.

"What do you think of your patient, doctor?"

Dr. Adler beamed like a little swarthy god.

"She does me credit, I think, yes, obviously."

Kitty looked prettily self-conscious in the glow of such dual appreciation.

"You have been so kind to me, everybody."

Madame La Jeune smiled gently upon her.

"That has not been difficult."

Afterwards, J.J. and Dr. Adler took their cigars down to the lake and walked beside it in the moonlight. It was J.J.'s first cigar, and fortunately it did not disagree with him. Moreover, he would have preferred a pipe, but the lounge of "The Grand" had overawed him. Both men were pleasantly warm with wine, and J.J. was absorbing a new humanism, for Dr. Adler's philosophy was like the moonlight on the water and the mountain peaks beyond it.

"I have not thanked you yet."

"My dear fellow, when one's craft succeeds, it gives what you call thanks."

J.J. was feeling secretly envious of the Swiss. What a good job was this, even though you did not always cheat death.

"May I ask how you began?"

Dr. Adler paused and looked across the lake, and in the moonlight his face had a sudden sadness.

"Because life wounded me. Some wounds stay with one."

J.J. was silent, waiting.

"It happened to me, as it happened to you, but in my case she did not recover."

"I'm sorry, sir, I did not mean to——"

Dr. Adler's fingers gripped J.J.'s arm.

"I do not mind speaking of it. Some things make life seem real. I was just a hard young man of science. But to watch the struggle, to feel helpless, to see someone whom you loved, die. To meet the appeal in the eyes, and know that you are helpless. That, is the real revelation. Just naked emotion, and without emotion, mere cleverness can be the devil."

J.J. stood very still. The voice of this other man seemed to be the voice of some other self. Nor, as they strolled back through the hotel garden had J.J. any words to utter.

29

KITTY first saw the cottage when the beeches were beginning to turn colour. They drove over the hill from Yatley and in at the new white gate, and there both Ellen and the new home were waiting. The cabman got down to help Ellen in with the luggage, and J.J. and his wife walked to the edge of the grassy terrace which still was mottled with the builder's scars.

J.J. was anxious. He watched Kitty's face.

"We'll soon change all this."

She looked at the house and the burning beeches behind it under a watered-silk sky, and then she turned and looked at the landscape.

"Oh, J., how did you find it?"

"Mr. Larcombe. Sits down nicely, doesn't it?"

He was casual, a man acutely self-conscious. Kitty faced about to meet the house.

"It might have been there for years. Isn't it wonderful to think it is ours."

He smiled at her.

"I'm not burying you, my dear."

"Burying me! Just think, I shall get up each morning and see this."

She turned again to the landscape, and suddenly her hand fluttered up, waving to it. She threw her head back, and her eyes laughed.

"Good night and good morning. Oh, J., now let's see the house."

The cabman was waiting, for J.J. had forgotten to pay him, and

while he felt in his pocket, he looked over his shoulder at Kitty. His eyes said: "Wait for me. I want us to go in together."

There were oak seats in the porch, and Kitty sat down on one of them, the sunny one and waited. This going into the new home should be a hand in hand business. She swung her legs and sat with her hands tucked under her like a child.

The cabman was getting up on his box, and J.J. crossed the little strip of new gravel. He saw his wife sitting there as though she had been there always, and would be there always. How swiftly that which was not could become reality, just like a page turning in the book of Time!

It may be said about Kitty's cottage, that the building and the garnishing of it had taught J.J. to do what Sir Thomas Pratten had dared to do as a younger man; take risks. In for a penny, in for a pound! All the new urges might be towards the safety first of State Socialism, a vast insurance scheme to provide that no one at any time should suffer anything. J.J., in his later years, was to be one of the last of the individualists, and anathema both to the Official Slave World and Enlightened Labour, because his altruism, being individual, was suspect, and therefore to be attacked and slandered. J.J. had built and furnished as an individual, who, having a new faith in his own material prospects, had spent lavishly and fastidiously.

Kitty was delighted and astonished. If the tribute was to her, and it was, she could thrill over these new carpets and gay curtains, the comfort and colour and gaillard spirit of her new home. No. 5 Chellwood Terrace was here, and so much more, lovely pieces of old furniture, china, a Madame Récamier couch, an old grandfather clock, panels of flowery needlework. The bright and polished efficiency of kitchen and bathroom piqued the woman in her. Had J.J. thought of all these things? And what a lot of money they must have cost!

"Oh, J., did you do it all?"

"How?"

"I mean, the curtains and the carpets."

"I chose them. It became rather a hobby."

She sat down on the bed with its yellow silk eiderdown.

"It must have cost——"

"Well, it's worth it."

"It's lovely. It takes my breath away."

"It mustn't do that. You see, my sweet, we shan't have to be so niggardly in the future. All this silly talk about money not mattering."

"If it can give——"

"Beauty and peace and space."

"But it mustn't spoil one."

J.J. laughed quietly.

"Some things may be incapable of being spoilt, but I'll remember the warning."

From the very beginning of things Kitty loved her house, even though she had walked into it without any whimsies of her own. J.J.'s nickname for it did not satisfy her, so J.J. left her to choose its title, Beechanger or Weald View, which should it be? Beechanger became Kitty's choice, and it appeared on her new notepaper "Beechanger, Yatley, Surrey." J.J. soon surrendered the weekend idea. He bought for himself a small car, or rather P.P. Products Co. purchased it for him, and treated the outlay as part of the firms transport expenses. The journey to Edgeware took about an hour and twenty minutes, and J.J. left at eight in the morning, but in the winter he found night driving with oil lamps somewhat of an ordeal. They had engaged a gardener, one John Potter, and Potter was taught to drive; he took his master to Dewhurst each morning, and met him again in the evening.

