















A  
MARKET  
BUNDLE

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

PRE-WAR

ARTHUR'S  
SIXPENNY PIECES  
COTTAGE PIE  
CLARA  
SIMPLE SIMON  
MOBY LANE

POST-WAR

KITCHENER CHAPS  
A KISS FROM FRANCE  
A LONDON LOT

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN



# A MARKET BUNDLE

BY  
A. NEIL LYONS



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## A Brown Girl Spoils the Picture

---

MY name is Arthur Clapshaw Baffin, and it is probably familiar to the reader. I am the author of those drawings, in line and wash, which appear so often in the pages of illustrated weekly journals. The signature "Baffin," or, sometimes, "Baff," at the foot of a drawing, is a guarantee that you are sure to laugh at it; for it is very, very seldom that I present a joke which is not immediately recognisable as such.

There is no doubt that my artistic career has prospered, although I am still under forty years of age. When, last year, I was interviewed by "Gamages Weekly," in connection with a "Symposium," which they were publishing, under the title of "Why I have got on," I attributed my success to having shown a strict regard for tradition and formula.

If I draw a picture of a comic hypocrite, everybody knows that I *have* drawn a picture of a comic hypo-

crite, because the picture which I draw embodies the universal conception of what a comic hypocrite ought to look like.

Thus, a hypocrite is confidently expected to look religious : so I always put my hypocrite into a black coat. I aim at presenting the common idea of a Nonconformist clergyman, and I dress him in "Jemima" boots, white gloves, very short sleeves, and a top hat with a sash round it. The gloves, of course, are much too long in the fingers, and are wrinkled round the wrist. I have never seen a Nonconformist clergyman who wore these gloves, or "Jemina" boots, or an undertaker's hat, or who, indeed, resembled even remotely the extraordinary figure which I am paid to depict. But people love me for drawing these diagrams, so I draw them. The populace grasps my meaning instantly, exclaiming "Good old Stiggins!" and performing winks and stomach laughs.

This is all I propose to say about my "Art." I feel I have done well in mentioning the subject, however, because, although I am a novice in literature, I have read much, and I know that the principal duty of a story-teller is to tell the reader about himself. I may add, I ought to add, one other fact to the biographical notes already offered: I forgot to state that my humorous hypocrite is now a creature of the past.

Since the outbreak of that dreadful war, which has so utterly changed our conception of social values, and which has so greatly aided the development of illustrated journalism, I have devoted myself to

portraying the British soldier. These efforts at creating a standard figure of the returned soldier have been highly successful. My soldier is a stubborn, leathery individual—"hard-bitten" is, I think, the word—who exhibits a great contempt for the civil population and for the amenities of a peaceful existence. You will perhaps remember my Major Fitz-Shrapnel, who "caught on" wonderfully at the clubs. I showed him beguiling the tedium of ten days' leave from France by reconstructing his wife's drawing-room. He had thrown all the cushions out of the window and had sawn up the sofa, and was seen reclining on a wooden bunk, amid a homely confusion of petrol cans and bully tins and telephone receivers.

Then there was my Cuthbert Clare, the bank clerk. The idea was that the unnatural calm prevailing in England had wrought upon his nerves and produced insomnia. I showed Cuthbert sleeping soundly on a marrow bed in the rain, while a hired boy in his garden exploded squibs to simulate the congenial stir and bustle of Flanders.

The object of these pictures, and of many similar ones, was to demonstrate to the public the truth of its belief that war has utterly destroyed the Young Man's taste for peace. The lesson which I wished to inculcate, or which I felt that my admirers wished me to inculcate, was that when at last our lads return to us they will no longer be contented with a humdrum life of ease. They will have acquired a taste for the open air, for rheumatism, for cold tea and for all the hearty pleasures of bodily discomfort. No Banks

and Counting Houses for them! No feather beds and carpet slippers! They will demand a fuller life—the right to a shake-down on the rockery, with a waterproof sheet for covering and forked lightning and cloudbursts for companionship. Or the ice-bound North, Our Lady of the Snows, and all that!

In order to secure the repose which is necessary to the rapid creation of returned soldiers, I live under conditions of strict isolation in a remote country lane. My dwelling is a three-roomed cottage, of late the habitation of chickens, but now, by restoration, the abode of a gentleman and an example of the picturesque in architecture. And this morning I took a walk in my lane.

I had not walked far along my lane, when my eye was attracted to a stretch of greensward which borders the hedgerow. Somebody had performed an unauthorised action here, having erected three arches of hazel wood and draped them with fragments of blanket. These sticks and these blankets formed a tent at which I stared with a curious satisfaction. It was such a sly little, sleek little tent.

When the inevitable authority emerges from the womb of destiny to write a "History of Tents and Portable Dwelling-Houses throughout the Ages," I do hope that he will not forget to mention the impromptu blanket-house of Little Egypt. If he writes intelligently about these battered relics of the pilgrim Adam, I, for one, will promise to subscribe to his four stout volumes. But, if we are to have a mere compendium of striped canvas, alphabetically arranged—"B" for "Bathing," "R" "Refresh-



ment," and " V " Viceregal "—then I am afraid that all I can do for him is to recommend his book to clergymen and schoolmasters.

Whilst I was looking at this small brown tent, an incident occurred. A patch of brown fabric was suddenly withdrawn from the front of the tent, and, through the narrow opening which had been thus created, there extruded itself a woolly, flocculent object. It was the head and hair—the sleep-tossed, tumbled hair—of a young girl.

The girl crawled out from beneath her dew-stained canopy and stood upright in the flickerless, cold glow of that October morning. She was dressed not wisely but quite well, in a simple combination of two garments—an old, flowered petticoat, terminating far short of her bare, brown ankles; and a scanty, whitish bodice. The bodice left her bosom and arms very bare. She stood before me, with her body arched, her arms outstretched, yawning, with a cat-like care and pleasure in the sensuous act. Her arms were white to the wrist, her bosom was white to the neck; beyond these points her skin was richly tanned. She was a tall, strong girl, with a deep chin, a wide mouth, a broad brow, white teeth, short top-lip, large eyes, wide lids, long lashes, a firm neck, a quick brown hand and freckles. She arched her back and stretched her arms, her eyelids all but closed, her mouth open, her strong, white teeth exposed, her nostrils and her shoulders and the blue veins in her throat all dancing to some tune I could not hear.

When she had stretched her limbs and rubbed her

eyes, the young girl put a lazy hand up to her hair, tugging at it harshly with a piece of comb. It set my teeth on edge to watch that crude, barbaric, ruthless act of decency. But the young girl closed her eyes and bared her teeth, and tugged and tore away, half smiling, as if she were rather pleased to be enduring pain.

Having bullied her hair into a state of order, the young woman threw her comb into the tent and sauntered to a spot some few yards distant, upon which there stood (as I now saw for the first time) a two-wheeled push-cart. It was fitted with stumps to maintain the deck in a horizontal poise. Close to the cart, an iron tripod had been erected, from which there depended an iron hook. Beneath this hook, a fire of sticks and furze and touchwood had been constructed. This fire burned dimly.

The young girl, having borrowed an ash-stake from the adjacent hedge, proceeded to poke the fire about. She then poked among the blankets which were strewn about the deck of her push-cart and produced a two-ounce packet of tea; and then she looked about her for the kettle, and, in looking about her, found me. The brown girl was evidently surprised to find me, but she did not make a show of her surprise, saying, quite lightly:

“Why, Sport: good morning! Up before yar bed’s made, ain’t ya?”