The garden was their adventure during the early part of that winter. Kitty planned it, if her rather varied enthusiasms could be described as planning, and in spite of Potter's orderly soul, the Beechanger garden was and always remained a delightful mass of disorder. J.J. came to like it like that, a place from which Nature refused to be banished, even as she refused to be banished from human nature, in spite of the decrees of science. Weeds would continue, and plants, pushed into a strange environment, persist in dying, and pests remain parasitic, even as people fall in love with the wrong people, and drink and eat too much, or are lazy or stupid, and fall sick and have pains. Kitty had her terrace and her lawns

and her rose-beds and her herbaceous border, her fruit and vegetables, and Mr. Larcombe, who liked her pretty face, gave her plants and advice and admiring glances. Kitty was taught to drive the car, and did so at weekends. She shopped at the old Yatley shop, and also in London. Twice a week she would travel to town with J.J. and enjoy herself in Oxford Street, and meet J.J. at Waterloo on the way home.

Kitty appeared to have forgotten that she had been a sick woman, but J.J. had forgotten nothing. England might be bearable until Christmas, but the dreariness of the long waiting for a spring which so often proved an illusion, had been very real to J.J. even as a child. To put it crudely, he had felt his stomach drop after Christmas, and March tornadoes had sometimes roused a raging impatience in him. J.J. wanted Kitty out of the country for part of her first winter. That glued-up patch of poison in her was too fresh, and his one dread was that it should break out once more.

"I want you to go to Menton for two months, Kit."

She looked pathetic.

"I don't want to, J."

"Your first winter, you know."

"But I feel so well. I don't want to leave everything."

"You'll get the sun."

"Must I?"

"I want you to."

He was so in earnest about it, and so profoundly concerned for her sake that she gave way. J.J. had been making inquiries, and it was Peter who was able to tell him of a unique, and funny little old hotel behind and above Menton. Sybil had been there. It was the Annunciata, perched on a ridge among olives, pines and flowers, with vine terraces, and looking into the red eye of the morning as the sun rose over the sea. This little white-faced, green-jalousied hotel gathered all the sunlight that the southern coast could give. It was reached by a funicular railway. It possessed peace. It gave you good and simple food, air, light, and tranquil nights.

So Kitty, not because she wanted to go, but because J.J. wished it, travelled south in the middle of January under the care of a friend of Squire Larcombe's who also was going south. Happiness has strange sources, and J.J. felt happier when she had gone because,

even in missing her, he felt more secure now that she was in the sunlight. Moreover, the Hotel Annunciata proved to be all that Sybil had said, and Kitty's letters were more than happy.

"It's simply wonderful, J. The sweet peas are out, and roses, and it's so warm in the middle of the day that you can lie in the sun. There's a lovely old monastery, empty, just by us, with great big cypresses. I can see the sea from my window. It is not like an English sea.

Can you come out for a fortnight?

You'd love it."

But J.J. could not spare the time. The P.P. Products Co. was getting into full production, and J.J. was working ten hours a day, and preparing to put "Anodynia" on the market. Mr. Hempstead was rubbing his hands over the mounting sales of Pepsonol. He had budgeted for a three years' campaign before results would begin to show in any magnitude, but in Pepsonol the P.P. Products Co. appeared to have struck oil.

It had.

Too much success may be as boring as too much sickness and too much old age, but both Kitty and her husband refused to be bored by it. "Anodynia" proved to be the most successful of the Company's products, and most astoundingly so, a Gold Goddess floating about the world, and showering upon her creator a rain of gold. J.J. would laugh over it and declare that he had given the working world a domestic anodyne, and that no one knew his name. At the end of the fifth year J.J.'s income was returnable at twenty-three thousand pounds or so per annum. The Inland Revenue was greatly interested in him. It did not regard him as a good citizen, but as a parasite to be plucked. It asked him through his accountant interminable questions, and gave him the impression that he was a rogue and a liar.

J.J. banked both at Dewhurst and in London. Kitty banked at Dewhurst, for J.J. handed over to her each year a wad of securities and she possessed an income of her own. When J.J. walked into his Dewhurst bank, the manager would come out to meet him, and either make polite conversation over the counter or invite him into his private room. The Yatley and Dewhurst Cricket and Football

Clubs, and many other such bodies elected J.J. as a vice-president and held out naïve hands. He subscribed here and he subscribed there. The Dewhurst Hospital invited him to become a governor, but J. J. Pope, chuckling over his reputation as a charlatan, thought it discreet to refuse the honour, but he became a subscriber to the tune of fifty pounds a year.

Riches can become a serious complication, threatening your plan of living, and J.J. and Kitty, sitting in their garden one summer evening, and looking at all that loveliness that was England, spoke of this problem. Their life at Beechanger was tranquil and good, a working life in which mystery mattered more than money, for, both to J.J. and his wife life was a mysterious business to be wondered at and explored. Beechanger was the same Beechanger, and the only change that had been made was the addition of a lab. built out at the back, and which J.J. had christened his playbox.

Said J.J. to his wife: "Old Larcombe tells me that we are thought of as funny folk."

"Funny, dear! Why?"

"We don't exhibit our cash value. Don't you think you would like a bigger house?"

Kitty turned her head to glance at her husband, and saw on his face the puckish, mischievous look she knew so well.

"No. Why should I?"

"I thought that all women——"

"It would only mean more bother, J. Aren't you happy here?"

"Completely. It gives me peace."

"Then, why should we alter things?"

"Just to present our neighbours an excuse for accusing us of showing off! But wouldn't you like a yacht?"

"A yacht? Whatever for?"

"Prestige. Or a villa on the Riviera? Or a house in town?"

Kitty reached for his hand and held it.

"J., I don't want our happy life here spoilt."

"Nor I."

"It's so peaceful. It's like the garden, not too big. And we have that landscape."

"Exactly. To look at without paying a penny. If you had six servants, and a butler, and six gardeners——"

"Don't, J. What a lot of worry it would mean."

J.J. did what he had done so often, raised her hand and kissed it, a strange gesture for a husband.

"Oh, wise woman! I don't want to be a sort of social exhibit, Kit. I'm a worker. I want to be able to do my work in peace and obscurity. The only things that really matter to me——"

"Yes, dear."

"Are my work and you."

She drew his hand into her lap, and sat and looked at the landscape.

"What a good man you are, J."