I pointed out to the lady that my virtue was little in excess of her own, to which she responded: “Well, yes: but then you live in a house”—her implication being that, as a householder, I was

exempt from those constabularly influences which govern the habits of "travellers." The brown girl then asked me if I had seen a young man about the road.

"What sort of young man?" I asked.

"One as looks like he's been a soldier," was her not very illuminating reply.

The only young man I had seen had the look and bearing of an Insurance Agent and therefore did not seem to conform to the particulars now circulated by the young lady. I therefore told her that I had not seen her young man.

"Urgh!" exclaimed the brown girl, in a tone of bitterness, speaking half to herself—"He's gone creepin' into some house, shouldn't wonder." She had found her kettle and now she dabbed it on to the fire, resentfully.

"This young man is your husband!" I ventured to suppose.

"Not likely," replied the girl.

I made excuses for my blunder. "You somehow don't look as if you were travelling alone," I explained.

"No more I ain't," said the girl. "This here young feller I spoke about, he's along with me. But he ain't my husband."

"No, no, of course not," I murmured, trying to accept her statement in a quiet and orderly manner.

"You see," continued the brown girl, "I looks arter him, like, and he looks arter me, like. That's the way of it. 'E's a nice, 'ot-tempered chap is 'Arold—knock anybody down as soon as look at them—and 'e did 'ave a fancy once for to 'ang 'is

'at up permanent, and I 'ad a fancy for to let 'im. But not now. Not since 'e's been a soldier. The army's spoilt him."

"In what way?" I asked.

"In the way of 'is fancies," replied the brown girl. The army's made a gentleman of 'im. A tent ain't good enough for 'Arold any longer. 'E's got a fancy now to live in a house, the same as if 'e was a little *garjer* like yaself."

"Garjer?" What's that?" I demanded.

"A person as ain't like us," replied the brown girl. "One as likes indoors. One as don't get about much. A *fuggy* person. You see," she continued, "they got my 'Arold into the 'abit of bricks and mortar, time 'e was serving the King. They put him to sleep in barns and pigsties and cow-houses and such. They filled 'is 'ead with swanky notions and turned 'im against the ditch. They spoilt 'is taste for laying rough. A green-wood fire brings on 'is cough, 'e says."

All this surprised me: this story of a soldier who had acquired a taste for indoor life. It didn't seem to correspond with my drawings. But it is the custom of life to oppose itself to Art; I am familiar with that phenomenon, and I showed no emotion.

The brown girl continued her monologue: "'E says 'e got enough ditch to last 'im, time 'e lay in the trenches. And then 'e stopped one with 'is ankle and they sent 'im into 'orspital. That just about finished 'im orf, that did, sending 'im into the 'orspital. It made a regular old gal of 'im—'im and 'is diddy-brush!"



“ What’s a diddy-brush ? ”

“ You may well ask,” replied the brown girl. “ It’s a little thing with a bone ’andil, what he carries in his pocket. And every morning ’e dips it into water and shoves it in his mouth and juggles it about. And then ’e swallows water—*water*, mind you!—and then ’e spits it out! And ’e’s full of everlasting talk about this hospital— ’ow there was a wooden floor with hoil-cloff on it, and calico between ’is blankets ; and how they made ’is tea for ’im first thing of a morning and brought it to ’is bed. And then ’e talks about the sisters—if I could get ’old of one o’ them upstarted she’s, I’d——Below! There’s ’Arold! Good morning, sir.”

“ There is no doubt,” I began, “ that Harold will soon settle down again to the discomforts of civil life. Perhaps——.”

“ *Good morning, sir,*” repeated the brown girl, significantly. Then, as I still lingered, she added a further hint : “ ’Arold’s ’ot-tempered, sir, and, if ’e ’its you, ’e’ll ’urt you.”

I went away from her, and, returning along the lane, encountered Harold, who nodded to me, curtly. He was a swarthy young man with a furtive eye ; but he was dressed in dark clothes and carried himself like an Insurance Agent. An hour later, I saw him again.

He came to my cottage door, escorting the brown girl who was wheeling the push-cart. He wished to buy a rabbit skin or, alternatively, to sell me one. He looked about him with a covetous eye. “ You got a nice little place, sir,” he said. “ Wooden

floors, I see, and a well o' water." He took his place beside the brown girl, and added, with a sigh, "Some people have got it very comfortable." He nodded to me and trudged away.

The brown girl took up the handles of her pushcart, and followed him, looking back as she did so, and tapping her forehead and shaking her head.

## II

### A Terrorist

---

OLD Dimidor had the good fortune, as you might say, to die before last August. If he were living now, I should get from him the truth about Russia. I should get it all this afternoon, all over tea, after tea, during supper, throughout the evening, and well into the morning. When old Dimidor talked about Russia he talked about it thoroughly.

Through the exertions of old Dimidor I became familiar with the word "Soviet" many years ago. This is more than many writers can say.

We met in a remote place: in the dusty ante-room of a "Reformed Restaurant," where people drank coffee-substitutes and ate beans with a sort of religious fervour, and where Capitalism was being constantly overthrown and as constantly resuscitated—in the form of an extra ha'penny on your plate of vegetable steak.

"You ought to put me in de papers," said Mr. Dimidor Stiffkosfky. "I am a singular man. I have led a great life."

And Dimidor Stiffkosfky's very large wife, who, like poverty and his ear-trumpet, was always with him, corroborated this statement.

"Yes," she said, "you must put Dimidor into de papers. He has had a great life."

Mrs. (or Madame, or Frau, or Gospadorin) Stiffkosfky nodded sagely—a confused conglomeration of chins.

"Once," said Mr. Dimidor Stiffkosfky, reminiscently, "once, when I was in Warsaw, dey cut off all my gas. Also, dey put me into prison."

"Yes," assented Madame Stiffkosfky, "dey put him into prison. Also, dey cut off all our gas."

Madame Stiffkosfky spoke these words in a massive, tragic manner. She expanded her chest. She expanded her chins. She gesticulated.

Little Dimidor—a weazened person, in black suiting, with cigarette-stained fingers, a bald head, and a sparsely tufted chin, connected himself up to the ear-trumpet—an ear-trumpet of imposing dimensions. He said :

"In Russia, many years ago, at the time when I was a student, they would have sent me to Siberia, but I retreated from the country on board a ship."

"Yes," said Madame Stiffkosfky, "he retreated on a ship."

"I was extremely sick," said Dimidor.

"My God!" ejaculated his lady, "he was unspeakably sick."

"All Revolutionists feel sick at times," I submitted. "And, anyhow, you got away. It was surely worth it."



"Got away!" repeated Dimidor, "certainly I got away. But where did I get to? I got to Middlesborough. *Middlesborough*. My God!"

The chins formed fours. And, in an unemotional and almost military manner, Madame Stiffkosfky repeated her partner's exclamation: "Middlesborough. My God!"

"And you could write a whole paperful," mused Dimidor, "about the trouble I experienced in getting to Middlesborough. I had to go through Constantinople."

"And in Constantinople," remarked the voice beyond the chins, "they took away his trousers."

"That is true," cried Dimidor. "They deprived me of all decency. For days I was confined to a wet cellar. The Secret Police of Russia, they very nearly recaptured me. I was also much followed by the Secret Police of Germany, of Austria, and of Greece."