"I, good! Great Scott, no! I'm one of the most selfish devils that ever was. I'm just asking the question 'Why should we let our happy life here be spoilt by a damned lot of money, and all that it might land us in?' If you feel that way too."

"I do, J. Don't let us allow it to spoil things for us."

So determined were fate or providence or the incalculable play of circumstance to transform J. J. Pope into a plutocrat, that even tragedy took a hand in the game.

Peter and Sybil were killed on the Stelvio Pass. How it happened no one but the instigator of the tragedy knew, for the German, crowding his big Benz round a blind corner, and striking Peter's near front wheel a glancing blow, had sent the English car through the low parapet and over the cliff. The dead and the wreckage were not discovered for a week, and then only by chance. Meanwhile, the German gentleman was back in Berlin.

Peter's death was a lethal blow to old Tom Pratten. Nothing would deter him from going out to the scene of the accident, and J.J. went with him. They discovered little but the horror of the thing; those two fine creatures lying dead in the sun for a week, to be gathered up and hurried into the earth. The English consul responsible had done what he could, but the Austrian authorities had looked sympathetic and had shrugged their shoulders. Almost they had held expressive noses. The heat of summer and two disfigured, disintegrated corpses! What would you? Fire or Mother Earth. Earth had been the only elements that could conceal with

decency that rotting flesh. Old Tom was shocked deep down in his vitals. With characteristic stubbornness he had persisted in driving up that mountain road, and standing where the gap in the low stone wall marked the site of the tragedy. Peter's red machine was still lying down below among the undergrowth and rocks, and looking like a squelch of fresh blood on the hillside.

What a macabre end for two such splendid creatures! J.J. was shocked by it, and by the memories it seemed to tarnish. His Dark Lady of Dreams, and Peter the Lion left to—— But that was a piece of fetid realism from which he shrank. Pathetic too was Sir Thomas' last whim. That wrecked machine was to be gathered up, packed, and railed to England. It should go to Peter's own works, and there be examined and be reported on by the experts. J.J. humoured his old friend, though refusing to believe that any verdict could be drawn from the twisted mass of metal. "Let 'em try," said the old man, and the car travelled home. Yet, strange to say, Peter's own car-tester who examined it, and who was grimly determined to prove both car and master to have been what he had known them to be, spotted a significant mark on the near front wheel and tyre. Mr. Peter had been driving downhill, had he? He would have been on the right side of the road. Something had struck that wheel, and turned him towards the wall. The wheel of another car? Yes, probably.

The story ended there. Sir Thomas, insisting on being told the verdict, did with characteristic obstinacy determine to go out and discover anything more that could be discovered about the accident. Some other man had killed his son. A mad and hopeless journey it might be, and Sir Thomas Pratten was on the very point of starting when nature intervened. He was found dead in bed on the very morning he should have left Pollards. His heart had ceased beating while he slept.

30

To J.J. Sir Thomas Pratten had appeared to be one of those strong and vital persons who are immortal, and the suddenness of his passing was like a cliff-edge on a dark night. What would the new world be, and his own position in it? J.J. had never explored the future as it shaped at the moment; he was innocent of expectations, and when the nature of Sir Thomas' will was revealed to him, he was profoundly touched and astonished.

There were a number of legacies, one to Kitty of ten thousand pounds.

As for P.P. Products Co., Sir Thomas had willed such a proportion of his shares to his partner that J.J. should find himself in control of the concern, that is to say he would be the owner of just more than half the shares. The rest, in a previous will, had been left to Peter, but old Tom had had a codicil inserted after his son's death. Various proportions of these shares were left to his dead wife's relations, to Mr. Hempstead, to a number of his old employees, and to various charities. The market value of the £1 shares stood at 32/6d., and J.J. found himself a capitalist to the extent of some three hundred thousand pounds, and in control of the Company. The thing astounded him. Almost, it was melodrama. It gave him two restless nights, and a moment of panic. Not till he came to comprehend the full significance of this fortune did he begin to visualise all that it might offer him. Power, leisure, security, the authority to seek and to explore without any man being able to say him nay, the privilege to do good things in any way that might seem good to him. Did he exult? It must be confessed that he did.

At their first official conference Mr. Hempstead was secretly amused by his superior's solemn acceptance of the responsibilities of wealth. Plainly, Mr. J. J. Pope was perturbed, and perhaps just a little scared, but how peculiar to be afraid of an income that might amount to seventy thousand pounds a year! Mr. Hempstead, while regretting Sir Thomas, was not in the least worried by his own new dignity. He was more than a mere general manager; he held a solid personal interest in the business, and he was quite confident of its future.

"There is no need for you to worry, sir."

J.J. raised his eyebrows. Was he worrying? Mr. Hempstead appeared to be in a paternal mood, and very well pleased with life, though he wore a black band on his arm.

"You lay the golden eggs, sir, we sell 'em."

J.J. laughed.

"Am I such a goose?"

"Pardon me, sir, that was not my meaning at all. You, in a sense, are Pratten Products. You create 'em; we sell 'em. What I mean is, the management can relieve you of all routine worries. Besides, when a show like this gets going, it goes on going, only more and more so. We've got the public, and why? Because your preparations give the public what it wants. They'll go on doing it, and more and more so, provided we don't drop down on adverts."

Mr. Hempstead was a good soul, if somewhat commonplace in his language and his ideals. He was trustworthy; he was capable, and yet J.J. could never quite escape from the feeling that he was in association with a red and beefy butcher slapping lumps of meat down on a marble slab with a heartiness that sometimes made you wince. Nor had J.J. any intention of allowing Mr. Hempstead to hack and slap just as he pleased. He knew just what horrid splurges Mr. Hempstead could perpetrate in the form of "Adverts." J.J. might be willing to leave the commercial side somewhat in the general manager's hands, but he was very determined that P.P. Products should not be Pratten Pills.

"I think we had better meet weekly, Mr. Hempstead. I should like you to submit to me the main details of the business."

"Of course, sir."

"I wish to see every advertisement before it appears."

"Naturally, sir. This isn't a cheap-jack show. I take it——"

"Exactly. My point is, Mr. Hempstead, that we shall strive to give and to give in a particular way, for what we get."

Altruism, what! Mr. Hempstead stared at his superior rather like a bull glaring through a field gate at that incomprehensible and menacing creature, a small boy with a stick. The boy might be just a boy, only mischievous, or the stick might have a nail in it, and the nail might prick Mr. Bull's nose. Moreover, the gate stood between him and that baffling urchin whose master-intelligence might puzzle him.

That is the kind of illusion which deceives large, beefy men. Because J.J. was a little fellow and the possessor of ridiculous legs, the large, bovine males believed that he could be butted over gates and hedges.

Mr. Hempstead confided his suspicions to his wife.

"I rather think I am going to have trouble with the little fellow."

Mr. Hempstead was both right and wrong. In a very short time he was having no trouble at all with J.J., simply because he discovered that he was the bull in a yard, and that horribly intelligent and determined small boy held a stick with a very big nail on it. Mr. Hempstead had imagined that he would be P.P. Products Ltd., and that what he advised would be the law. J. J. Pope educated him into thinking otherwise.

At a famous and expensive Scotch Hydropathic Establishment, where hydropathy was very much an afterthought, and people gathered to play golf and bridge, and to exhibit their success in the world to the world, it was the custom to spread yourself in the loggia and watch other people arrive by car. In fact the parade of cars on the vast semicircle of gravel below the terrace was a symbolic affair. A man was known by his car; he was judged by his car. Society and success were graded by the amount of money that had been expended upon the symbol of the chariot.

Dr. Charles Steel, plus wife, had come to Scotland in a 20 h.p. Peerless. Dr. Steel was plus one at golf, and now senior partner in his firm. He wore very colourful Harris plus-four suits, and the air of a man who impressed all women. He and his wife had just brought a mixed foursome to a successful conclusion, and were taking tea in the loggia, when that rather shabby little car tottered up

the majestic drive. It was a mere ten horse "Comet," with a rather faded hood, and brakes that squeaked when they were applied. Dr. Steel, eating buttered toast, and looking well buttered, watched a little man emerge from this very inferior vehicle.

"Gosh! See who it is?"

His wife saw the object, but did not recognise it.

"Don't remember."

"Why that little squit who used to live opposite. Got himself defrocked for turning quack."

"Oh, Pope."

"Doesn't look very pontifical, does he? Patent medicines can't be paying."

"Fancy him coming here!"

"Some cheek, what! Hallo, he's complete with wife."

A pretty woman slipped out by the other door, and stood looking about her rather shyly, while her husband mounted the steps, crossed the terrace and entered the Holy Place. Over the door was written in invisible letters "Only those who have big bank balances may enter here." Mr. Pope interviewed a very superior lady in the office, and the superior lady became less so when she heard his name.

"Oh, yes, sir, your suite is ready."

"Can I have my luggage brought in?"

"Of course, sir. I'll ring for the luggage porter."

An equally superior porter in green and gold followed J.J. out to the car, and having appraised its value, continued to be superior. Also, the luggage was none too new, three well-worn suit-cases and a hat box. And there were no golf clubs!

"Booked your room, sir?"

"Yes, Number Three."

The porter stared, and for some strange reason became less superior. No. 3 was one of the most expensive suites in the Holy of Holies.

Mr. and Mrs. Pope did not come down to take tea in the loggia. They had driven a long way, and both of them were tired. They had tea in their sitting-room, and Kitty, who had a headache, swallowed two tablets of Anodynia, and lay down to sleep. J.J., who had left the Comet on the gravel, went to drive it round to the garage where a very superior attendant in a white coat did not greet him and the car with any enthusiasm.

"Afraid we're full up, sir."

"Oh no you're not," said J.J., "a lock-up is reserved for me."

The attendant cast an oblique glance at the vehicle. Why lock that up? Nobody was likely to pinch it.

"What name, sir?"

"Pope. Suite Number Three."

The magic number had a peculiar effect upon the attendant. He became brisk, and oily, like his job.

"Of course, sir. Shall I put her away for you?"

"Thanks," said J.J. "I'll do it myself."

He drove the car into the large white chamber where she looked like a mouse in a super-mousetrap. The attendant was waiting for the possible tip. He did not get it.

"Like her washed down, sir?"

"I don't think you need trouble. My chauffeur will be coming up in a day or two."

A chauffeur for that!

Dr. Steel liked to hold the stage in a somewhat Elizabethan manner, being a fine figure of a man, and colourful in his clothes. The terrace of the Holy of Holies might have been planned for so professional a swaggerer. Dr. Steel was the kind of man who, if he conceived the other person to be his inferior, and he considered most men his inferiors as males, would present one finger, nod patronisingly and say "How do." Charlie Steel had made up his mind to confront J. J. Pope in public, and snub him as he deserved to be snubbed. A little charlatan who had the impudence to present himself on such a stage needed a rebuff.

So, Dr. Steel in coffee-coloured jacket and plus fours, with green stockings and beautiful brown shoes, awaited his opportunity and took it. It was on the second day, and J.J. had appeared upon the crowded terrace to order tea and secure a table. Dr. Steel strolled up to him, hands in pockets, large and important.

"Ha, Pope, I don't suppose you remember me?"

J.J. gave him a quick, upward look.

"Oh, yes, I do."

"It is a good many years since——"

J.J. was signalling to a waiter, and he ignored Dr. Steel for the moment.

"Waiter."

"Yes, sir."

"Find me a table, and get me tea for two."

"Yes, sir."

J.J. turned again at his leisure to confront Charles Steel.

"Still in Chelsea?"

"Very much so, but rather more than Chelsea."

"Kensington too, I expect."

"Well, a practice like ours——"

"Park Lane too, I presume."

Was the little devil trying to be facetious? Dr. Steel's rather bulging blue eyes became ominous.

"Ever regret the lapse, Pope?"

J.J. smiled.

"Ever use any of our products, Steel?"

"My dear sir!"

"They really are rather popular, you know, and might help you when you are posed for a prescription."