"Also," added Madame Stiffkosfky, "he contracted dis pain in de ear. Dis pain has remained dere. It has always remained."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dimidor. "My ear! My poor ear! Oh, my dear friend, I have led a great life. You must put me into de papers."

"I will communicate," I said, "with the editor of the 'Aurist.'"

"You are kind," exclaimed Dimidor. "I ought to be put into de papers. I have had a great life. In America—at a place called Cincinnati—I was arrested by the Sheriff. They fined me one thousand dollars for raising a conspiracy at the glue works.

But still I did not despair. I had still a little money, and I returned to England—to Middlesborough—where my books and some of my best clothes, and my wife's best clothes, were still residing with a landlady of the town. I returned to Middlesborough. The Social Revolution must still go forward ! ”

“ Aha ! ” cried Madame Stiffkosfky, “ the Social Revolution must always go forward. That is definitive.”

“ At Middlesborough,” pursued M. Stiffkosfky, “ I became confused in the minds of the authorities with certain absurd theoretical people—Trades Unionists, Direct Actionists, and so on. I was much watched. But the police need not have troubled themselves. I was passive in Middlesborough. I had studied Middlesborough.

“ It seemed to me that, whatever else might happen to Middlesborough, this town would not become celebrated as the English cradle of the Social Revolution. I therefore made no effort—no effort at all—to educate this city in the theories of Communal Anarchy. But the police still interfered with me ; so I had to go away from Middlesborough. Ah, my friend, I have had a great life ! You must certainly put me into de papers.”

“ You must put him into *all* de papers,” stated Madame Stiffkosfky, in a dry, judicial voice.

“ Having still a little money left—but not much,” continued M. Stiffkosfky, “ I then came to London. Madame Stiffkosfky, my faithful companion through all these troubles, came with me. We had made up our minds that, whatever happened, whoever might

suffer, at all costs the Social Revolution must still go forward."

"Forward! Always forward!" quoth the authoritative voice of Madame Stiffkosfky, amid an imposing demonstration of chins.

"I had not been in London three months," pursued M. Stiffkosfky, "when, outside the Albert Hall, where a demonstration of our antipathy to what is called Justice was taking place, a policeman assaulted me with his mallet, entirely destroying my hat and two bones in my head. 'This,' I said to myself, 'becomes exciting!' Ah, my dear comrade, I have led a great life. You must put it into all de papers."

"All!" intoned the chorus of chins. "All!"

"Then," M. Stiffkosfky went on, "my money was all gone. And then it became a little hard for us. I was forced to learn the unpleasant process of sticking up cigars. Madame, here, trimmed hats. But we did not give in. We had our reward in the progress of Internationalism, in the rapid development of the idea of Brotherhood, in the glorious march forward of the Social Revolution. That was all which mattered to us."

"That was all which mattered," croaked the chins.

"But at this time, I am sorry to say," continued my celebrated friend, "there was a lot of untrue gossip going on among the thinking people of Aldgate, where we lived. It was said that we were married—me and Madame here. *Legally* married. It was very painful to us, this gossip. Because, since we

were little, since we could think at all, we have not believed in marriage. We have been free friends, always, Madame and I.

“Free friends—always!” testified that lady.

“So then I would have gone away from London. But I had no money to go away. What a life this is!

“Ah, I have had a great life. You must put it in de papers. It all deserves to be put into de papers.” M. Stiffkosfky paused and sighed.

“When I next became an object for the police it was more serious. They were on horseback, and they were very large. It was when the women were defiant, and were marching in a body up to Parliament. I do not understand women; but I do understand the idea of marching in a body up to Parliament. The large policemen, on their large horses, rode all among them, very roughly. And I was marching with them, and my passions were excited. So I pulled a large policeman on his leg, and I pulled him from his horse, and he became a spectacle of amusement, and the mud was splashed into his face. So this time it was serious. They put me into prison for one month.”

“One month!” exclaimed the echo.

“And that was very hard,” continued Dimidor. “There was no work at all when I came out, because they had determined my engagement at the place where cigars are licked. Also, Madame here had received an immediate dismissal from the shop which paid her for trimming hats. It was very hard for Madame. During many days, when I was in prison,



she had no food to eat. I should not have blamed Madame then if in her despair she had become a little bit unfaithful to me."

"Ah, no," protested Madame. "I was too fat in my face."

"Therefore, you see," pursued M. Stiffkosfky, "we have had a great life and we are deserving to be put into de papers, for an example to young people who think like we do. And all the young people will one day think like we do."

"One day!" said Madame Stiffkosfky.

"But there is one thing," added old Dimidor, coming closer to me with his ear-trumpet. "There is one thing which you must *not* put into the papers. We are ashamed about it. It is the money which we now have, and which we have never earned. From the will of my uncle at Kieff there was a little money came to me—a few thousand roubles, a few hundred pounds. And my cousin at Kieff, my uncle's son, he wrote me a letter to tell me let the money stop with him for a little while—for a year, perhaps—because he was entering into a partnership over some oilfields in Baku, and there would be a great return from this. And so we were tempted to make more of our money. Life had been so hard to us. We had lived so many years so very cheap. And all for the Social Revolution."

"For the Social Revolution!" the voice behind the chins pealed forth in muffled, solemn tones.

"And so we wrote to our cousin, in Kieff, to keep the money and make more of it. And this he did. We now are very rich. We have three thousand

pounds. But we do not live extravagant, and I swear to you that much of what we have is spent for others. We still think always of the Social Revolution."

"Always!" said the lady.

"But we do not wish that you should put this news into the papers, because the world does not always behave too charitable. We are ashamed of this money which we did not earn."

I promised.

But M. Stiffkosfky is now dead. And, when he died, Madame Stiffkosfky and her chins, his free friends, took laudanum, and became dead also.

So I feel that my promise no longer counts.

### III

## The Guinea

---

THE Poet and the Novelist, having met in a tavern, The Poet became inspired to drink a number of bottles of bad red wine, for which The Novelist paid.

The Poet, a spreading, loosely buttoned man, took a long time to cheer up. Many minutes went by before he even spoke, during which he rested his great stomach against the edge of the table, drummed at the table-top with his fat fingers, and scowled at The Novelist from beneath the wide brim of his greasy black hat. Gradually, however, the wine began to warm his throat, and then The Poet began to gurgle, and then to hum, and then to sing. Finally, still tapping, The Poet began to rhyme. Thus :

My Soldier came to me.  
And soft was his tread  
And swiftly did pass ;  
More swiftly he sped  
Than the shade of a swallow  
Speeds over the grass.

Yet soft was his tread  
As the step of a moth,  
Who lighteth him down on the shadowy cloth  
Which the dandelions spread.

Now, The Novelist, who was grotesquely clad in a military uniform which his country had conferred upon him, was touched and flattered by The Poet's rhyme. He was conceited enough to imagine that he and his uniform had in some measure provoked the rhyme. But when The Poet heard this he left off drumming, pushed back his hat, drew in his stomach, sat up, and glared.

"Great God!" cried The Poet. "What next?"

"Sir," he continued, "I had certainly sunk low when I rhymed those words, but I had at least not fallen into the shame of rhyming them for such as you. What are you?"

"I c-c-can't think," stammered The Novelist, looking down at his uniform.