The waiter was beckoning to J.J. He had found a table, and J.J. with a smiling nod at Dr. Steel, walked off to secure it.

Not all the humour had yet been squeezed from the occasion. Dr. Steel, sitting down with his golfing friends, put J. J. Pope in the public pillory. Could they see that little man over there? They could. Well, that was a gentleman who had been chucked out of the medical profession for turning quack. No, and the scandal did not appear to have brought him much in the way of cash. Had they seen his car? A decrepit old 10 h.p. Comet. It was a wonder that the doddering old bus had managed to travel so far. Dr. Steel elaborated his irony. He spoke of J.J. as "Sequah," and reminded his friends that that perambulating quack had employed a gilded coach and a brass band. He was supposed to have made pots of money, the scoundrel!

One of the ladies was tactless. She asked Dr. Steel to tell her what firm J. J. Pope was interested in.

"A show called P.P. Products."

"Oh, I know. They make Anodynia. Really wonderful stuff."

Dr. Steel looked shocked.

"Dear lady, do you mean to say you dose yourself with that rubbish?"

"I'm afraid I do."

"Well, as a professional man I ought to warn you that you may be——"

The lady laughed.

"I'm sorry, but it suits me. Doesn't it, Guy?"

"Seems to, darling. By the way, Steel, did you say P.P. Products?"

"I did."

"Well, I do happen to know that they are pretty big people, and that their research side——"

"Afraid I'm not interested," said Dr. Steel.

But later he was interested when a very sumptuous car slid noiselessly up the drive and drew up below the terrace steps. It was a Rolls coupé in pearl grey, and from it emerged a chauffeur in French grey.

Dr. Steel sat up.

"I say, that's a posh bus. What lines! About the most expensive thing on the market."

"Isn't she lovely," said one of the ladies.

"An aristocrat. Such perfect taste."

The chauffeur was mounting the steps and looking about him. Someone rose from a table, and went to speak to the man.

"Hallo, Miller, had a good journey?"

"Perfect, sir. And you?"

"Oh, the old Comet got us here. You'll find her in the garage. I have a room for you."

"I can take the Comet back to-morrow, sir?"

"That's the idea. The Rolls people are satisfied now?"

"Oh, quite, sir. She's running as soft as silk."

Dr. Steel was filling a pipe, and doing it as though the wretched thing had offended him. Two of his golfing friends exchanged smiles.

"You seem to have got it rather wrong, old man."

"What?" snapped Charlie Steel.

31

J. J. POPE'S particular inspiration did not take actual shape until one of those occasions when he and Kitty celebrated. Kitty, like many happy women, was sentimental about dates, and anniversaries. She liked her birthday remembered, which it was, and the day of the year when she and J.J. were married. The peculiar thing about their comradeship was that they were set like two clocks to chime together, or cry "Cuckoo" in unison, and that they appeared to arrive at identical and simultaneous conclusions without any previous exchange of confidences.

Kitty would say: "Oh, J., when did you think of that?"

"It's been simmering for some time, darling."

"So it has with me."

There were two anniversaries which J. J. Pope persisted in honouring, the one sorrowful, the other happy. Many people would have said that he was a silly little ass to bother about either after ten years of married life, but, after all, when your particular happiness is linked with certain events, there may be a profound wisdom in recalling them. J.J. had never forgotten the night when he had seen those sinister little bodies in the field of his microscope, nor had he forgotten the first night he and Kitty had spent together after Dr. Adler had given her back to him.

They had been to Covent Garden to hear *Tristan und Isolde*, and had dined at Boulestin's, and were being driven homewards by Miller, when Kitty made her confession.

"I think we are being awfully selfish, J."

"Do you, my sweet?"

"Yes, I do. I have been feeling it for a long time. We just come out and dine and hear lovely music, because we remember something that matters to us. It does matter to you, doesn't it?"

"It might have mattered in blood and tears."

"Darling, I was so afraid—then. What lots of people must be afraid, and can't find a way out, like we did."

J.J. sat looking at the lights of the London streets, his arm resting in the sling of one of the upholstered straps. The movement of the car was an almost noiseless glide. Miller's fat and good-humoured neck showed through the glass screen.

"Yes, no way out. You have a wonderful way of expressing things, Kit."

"Have I?"

"Yes, you always had. It is rather rare. We get so tied up with our insincerities and our affectations. I gather you have an idea."

"Yes, J."

"So have I. I wonder if they agree. You begin."

While his wife was speaking, J. J. Pope watched the bitter and more obscure streets that made him think of dark canals with human shapes adrift in them. Yes, rather like frogs in a cistern whose sides were too steep and slippery for escape. What a wealth of silent anguish and despair must lie water-logged in this most rich city. But he was listening to Kitty, and hearing her gentle voice uttering almost the very words that had been troubling him for many months.

"We've been so lucky, J. We have so much. I feel we ought to do something to help."

"Those who couldn't find a way out?"

"Yes. You found a way out for me. I've been so happy. I feel I'd like to try and pass on some of my happiness."

"Just how, my sweet?"

"Well, we couldn't do it, of course, for many, but we might do it for some. I'm not being a little prig, J."

"You never would be that."

"I don't want to be goody-goody, and interfere with people's lives. I want to give some of them the chance I had."

J.J.'s hand snuggled its way under her velvet cloak.

"Like to hear my version?"

"Yes."

"You remember when I bought ten more acres of land? Well, something in me just said: 'Buy.' I wondered at the time whether it was just land-lust. It seems now that it wasn't. And I am just being a copyist. Old Adler must have planted the seed years ago. It has taken a long time to germinate."

"J., you mean?"

"A little English Switzerland for a few of those who have what you had. That site below the pines is just the place for it. I suppose it would cost us about twenty thousand to build a small sanatorium which would house two or three dozen cases. Then there would be the equipping, and the staffing and the upkeep."

"Oh, J., it is just what I have been thinking of!"

"There we go again! We must be about the most telepathic pair in England."

"You really mean to do it?"

"I do. My idea is to take only early cases, where there is hope, and to think about the afterwards."

"The afterwards?"

"Yes, it's no use setting people on their legs unless you can find them somewhere to walk to. Work that they can do. I see myself setting ourselves a devil of a lot of problems."

"And you could study the disease."

"In a way, yes. It has provoked me ever since you conquered it. But there's the snag."

"How, dear?"

"I'm not a doctor. I'm not allowed to be a doctor."

32

Such was J. J. Pope's inspiration. He would set up this living monument upon a hill as a thank offering, and a sign and a symbol. He could and did confess that he had been a hard little man, but that life had been merciful to him in sparing the one creature who was precious. This should be Kitty's show. Her idea was that the enterprise should be hers, endowed by him, but owned by her, if such an institution could be owned by anybody. Nor should it be christened a Sanatorium, or advertise the White Death to the Weald of Sussex. It should be a house, a rest house, a sunny and simple place like the woman who had inspired it.

J.J. did much cogitating, and it was on Yatley Heath that the vision came to him. He had wandered up there to the familiar and venerable beech tree, and remembering the puckish paganism of his boyhood days, that escapade in the nude, he had seen his building rise in white stone. Why not a little classic temple upon a Surrey hill? Yes, why not? An Ionic portico, a long, low, peaceful façade with high windows, and outer ambulatories into which beds could be moved and patients lie or sit in the sun. This Rest Home for the sick would be sheltered by the beech and pine woods, high above the damp clay lands, and open to all the sun and air that an English sky could give.

When he spoke of his vision to Kitty she saw it as he saw it; a white temple on a hill with the high woods behind it.

J.J. approached a notable firm of architects, to discover in its most active partner an enthusiast for so human a phantasy as this. A classic temple on a Surrey hill! Well, Britain had not been a stranger

to such temples, and after all J. J. Pope's temple could suggest Nash and the brilliant stateliness of his Regency mansions. Mr. Lancaster was Hymns Ancient and Modern. He had fallen for the flat roof, in that nicely concealed steel girders gave you more scope for spaciousness below. He would get out plans immediately if Mr. Pope would supply him with the necessary details as to accommodation that would be needed for patients and staff. When the plans had been passed they could invite tenders. And what sum did Mr. Pope propose to spend upon the place? Twenty thousand pounds. Mr. Lancaster would go into the matter and work out a rough estimate.

It was then that J.J. asked a significant question.

"Shall we be—obstructed?"

Mr. Lancaster raised black eyebrows.

"Obstructed?"

"Well, my experiences have been somewhat stormy."

"But, surely, a humane idea like this?"

J.J. smiled at Mr. Lancaster.

"Humanity can be so inhumane in its prejudices."

Mr. Lancaster twiddled a pencil.

"You mean——"

"There are people who might object to a Rest House in the neighbourhood. The—amenities—you know."

Mr. Lancaster nodded.

"Dreadful word. Yes—but I don't think any such protest could persuade authority to veto so humane a project as this."

Mr. Lancaster was right and he was wrong. J.J. let it be known through Mr. Larcombe, who was the most garrulous of men, that a rest-house for consumptives was to be built at Beechanger. There was opposition from certain people who even proposed to go to law about it; people whom the Ferocious Idealists described as Vested Interests. J.J. was to grow tired of that squawk. Why not Shirted Interests for a change? P.P. Products possessed a super-shirt, and was going to stick to it. When, in the future, the Loud Levellers asked the world why there should be First Class carriages, J.J. had his answer pat——

"Because there will always be first class minds."

J. J. Pope was not quite the social outcast that he had been, but a little autocrat with the sense of humour and a most potent purse. He had come to possess eminent friends, even in the Profession, humanists who also had a sense of humour, and who could appreciate the esoteric significance of J. J. Pope's non-conformity. Moreover, some members of the Profession had fallen so far below Charlie Steel's standard that they were prescribing P.P. Products for their patients.

How ironical was this.

The white rest-house on the hill was coming to life, and one evening J. J. Pope attended a dinner of the "Omnibus Club." He had been elected a member, which was a tribute to the club's tolerance, though the "Omnibus" was like its name, a vehicle containing all sorts and conditions of men. It was neither political nor social. In fact politics were taboo. And on this particular evening J.J. found himself seated between Sir Hereward Mollison and Max Gulliver—wit and journalist. Sir Hereward was a very serene and stately gentleman with a fine head of white hair, Max Gulliver rather like an intelligent and ironic chimpanzee.

It was a good dinner and good company, and men grew warm with wine and wit. J.J. happened to mention his project to Sir Hereward, and Sir Hereward was interested.

"Why—Rest House, Mr. Pope?"

"Well, sir—more welcoming, less melancholy. Adler of Geneva taught me something."

"I agree. The serene spirit that maketh well."

"But there is one snag."

"And what is that?"

"I might find myself in trouble with your people. A defrocked doctor——"

Sir Hereward smiled through the smoke of his cigar.

"We are not quite so—Old Testament, Mr. Pope. Besides, you could—obviate that."

"How?"

"By employing a resident physician. You might even find a man who was T.B. himself, and needed a light job."

"That's an idea, sir. Thank you for it."

"I happen to be on the G.M.C. I rather think I should father such an enterprise as yours."

"Thank you, sir. I take that very kindly from you."

Max Gulliver had been listening, and he joined in.

"That's one of the most humane ideas I have heard of for a long time, Mr. Pope. There's imagination in it. I'd like to write it up."

J.J. wanted to say "For God's sake, don't," but he walked more softly.

"Very good of you. But just at present we are in the constructive stage. Besides, I don't want to raise false hopes."

"Oh, just how?" asked the journalist.

"Well, we shall be quite a small show, and we shall have to pick our patients, those for whom there is reasonable hope."

Max Gulliver was quick of understanding.

"I think I see the point. Publicity might be—embarrassing."

"Yes. One might have to disappoint a number of poor devils."

Sir Hereward looked at him benignly.

"May I ask—how this idea came to you?"

J.J. was silent for a moment.

"Why, yes. My wife had T.B. and recovered. This is a kind of thank offering."