"Well, I will tell you what you are," rejoined The Poet, and he did so, causing The Novelist to blush.

"You can't deny it," continued The Poet, "for in my boyhood I read some novels, and I know what a novel is. It is the expression by a novelist in one hundred thousand words of that which a ferret can express in one squeak. Sir, a man who would write a novel would keep a bad-house. I rank you, morally, with King Ferdinand of Bulgaria, and if I were Prime Minister of England you would have to register at Scotland Yard."

"Then have some more wine," remarked The Novelist.



“By all means,” replied The Poet.

The second bottle was brought, and The Poet, having filled and emptied his glass, again filled that vessel, and then poured some wine into The Novelist’s glass. By this time The Poet had waxed gay and frank and talkative.

“If you must know the truth about these rhymes of mine,” he said, “they were written for a woman.”

The Novelist looked expectant.

“They were written,” continued The Poet, “for a woman of some public reputation and importance. If you were not a Novelist, I should suppose that you had heard of her. Her name is Whirley Puttock.”

“What : the revue lady ? ”

“And why not ? ” demanded The Poet, sitting back and frowning. “At any rate, she is not an Authoress.

“It may surprise you to be told,” continued The Poet, “belonging as you do to a profession that specialises in ignorance, that Whirley Puttock is not so freshly girlish and perfectly single as she is supposed to be. When I first saw her—it was at a private view, in the lounge of an hotel—I was surprised to find that she is a wife and mother, nearing forty, and that her name in civil life is Maggs. Mrs. Maggs was kind enough to say that she had heard a great deal about my poems, and she invited me to recite then in the lounge of the hotel, but this I declined to do. Whirley also said that she had been wishing for a long time to make the acquaintance of some competent poet, as she wished to buy a better kind of song than her man in Ber-

mondsey was at present supplying. She suggested that I should write a song for her."

There was a silence, during which The Novelist looked shyly at The Poet, and The Poet sat back and glared at The Novelist.

"Well, why not?" exclaimed The Poet, at last. "Even Homer had to live, and—these paper restrictions are playing the very deuce. I put it to my publisher that if he couldn't afford to publish my triolets he couldn't afford to publish anything, and the fellow replied with an argument that I haven't yet been able to answer. 'Oh, Mr. G.,' he said, 'you forget the paper that's ate up by your margins.'

"Well, sir," pursued The Poet, "the long and the short of it was that I had not the heart to refuse little Whirley's request. I consented to compose some trifle for her.

"She said that what she wanted was a military song. She pointed out that military songs are popular at all times, but that in these times they are regarded as indispensable. The revue in which she was at present appearing had only two military songs, and a third was badly needed. Miss Whirley Puttock expressed the opinion that I could write a very good military song indeed, and I venture to think that I did not disappoint her."

Here there was a further silence, during which The Novelist again looked timidly up at The Poet, while that gentleman sat back and glared, until at last he said: "Well, sir?"

"So *that* was the song," said The Novelist: "that composition which you were reciting?"

“ Yes, sir ! ” replied The Poet.

“ Oh ! ” said The Novelist, “ oh ! . . . *that!* ”

“ And why not, you lascivious monkey ? ” shouted The Poet.

“ Why not, indeed ! ” assented The Novelist, hastily filling his companion’s glass.

The Poet drained his glass, and then, looking fixedly at The Novelist, again recited the words of his music-hall song :

My Soldier came to me,  
And soft was his tread  
And swiftly did pass ;  
More swiftly he sped  
Than the shade of a swallow  
Speeds over the grass.  
Yet soft was his tread  
As the step of a moth,  
Who lighteth him down on the shadowy cloth  
Which the dandelions spread.

“ Whirley Puttock,” pursued The Poet, “ was delighted with the rhyme, but—however, I anticipate. Whirley said at the end of our talk : ‘ If you really mean to write this song, Mr. Glawms, won’t you come to lunch one day and talk about it ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Madam,’ I replied, ‘ I will come to lunch to-morrow.’ ”

“ My promptitude, it seemed, surprised her. She evidently held the mistaken opinion, promulgated by inky-fingered pick-thoughts like yourself, that poets do not understand business. But I undeceived her, for I arrived at her house at one o’clock precisely on the following day, although she lives at a great distance

from London, on the extreme summit of Brixton Hill.

"It was a large house, filled with handsome furniture and appointments. Whirley's monogram was embroidered on every chairback and every cushion, and it was engraved on every cigarette-box. The word 'CIGARETTES' was also stamped on these; and on the ebony handle of the bread-knife was carved the word 'BREAD.'

"The lunch did ample justice to its environment. It was a splendid lunch. An unforgettable lunch. There was the usual prelude of Barsac, but it was mercifully a short one. Pommery Greno followed, and then some more Pommery Greno. This was succeeded by some old Spanish Brandy, which I am bound to say was such that Calderon himself would not have disdained to drink. A perfect lunch, sir."

"Was there anything to eat?" The Novelist asked.

"I forget," replied The Poet, "but it was a wonderful meal.

"On its termination, Miss Whirley asked me whether I had thought any more about her poems. 'Thought?' quoth I. 'Dear lady, I have *written* them.' With that I produced the verses from my pocket. 'My soldier came to me, . . .' and so on. I needn't repeat them, perhaps?"

"No," said The Novelist.

"Whirley, as I have told you," continued The Poet, "was delighted with my rhymes. She remarked that they were very neat. She then drew



my attention to a young man who had also been sitting at the table, and whom I had already all but noticed. He was Whirley's husband, and he had been saying 'Not half,' 'Right ho,' and 'Wow, wow,' at intervals during the repast. Whirley explained that this relative attended to all matters of business on her behalf, and that she would now leave us together—with the brandy—to discuss the delicate matter of payment for my poem."

The Poet ceased talking, and gazed down gloomily at his empty glass, and The Novelist refilled it for him from a freshly opened bottle. The Poet sighed.

"Well, what did he say?" pressed The Novelist.

"What did who say?"

"Whirley's husband. Did he treat you handsomely?"

The Poet tossed off his wine, and slammed the empty glass down on the table.

"He offered me a guinea, sir," said The Poet.

"A guinea?"

"A guinea."

"What did you do?"

"I snatched up the verses from the table, sir," said The Poet, "and put them in my pocket, and I snatched up my hat from a chair and put it on my head, and I got up from the table, upsetting the brandy, and I walked to the door. At the door I turned, and gave him one look. And then I spoke to the young cheesemonger. I said:

"'Why, damn it, I can *borrow* a guinea!'"

## IV

# A Big Red Blot

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THE little Derby Dog sat in a draughty corridor. He sat on a hard wooden bench, at an unsteady wooden table—trestle, six foot, folding, one—with military registers and buff slips and medical history sheets spread all around him.

This little Derby Dog was the least heroic of his species, being that pathetic creation of our “win-the-war” spirit, a C3 clerk. He was a small, fat, bald-headed, nervous man, of middle age, dressed in the uniform of the famous Umpshire regiment, with which he had never served, and weighted down by a pair of enormous hobnailed marching boots, in which he had never marched.