"Pope's Whited Sepulchre" as some unkind people called it, was rising on its Surrey hillside, and as it neared completion inquisitive persons passing along the valley road would look up towards Beechanger, and discover this new white building brilliant against the woodland. New it might be and shining like some Greek temple, but its lines and proportions were so perfect and its setting so verdant and serene that even hyper-sensitive cultivators of the picturesque could find no offence in it. Motorists in search of tea might ask: "Is that an hotel up there?" and when told that it was a sanatorium, they would pass on and think no more of it.

The business of staffing the hospital was proving something of a problem. J.J. found his matron through the sympathetic help of Sir Hereward Mollison who came down to see the building. It was his suggestion that J.J. should advertise for a resident M.O. who had

been a sufferer, and who might be sympathetic and interested and glad of an easy post. J.J. took Sir Hereward's advice, and got his man; a gentle but efficient creature misnamed Slaughter, who was unmarried, and to whom Beechanger made an instant appeal.

But the nursing staff? Could any women be persuaded to come to so solitary and Arcadian a spot?

Said Miss Byng—the prospective matron: "Leave it to me, Mr. Pope."

J.J. left it to her with excellent results.

The Rest House was to contain two wards for male and female patients, and ten small rooms for particular people, for J.J. was wise in feeling that you could not mix new wine and old. The more primitive creatures liked company and chatter, the more advanced and separative asked to be alone. J.J. as a separatist, understood all this. The two wards were to be christened "Jane Pope" and "Pratten."

Beechanger might be a house of mercy, but discipline was to be stringent, for the safeguarding of the staff. J.J. and Dr. Slaughter evolved a code of hygiene and produced a list of "Musts and Must Nots." The ignorant among the patients were not to be suffered to spit as they pleased.

It was Dr. Slaughter who put to J.J. that pregnant question:

"What of the afterwards?"

"Yes, what of the afterwards? He had been able to give Kitty protection and care. And Slaughter, fresh from his own somewhat bitter experience as a G.P. in the industrial Midlands, had been confronted by the terrible afterwards. Man had to work and live, and in working competitively—doom himself.

"You have given me my chance, sir. What of the others?"

"Yes, that's going to be a problem, Slaughter. We shall have to solve it somehow."

"It has never been solved yet."

"Perhaps because no one gave sufficient thought to it."

On the wall of his lab. J.J. tacked up a reminder:

"Remember the Afterwards."

In the years to come he was to solve that problem, so far as his own patients were concerned.

J.J. was a man of memories, and he had a liking for reverting to them both in fancy and in fact. On his way back from Edgeware he might tell Miller to diverge towards some familiar corner of the city, and leaving the car, go wandering. It was in the winter more than in the summer that these reminiscent moods were persuasive, for, somehow the sinister shabbiness and the secret shames of the dim streets moved him to a profound thankfulness. Life had been merciful to him, and in savouring these strange contrasts he could remember what might have been and what was. Down yonder on a Surrey hill peace and a serene and happy face waited for him. Here, in the bitter streets, an eternal question challenged him—"What if I had lost her?"

Man may walk blindly towards some extraordinary coincidence, and in the dreary dusk of a dead October day J.J. had stood looking at the windows of Unicorn Place, and then passed on to revisit Mortimer Mews. There was a difference here, less dung and less fresh paint, more shabbiness, fewer children. Mortimer Mews appeared to have lost its vulgar music-hall gaiety. There was no window-box in that particular and beloved window. Two frowzy women were squabbling in an open doorway. A melancholy man in long boots and a jersey was washing down a taxi-cab.

J.J. was wondering whether Joe Clements still lived in Mortimer Mews when he saw the Clements door open and Joe himself appear. J.J. walked up the grey cobbled alleyway and found himself smiling at a Joe who was more grey, and lean and bent in the back.

"Hallo, Joe."

"Why, if it ain't you, sir!"

They shook hands.

"How's life?"

Joe's mouth shaped itself as though he was about to spit, but he refrained.

"Oh, not too—good. Things a bit upside down. Them damned motor mouse-traps."

His eyes were on the taxi-cab.

"New world, Joe. Engines instead of horses."

"Not 'alf."

"Still keep a horse?"

"Yus—I do. Can't cotton to a bloody tin box on wheels."

"Why not——?"

"Gettin' old and set, I reckon. Besides, I've lived with 'orses all my life."

J.J. understood. Joe was a conservative soul, and suffering for it both in temper and pocket, and Joe's prejudices might be more valid than he knew. The petrol engine was to be the harbinger of a greater beastliness.

J.J. glanced up at Kitty's window.

"Anyone living there now?"

This time Joe did spit.

"Yus. Seedy sort of bloke with a cough. Come down in the world —I guess."

J.J. was feeling in a waistcoat pocket. He produced a sovereign and was in the act of passing it to Joe, when the door across the way opened.

"Thank yer, sir. That's 'im. Bit of a change, what!"

J.J. saw a shabby figure in black emerge with a suggestion of surreptitious and apologetic deliberation. It looked to the right and to the left. It closed the door carefully and locked it. It pulled an old black hat well down over its long and emaciated face. It was a figure of fear, of shabby subterfuge, of defeat and of social effacement.

Suddenly the starved thing began to cough, and to stand palsied with the spasm. It leaned against the wall, head down, one hand groping in a side pocket. It produced a dirty handkerchief, and stuffed it against its mouth, and when the soiled plug came away J.J. saw the stain upon it.

J.J. was shocked, not only by the creature's anguish, but by an almost incredible coincidence. The man leaning against the wall was Crewdson, the fellow who had led the ducking party in St. Jude's Great Court on that night in May.

For a second or two J.J. hesitated, and in that short period of time he was posed by contrasts in emotion, or rather by the symbolic thought-concept of what he might be feeling. Had he no justification for gloating over the sinister shabbiness of this poor sick crow? He had—and yet—— That which he felt was compassion.

"Excuse me a moment, Joe. It is a most strange business, but I used to know that fellow."

He crossed the yard. Crewdson was head-down, and leaning against the wall as though exhausted.

"Isn't it Crewdson?"