The history of this unimportant Derby Dog was like that of about a million others. When the under-sized and sedentary were first called for, had gone hot-foot to the attesting station, eager to demonstrate the youth and ardour of his soul. He had returned from the attesting station with a buff armlet, a printed certificate, and half a crown, and

he had sat up until late at night, with a proud but unhappy wife, planning a future of military distinction. This Derby Dog was a member of what is called the "professional classes." He was an architect, or author, or something of that kind, and foresaw that, being more or less educated and having a decent professional reputation, some creditable employment would be found for him in which he could use his talents and prove his courage. His forecast, however, went singularly wrong.

Within a few weeks of his attestation he was called upon to endure the most humiliating and indecent experience of his life—that of a so-called "medical examination." As a result of the inspection which he then underwent, in company with some two hundred other naked men, he found himself, to his contemptuous surprise, in a low medical category. There then followed further humiliations. He was given a half promise of employment, with commissioned rank, in a technical unit. Then this promise was withdrawn. He was half promised a further medical examination. That half promise was withdrawn. He was told that he was eligible for enlistment in a Labour Battalion, and that having enlisted he could then get his re-examination and look for higher things. He made a number of railway journeys and filled up a number of forms and then learnt that he was *not* eligible for enlistment in a Labour Battalion. He was told that he was not eligible for enlistment in anything, but that he might at any moment become eligible and would then receive a fortnight's warning to present himself for

service. "What service?" he asked. He was told that he would get that information when—he got it!

The months which followed were months of unhappiness and anxiety for the Derby Dog, during which he was neither a soldier, an architect, nor a man. Old ladies despised him publicly in omnibuses; clients withheld work, feeling that a man so liable to be called could not advantageously be chosen; and the army bombarded him with papers. On receiving his papers, he would kiss his wife, lock up his cigars, pay off the gardener, and go away—only to return by the 6.30! His papers, he would find, had been posted by mistake. He was told that he was not wanted and that he must return home. This happened about four times. But at last there came a time when no one could conveniently admit that it had happened, and this time the Derby Dog did not come home again.

This time he was sent to a posting depot, where he learnt that he was to be forthwith mobilised and despatched by train to a country town, to be a military clerk in a military office. The posting station was in an acute state of February, and the little Derby Dog became extremely cold as he hopped about a parade ground inches deep in snow, and presented himself at various huts where boots and overcoats, and knives and forks, and button-sticks and hold-alls were thrown in his face. He remembers well the final hut, because it happened to be locked; wherefore he had to wait in the snow for half an hour until an unwilling corporal unlocked it in order to complete the "issue" by supplying him with a ration of brown paper and string.

A private soldier accompanied the Derby Dog on his journeys from hut to hut, and this soldier swore because the final hut was locked. So the Derby Dog said to the soldier: "But I don't *want* any brown paper! What is it for?"

"To wrap up your civvies in," said the soldier.

The innocent Derby Dog suggested that in that case it would be unnecessary to wait for the paper, as he had brought a bag for his civilian clothes. But the soldier, white with emotion, flung out a detaining hand. "You can't hop off like that, cocky," he exclaimed. "You must get your brown paper. Why, you've *signed* for it!"

So the Derby Dog waited and got his brown paper, and a little bronchitis as well, and late that night he found himself wearing strange clothes in a strange town. There he lived unhappily ever after.

His work in the military office began at 8 a.m. and ended at 8.30 p.m., Sundays included, and he found that the current civilian theory concerning him, and concerning all soldier clerks, was that he was a coward and a slacker. His wife was permitted to live with him in the county town to solace his hours of leisure, and to feed and lodge him. The sum allotted by His Majesty's Government for the upkeep and nourishment of both husband and wife was called a Joint Subsistence Allowance and amounted to the sum of twenty shillings and fivepence per week. On this sum the Derby Dog's wife was supposed to be able to clothe herself, feed herself, and house herself, and to feed and house a hungry soldier in addition.

Now come back again to the point from which we



started. This soldier, our Derby Dog, was sitting at his impossible desk, in an impossible corridor, writing impossible letters. The desk was impossible because it was an army desk—table, trestle, six foot, folding, one : the corridor was impossible because it was a corridor, and the letters were impossible because they were—impossible. The usual sort of thing was simple : “ Attached is passed to you for information and necessary action, please.” But when the machine became excited the Derby Dog would find himself writing such wonderful passages as this :

“ Ref. your number K1088 of 13th November and attached enquiry, the correspondence is returned to you for completion under ACI /28363 /16, as in view of Para. 5 of those instructions your minute No. 8 is not understood in this office, please.”

The little Derby Dog indited these epileptic despatches with an air of great industry, for he was fully exposed to the view of three severe-looking officers—officers of the regular army—pukkha officers. They stood at the far end of the corridor, facing the Derby Dog, and they were smoking Egyptian cigarettes with an air of stern displeasure and with that expression of countenance, habitual with officers of the regular army, which would suggest to the uninitiated that they had all just detected a defective drain. These officers belonged really to the room behind the door which faced the Derby Dog; but they came out into the corridor when they wanted to smoke, and as they always wanted to smoke they were always in the corridor, looking

always very displeased, well-groomed, and pukkha. They were elderly men whom the God of Battle had called from the golf courses of Leamington and Clifton, or resuscitated from the twilight sleep of Dawlish.

Behind the Derby Dog, at the other end of the corridor, there was another door, but this door was closed, for it belonged to the room where the temporary officers dwelt, and these officers did not ever come out of their room. They were busy men who worked extremely hard and carefully in order to sustain the professional reputation of the pukkha officers.

The little Derby Dog had an affection for the temporary officers. They were Englishmen like himself, and did not belong to an international caste, like the pukkhas. They went about their work with an earnest self-detachment, and went, or hobbled (since most of them added a permanent disablement to their temporary status) about their pleasures in a simple way, avoiding with remarkable cheerfulness those places where the regular officers congregated. They seemed to be quite indifferent to defects in the social drainage system, and on arriving of a morning would usually nod to the Derby Dog and say " Good morning, corporal."

There was an open stairway on the corporal's left and a window at his right ; so that this warrior-scribe did not lack fresh air. Sometimes, indeed, when the street door at the foot of the stairs was open, he got fresh air to excess. A fierce, but mercifully short-lived, blizzard told him now that the door had been opened. He looked down the

stairway and saw approaching him several pieces of a man.

The pieces of man were ascending the stairway very slowly. They had a lot of dead weight to carry, such as a wooden leg, a steel arm, a silver scalp, and an artificial jaw. It looked like some mechanical contrivance at first sight, so few and scattered were the pieces of original being. But among the human fragments which remained were two dark and resolute eyes, which proved that the figure now standing at the Derby Dog's table did not wholly consist of cabinet-work and ironmongery. Indeed, it spoke, though indistinctly, and thus established further proof of its humanity. The artificial jaw wagged up and down, and flat, staccato noises issued from it, which sounded like a magpie's parody of human speech.

The bits of man before him were dressed in the uniform of a commissioned officer, which circumstance added to the difficulties of the little Derby Dog, since he had to stand to attention whilst the officer's platinum face kept opening and shutting like a clockwork toy. At last the little Derby Dog was able to grasp what his visitor required. He had toiled up the stairs with his cabinet-work and ironmongery to ask for a "Privilege Railway Warrant": a voucher which is issued to officers enabling them to travel by train at reduced fares. The little Derby Dog saluted his visitor and reseated himself at the desk in order to make out the warrant.

While he was ostensibly engaged on this task the little Derby Dog took further stock of his visitor

The Derby Dog observed that his visitor was wearing a blue armlet, in public evidence, as it were, of the fact that he was not altogether fit. The visitor carried a book in his hand, and the Derby Dog saw that it was a volume of essays by Michael Lord Montaigne. He looked at the eyes again and saw that they were the eyes of a man who would care to read books: indeed, they were reading now, as they searched through the window at the huddled red roofs of the county town.

The Derby Dog had now filled in his warrant and he carried it down the corridor to the group of pukkha officers and presented it to one of them for signature. This officer, having asked for whom the privilege warrant was required, and having had his attention directed to the figure at the table, strolled up to that figure and addressed a few words to it. The other officers followed him, and a splendid effect they made in their smart, well-fitting uniforms, shiny buttons, and rows of medal ribbon.

These ribbons were the fruits of warfare in distant and romantic places. There were ribbons from Egypt, from China, from Ashanti, and from Burma.

Their owners regarded the wreck at the table with expressions of kindly tolerance. They questioned him about his military experiences, and elicited, with difficulty, the information that he had had the misfortune to be knocked out during operations on the River Somme.

Then the man at the table, stuffing the Privilege Warrant carelessly into a pocket, and, dragging his load of wood and iron, dragged himself away. He

clasped the baluster of the stairway with his competent left arm, having previously manipulated the hooks and hinges of his right arm in such a manner that they would hold an open book in close proximity to his platinum face. Then, descending slowly, step by step, he went down the stairway, reading Montaigne.

The regular officers at the head of the stairs leant over the balustrade and watched the departure of their visitor with wonder and interest.

“Poor devil!” said one of them.

“Yaas,” said another: “he’s had the devil’s luck.”

A third officer spoke. “Is the poor devil,” he asked, “a *pukkha* soldiah?”

Both the other officers shook their heads, decidedly. The little Derby Dog, at his wobbly table, executed a sudden wriggle and dropped a big red blot on A.B. /192.



## Mrs. Pearmint's Auction Sale

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MRS. PEARMINT resides in a very secret part of the county. She lives in the heart of a remote and forgotten wasteland ; a piece of old scrub country, so completely retired that all the scrub thereon has grown up into forest trees—oak, and ash, and beech. Here and there an old True Service has spread the bounty of its mottled fruits. This primitive plantation covers eight square miles of land, and Mrs. Pearmint has her habitation in the very centre of it all, and can only be approached by the most private glades and ways. So it will be seen that the old lady lives well away from noise and agitation.

Mrs. Pearmint's secluded situation gives interest to a battered old signboard which is nailed to the trunk of a gigantic beech tree at her cabin gate. This signboard bears the inscription, "General Shop." If any town-bred traveller ever found himself in the vicinity of Mrs. Pearmint's cottage he might reasonably wonder to see such a sign in such a place. But town-bred people never visit Mrs.

Pearmint's little forest, its existence being as yet unknown to the world at large. Only Mrs. Pearmint and her few neighbours, and a baker and a tax collector and myself know that it is there.

All the business which Mrs. Pearmint has ever been known to transact in conformity with her sign is to sell a few crab-apples in the autumn season or to give a few figs to the baker, an old and sprawling fig tree being the principal feature of her garden. The existence of Mrs. Pearmint's signboard is understood to date from the time, now very remote, when Mr. Pearmint was alive and active, and attended a sale of pigs in the town of Petborough, and found the board in a lumber yard and bought it for tuppence. Mrs. Pearmint's husband, being then alive and active, carried the board to his cottage in Grimm's Fairy Tales, and affixed it to the beech tree.

The idea was, as Mrs. Pearmint has often explained to me, to accustom the baker, the tax collector, and myself, slowly and gradually, to the knowledge that a general shop was coming. When Mr. and Mrs. Pearmint grew old enough to desist from actual work, and to have saved an appropriate amount of capital, the shop would actually come. I understand that it was to have consisted of penny tins of mustard, penny bottles of vinegar, penny packets of salt, "Bull's Eye pellets," crab-apples, and onions. A good shop, but alas! it came not. For, before Mrs. Pearmint's husband could grow old and rich enough to contest the supremacy of Harrod's Stores, he was stricken with disease, a disease of the rheumatic order which stiffened all his joints, so that he could

neither move nor turn, and old Mrs. Pearmint had to wheel him along the ways and glades in a home-contrived perambulator, or bath-chair.

What with this employment and the necessity now imposed upon her of gathering crab-apples and figs for two, Mrs. Pearmint was too busy to open the shop, and when the death of Mr. Pearmint mercifully took place she was somehow too sad. But she left the signboard—as an expression, perhaps, of all that which other widows try to utter in granite.

Now, when September arrived, breathing a promise, since bluntly falsified, of amber sunshine, the subject of ripe green figs was naturally suggested to my mind. The idea presented itself to me of paying a casual visit to Mrs. Pearmint and her fig tree and making a noise like half a crown. But when I got to Mrs. Pearmint's cottage there were no figs to be fished for. The first crop had gone, and a second growth was not yet ripe. And Mrs. Pearmint was very busy. I found her digging with a spade at the foot of her elm tree burying the signboard. All the explanation that my expressions of surprise brought forth from Mrs. Pearmint was the brief remark that she was preparing for her auction.

“What auction?” I demanded.

Mrs. Pearmint should have thought I must have heard then. Everybody know'd about it. Mrs. Pearmint was evidently a little hurt to find that I was not among the knowing ones. She was leaving the cottage then, so there. And the fig tree was going to be uprooted, for her poor husband had set such store by it he could never abear to lay in his grave

and think of strangers mauling it. The only explanation offered by Mrs. Pearmint of this sudden decision to leave her old home was that she had arranged to live with her sister in a cottage on the high road, close to Firkin's Smithy, and then they would be two old widders together, and a good job, too, for everybody. As to the auction sale, it would take place on the day before Michaelmas, and very busy she would have to be to get ready in time.

I hope that I succeeded in concealing the wonder with which this item of information inspired me. It was difficult to understand, in view of the extreme scantiness and simplicity of Mrs. Pearmint's worldly possessions, why the preparation of the sale should occupy much of her time, and why any sane auctioneer should allow the act of selling them to occupy any of *his* time. Thus cogitating, I said good-bye to Mrs. Pearmint, after promising firmly to attend her sale at Michaelmas.

In the days which followed, Mrs. Pearmint's auction sale was the subject of much amusing local comment. Interspersed with all these neighbourly jeers, however, was a strain of serious speculation regarding the value of an old oak corner-cupboard which she was known to possess. This was estimated by the gossips to be hunderds and hunderds of years old, and it was correspondingly estimated at hunderds and hunderds of pounds in value.

Now it happens that some near friends of mine whom I will call "The Freddie's" are about to consummate the folly of their mutual attachment by

getting married. It naturally occurred to me that my own contribution to their joint resources might as well be represented by an old oak cupboard hundreds of years old as by a pearl necklace hundreds of yards long. Indeed, I had actually contemplated something of this very kind, and had actually been to look at one in Petborough. The one I looked at was a highly carved cupboard, with an oily black surface that had green lights in it. It was fitted with obvious Birmingham handles and had the fresh sap running out of every joint. The worthy tradesman of Petborough who had this article for sale assured me positively that it was what he called a genuine Aunt Teak and had only that morning reached his shop from an old Sussex farm-house which it had inhabited for years. It was no doubt, as the tradesman represented, dirt cheap at eight pounds, but, as dirt is no use to me, even at a gift, I left his cupboard with him and went to look at Mrs. Pearmint's.