The starved goat-like profile came full face. The eyes were narrow slits, suspicious, fearful.

"What d'you want with me?"

"Perhaps you don't remember?"

Those strained eyes stared like two dark slits in a tragic mask.

"Good God—the—J. J. Pope!"

"Yes."

Crewdson appeared to shrink back against the wall.

"Well, go to hell."

He began to cough again, and the paroxysms smothered that last flicker of defiance. The dirty handkerchief came out, and again J.J. saw blood upon it. What a different Crewdson was this, the shabby, sneering sensualist smudged into this poor sick scarecrow. How had it all happened? But did that matter? The immediate problem was the martyrdom of man, whatever man had been.

"You ought to be in bed—Crewdson."

"Bed!"

The white face seemed to spit the word at him.

"Yes."

"A fellow has to live—or try to."

J.J. touched Crewdson's arm.

"Look here, you get back inside and lie down. Got a doctor?"

"No. What's the use of doctors?"

"Come along in. Is there anybody to——"

And then the most tragic thing of all happened. Crewdson turned to the wall, crushed his hat against it, cringed, and began to weep, the dreadful tears of a broken man. J.J. stood there beside him, profoundly shocked by this other man's anguish. What was to be done about it? Something had to be done about it.

"Crewdson——"

"Oh, leave me alone, can't you. What's the use of fussing? I'm done for."

"Perhaps not. Come along inside. You ought to be in hospital."

"I have been."

"I see. Well, come along inside."

J.J. turned and beckoned to Joe Clements across the way, and the cabman joined them.

"Come on, Mister. Mr. Pope's right. Got your key?"

Crewdson groped for it, and handed it over.

Shades of "Nanette" and pansy-flowered hats, but what a change was here! J.J.'s lab. was the Crewdson keeping-room, and almost empty of furniture. There was no fire, and dirty crockery decorated the table. Joe and J.J. helped Crewdson up the narrow stairs leading to that familiar room, now no more than a sick man's piggery. The bed was unmade, and the tousled sheets looked as though they had not been laundered since the Creation. The window was shut and the room smelt stale and septic.

Once again J.J. was shocked. Memory held a fastidious nose. This little room that had been so clean and flowery! Crewdson had flopped down on the bed, his black hat crushed over his eyebrows. The dirty handkerchief was at work.

J.J. nodded at the cabman.

"Thanks, Joe. I can manage."

Clements took the hint and left them, and J.J., sitting down on an insecure bedroom chair, looked at the man who had humiliated him. Extraordinary situation! Was Crewdson to be Beechanger's first patient?

"Look here—Crewdson—you can't stay here. Listen to me. I am opening a sanatorium next week. Yes, down in Surrey. I'll send an ambulance for you."

Crewdson, head down, hankerchief to mouth, seemed to shiver.

"Why—why the devil—should you?"

"Why? Just because you're a sick man."

"Damn it—I haven't a bean. Was just going out to pawn something."

"That doesn't matter. We don't charge fees. Now, you get into bed and stay there."

Crewdson, head down, handkerchief to mouth, seemed to shiver.

"Might light the gas for me. Haven't cut me off that yet."

J.J. got up, produced a box of matches, and lit the gas jet. He saw that there was a gas stove. He lit that also.

"Any food in the place?"

Crewdson nodded sulkily.

"Yes, enough for a night."

"Good. I'll send Joe Clements in with some milk and eggs. The ambulance will be here with a nurse to-morrow morning."

And suddenly, Crewdson's old insolence flashed out.

"Thanks, Tad. An occasion for crowing—what?"

J.J. smiled at him.

"No. Life isn't just a dung-heap, man. You get into bed and lie still."

The car climbed Yatley Hill. J.J. had been lying back in his corner, a very thoughtful J.J., but as the car topped the hill he saw the full moon shining above the dark trees. Full moon! Strange and mysterious old luminary, somehow like life, calculable, yet never quite familiar. And what a strange business! Crewdson down in the dirt, and impregnating that happy room with a pathetic, nauseating foulness. Poor, shabby devil! J.J. bent forward to look squarely at the face of the moon. He thought: "I must buy that place, and have it cleaned up. Yes, papered and painted. Can't let it stay fouled like that." For the cottage in Mortimer Mews still had the face of Kitty.

J.J. sat smoking by the fire. They had dined and Kitty lay on the sofa, holding a book which she was pretending to read, because she had been challenged by her husband's face. She was wise as to these silent moods of his, and left them undisturbed, because she knew that J.J.'s silences were creative.

J.J. took his pipe from his mouth, and spoke.

"Kit."

"Yes, J."

"Something once happened in my life which I never told you about. Not going to tell you now. But I have had the most amazing experience."

"Have you, dear?"

"It happened like this. I felt like going to see some of the old places, and I strolled along to Mortimer Mews to look at your window. Found Joe Clements still there, and while we were chatting a

man came out of—our—place." He paused for a moment, biting hard on his pipe.

"He was a down-and-out, and sick, desperately sick. It doesn't seem quite credible, but I recognized him. He was a man who had tried to humiliate me when I was up at Cambridge, a sadistic sort of beast—and there he was—coughing his soul out."

Kitty was sitting up, her arms about her knees.

"What did you do, J.?"

"Spoke to him, got him upstairs into—your—room. And what a room! He is going to be our first patient."

"Oh—J.——"

"Sending an ambulance for him to-morrow."

Kitty left the sofa, to kneel by J.J. and put an arm round him.

"You would do—that—darling."

"Oh—well—— I suppose a revengeful man might have gloated. Couldn't somehow. If you and life have taught me anything—it's the healing inevitableness of compassion."

Kitty drew his head down, and kissed him just where he was beginning to grow grey.

"You are a—great man, J."

He put his arm round her.

"No—but I think I'm a grateful one."

Crewdson never came to Beechanger. When the ambulance called for him next morning they found the place locked up. It was Joe Clements who produced a ladder and climbed up to Kitty's window, rapped on the glass and shouted. There was no reply.

Crewdson lay dead. He had gassed himself.

THE END