On again approaching Mrs. Pearmint's cottage I met that lady with her home-contrived perambulator. The vehicle was filled to overflowing with her household possessions, which appeared to consist exclusively of coloured almanacs for the year 1906, and many small pieces of decayed oilcloth. She was wheeling these treasures about the ways and glades, and she explained that this was being done in preparation for the auction sale. How the woman could consider herself to be preparing for a sale by taking her possessions away from the house in which the sale was to be held was one of those small



mysteries which now seemed to attend all the proceedings of Mrs. Pearmint.

She left her perambulator in a glade and returned with me to the cottage to show me the corner-cupboard which, she explained, might or might not be for sale on the day of auction, she having not yet decided whether to sell it "with the rest" or to take it with her for company when she joined her sister at Firkin's Smithy. It was a dirty old corner-cupboard anyhow, and greatly rotted, and I was unable to force myself to believe that "The Freddies" would thank me for it. However, by not actually opposing Mrs. Pearmint's view of its extraordinary charm and value, I contrived to sustain it, and at a convenient moment transferred my attention to the other objects in Mrs. Pearmint's sitting-room. These consisted of four more pieces of tarnished oilcloth and two Windsor chairs. The room was otherwise empty.

"You see," said Mrs. Pearmint mysteriously, "I've been having a clear-out, like, to get ready for my auction sale. I've a-took the table and the easy chair to my sister's, an' the old clock, too. I couldn't sell *he*."

Mrs. Pearmint remarked later that the second lot of figs were going on nicely, and she invited me to return in a few days' time and taste the last of the fruit that would be gathered from the old tree.

The following advertisement, which appeared next morning in the "West Sussex Gazette," placed beyond doubt the authenticity of Mrs. Pearmint's sale :

BUGLOSS COTTAGE, GRIMM'S WASTE, PETBOROUGH GREEN, SUSSEX.

(about 4½ miles from Petborough Town)

**M**ESSRS. PERKINS, PERKINS, PERKINS SON & PERKINS are favoured with instructions from Mrs. Emily Pearmint (giving up housekeeping) to Sell by Auction on the Premises, on Saturday, September 21st, 1918, valuable HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE AND EFFECTS, comprising capital feather bed, inlaid rosewood twin French bedsteads, excellent mahogany cellarette sideboard, pair antique Sussex iron brand-dogs with pot-hooks, magnificent black oak carved corner-cupboard, 2 eight-day and 1 thirty-hour brass grandfather clocks in mahogany cases, fine old 8-ft. cherry wood dresser, and several useful pieces of good quality oilcloth, together with numerous household effects.

I read this announcement with profound emotion and was glad to recognise the oilcloth. The other items, I supposed, would explain themselves on the day of sale.

In point of fact they explained themselves sooner than that, namely, this morning, when I again visited Mrs. Pearmint's cottage to say good-bye to the fig tree, and again met Mrs. Pearmint in a glade or way, attended by her trusty home-contrived perambulator. Mrs. Pearmint explained that she would have to detain me for a minute or two, as she had promised to wait at the spot until twelve o'clock in order to receive a wagon which was bringing some things for her sale. As she spoke the wagon appeared.

It was a large wagon drawn by two horses, and brightly painted with the name of my worthy Petborough tradesman. It carried the twin bedsteads, the mahogany sideboard with cellarette, the shining brass clocks, the fine old fire-dogs, and the cherrywood dresser. Above all else, crowning the

load, it carried a piece of furniture which I had seen before, namely, the magnificent carved oak corner-cupboard. Its oily black surface showed green lights, and fresh sap was dripping from every joint.

Some wealthy amateurs of the collecting world will soon be travelling all the way from London and New York into this remote and secret little Sussex forest, hitherto known only to me, the tax collector, Mrs. Pearmint, and the baker's man. Here they will find some obvious Aunt Teaks.

## “ Poor Old Ambrose ”

—

THE news that Ambrose had left home was received with calm in the village. I suppose that the historic events of the last four years have accustomed us to the idea of people leaving home. Their return is a more surprising thing, but even those incidents do not give rise to much local excitement. William, in the act of taking his calves to market, encounters George (whom he has not seen since August, 1914) in the act of carting faggots, and all that William has to say about it is :

“ 'Marnin', George. Back again, then ? ”

“ R ! ” replies George, employing the shortest monosyllable in the language, as he goes on carting faggots.

As for the Georges who have not come back at all, and never will . . . well, they have gone, and we forget them. So what did Ambrose matter—one more or less ?

But there were circumstances connected with Ambrose Button which to my mind made his

conduct "unlikely." One of these circumstances was a goitre, and the second was a rheumatic affliction which had twisted his neck and caused him to walk sideways. A third circumstance consisted in the habit of industry which Ambrose had developed to a high degree. For five years now he has been "working" my lane, early and late, rain or shine, in the interests of Mr. Tagg, the timber merchant.

Ambrose's vocation is, or was, that of a "haulier." I know little of the technique of this calling, except that it seems naturally to imply a goitre and a crooked neck and a habit of persistence and work as usual on Bank Holidays. Before it was light in the winter time you could hear Ambrose and his wagon and his twisted bones come creaking down the hill; and just so soon as it was light in summer you could see them. Thereafter, throughout the day, and well into dark, they could be seen and heard again at half-hourly intervals; creaking empty down the hill or blowing, fully laden, up the hill, on top of which the wood is dumped.

Variations of season and temperature made little difference to Ambrose's twist and limp, but they exercised a great effect upon the goitre. Ambrose was a pale-complexioned little man, having a small white knob in place of a nose, no eyebrows, eyes like boot-buttons, an open mouth, ragged teeth, and a few irregular wisps of mouse-coloured beard. In summer time this physiognomy presented a contrast in colouring with the goitre, which was of the brightest carmine hue, and was at that season of the year worn exposed—for coolness. In the winter,



however, Ambrose would put its stocking on, and then it could only be recognised by its shape.

It will be seen that Ambrose was a hard-working man. He worked so hard, in fact, and went so lame, that I often thought how lucky it was for his master that he was not a horse. Yet, though hard work be ennobling, it is not always beautifying, and I cannot disguise from the reader that Ambrose Button was no Prince Charming. But even the crooked bits burn, as we say in these parts of cord-wood and cripples ; and Ambrose had flared up once. He was now a married man.

She who was his helpmeet and incubator had a cleft palate and other physical detractions, but she gurgled about the village contentedly enough, and was no doubt able to meet the requirements of the husband, who was never at home, and the babies who infested it. During the eight years of her alliance with Ambrose, Mrs. Button had admitted eight babies into this world, and another one was knocking at the door.

They all lived in close proximity to the wood dump, in a habitation which had been kindly placed at their disposal by Mr. Tagg, the wood merchant. It was a modest domicile, composed of a tram-car, a bird-house, and some galvanised iron. Here Mrs. Button stewed and stewed her cabbage, and her old mother had and had her hiccups, and the eight babies crawled and quarrelled and screamed, and the wood pile creaked and ripened. This home Ambrose had now left.

The matter might not have been brought to my notice at all—why should it?—except for the fact

that I was expecting Ambrose to bring me some wood which he did not bring. "What has become of Ambrose this morning?" I said to somebody; and old Mrs. Pett, who totters about my house with a duster, overheard the question.

"Why, haren't you heard, then, sir?" said Mrs. Pett.

"Heard what?"

"About old Ambrose. He've runned away."

Mrs. Pett made this announcement without gesture or emphasis of any kind. It was an event which evidently interested her little. She potted here and potted there in her usual placid manner, removing particles of dust from pieces of furniture with her duster, with which she then reapplied the dust to other pieces of furniture. The news had impressed me a little bit, however, and I gave it my consideration. Then, thinking of the goitre and the timber carting, and all, I said:

"Well, it's about time."

Mrs. Pett assented, yawning slightly, and went on dirtying the furniture.

Then Mr. Tunks was announced, together with the boy who holds his spanner. Mr. Tunks had come to apply a new washer to the kitchen pump. He therefore found it necessary to dissemble that instrument completely and take it all away with him. Before doing so, however, he was regaled with the usual cocoa by Mrs. Pett, and they were heard to discuss the usual topics. Ambrose formed one of these. Mr. Tunks was heard to remark that in his opinion Ambrose had enlisted and had gone to be a

Young Guard in Cologne. This suggestion created merriment, Ambrose's goitre and his twist and his limp having been noticed in the village.

“ But joking apart, Alf,” said Mrs. Pett, having dried her eyes: “ No one can't blame old Ambrose. They can't reely. Who *could* put up with that wife o' his'n, the way she goo on having babies? ”

Mr. Tunks assented heartily. “ No stoppin' 'er at all,” he said.

Soon after my pump had been carried away, Mr. Rummery was announced. This old gentleman, in view of the approach of the gardening season, had come to proclaim the fact of his continued existence and that of his ability to mow and hoe. We walked round the garden together and looked at some potatoes in a shed. These had the effect of putting Mr. Rummery in mind of Ambrose.

The deserted incubator, it appeared, had called on Mr. Rummery that morning, and had asked for a few pounds of potatoes on the credit system. She had explained that she and the children were hungry. But Mr. Rummery had given her no potatoes. For them as couldn't manage, he told her, couldn't beg, and besides, he told her, the time to think about cooking potatoes was the time when there had been a man at home to eat 'em. Perhaps, he told her, if Ambrose had been offered more potatoes they might have given him the heart to stop at home.

These were wise maxims, but they did not seem calculated to appease the hunger of Mrs. Button and her chickens.

It seemed to be a case for direct action, and I looked

up Mrs. Button. She was giving nourishment to her last-born, and stewing cabbage, and her mother was having hiccups, and her children were having whooping cough. Seeing which, I called on the vicar, who was having tea. He displayed no great interest in Mrs. Button's trouble, and was, indeed, yawning before I had quite finished explaining it. He said, however, that he would enquire into the case, though, on the face of it, it struck him as being one of those cases into which it were wiser *not* to enquire.

For some time after this I heard no more about Ambrose. I have reason to believe that his incubator and its produce were supplied with potatoes in sufficient quantity, but beyond that there was little done and nothing said. Ambrose had gone and there was an end of him, and nobody either thought or spoke about him.

And then, all of a sudden, poor old Ambrose turned up again.

Some boys found him. They were playing near the pond in Coldharbour Lane, and throwing bits of stick at a sort of football-thing that was floating there. One of the boys got hold of a staff and managed to drag the football to the bank, and it turned out to be—what do you think? It turned out to be the head of poor old Ambrose, to which the body and limbs and goitre of poor old Ambrose were still attached.

Mr. Tunks brought me the news in calling to explain, with a very flushed face and a very thick voice, why he could not finish the pump. He described the surprising manner in which poor old

Ambrose had turned up again, speculated as to the probable result of a coroner's inquest, and remarked how fortunate we were in having the cold weather still with us. He then went on to describe the effect which Ambrose's return was exercising on my pump.

“ The job's there, I'll own,” said Mr. Tunks, “ and lays in my workshop. But there it will have to lay till we've dug old Ambrose in. It's no manner o' use for me to deceive you, sir, for I can't work and I woon't work, not while poor old Ambrose is in me mind. Oi sims to want to sit and grieve about him, I doos, and I can't eat naarthun', though I drinks a tidy bit, for me throat be that parched. Poor old Ambrose! And that poor wife o' his'n—left there alone and unprovided for, with eight little children. Poor woman! I sent her a rabbut this mornin'.” Mr. Tunks turned away to hide his feelings, and the interview terminated.

A few minutes later a little girl, sobbing bitterly, came with a note from Mrs. Pett. Mrs. Pett expressed her sorrow at being unable to come to work that morning. She added an expression of her fear that she would be equally unable to come for many successive mornings, since she was occupied, day and night, in sitting with the widow of poor old Ambrose. She asked to be paid a few shillings that were owing to her in order to provide crêpe for the widow's children.

This little girl was followed by a bigger one, Miss Smee, the parish organist. Miss Smee brought a subscription list in aid of the widow and orphans of



poor old Ambrose. This list was headed by the signature of the vicar.

After that, nothing surprised me—not even the strange noises which then took place at the bottom of the garden. They grew so loud, however, that I went out to look for them, and found that they were occasioned by Mr. Rummery giving vent to emotion. The tears were streaming down his face, and he had filled my wheelbarrow with my potatoes, and was wheeling them away. I asked him why.

“P—poor—old—Ambrose,” replied Mr. Rummery in a broken voice. “They fatherless little ones o’ his’n: they—they——.”

Old Mr. Rummery could say no more, but averted his head and gurgled. Then, with his shoulders shaking, he wheeled my potatoes away to the succour of the orphans.

So poor old Ambrose has made a stir in the world at last.

## VII

### Brown Milk

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MR. NICHOLAS ODDY, cornfactor, of Devizes, in Wiltshire, received me by appointment in the international "salon" of the Metropolitan Palace Hotel, which is fashionably situated in Bloomsbury Square, London.

With Mr. Nicholas Oddy was Mrs Nicholas Oddy, cornfactor's mate, also of Devizes.

Mr. and Mrs. Oddy offered me a hearty Wiltshire welcome : Mr. Oddy explaining to Mrs. Oddy that I was young Jack's friend, who wrote for the newspapers, but that I wouldn't take anything. To which Mrs. Oddy replied that if I was young Jack's friend I would *have* to take something, even if it was only a cup of cocoa.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Oddy expressed repeatedly, in very polite terms, their sense of obligation at my having come to see them. They knew that young Jack had written to me, for he was a good lad and without pride, although he had passed for a doctor ;

and was always showing kindnesses to his old aunt and uncle.

But they had never for one moment supposed—no, not for one moment—that anything would come of it. A busy man, such as they knew me to be—they had Jack's word for that—must have many more important matters on hand than Jack's old aunt and uncle from Devizes. Still, Jack said I would come, and Jack was right ; for, sure enough, I had come, and they were extraordinarily obliged to me for coming, as they were sure Jack would be, when Jack heard that I had come, which he certainly would ; and at the risk of offending me they really must venture again to insist on my having something—if it was only a cup of cocoa.

Upon their cocoa being for the second time declined Mr. and Mrs. Oddy looked at each other silently, but with a certain grave intentness, like two old owls conferring. And then Mr. Oddy spoke. He said :

“ You mustn't mind *us*. Devizes is a slow old place, and we're a slow old couple. We live a long way out of the fashion and we don't know any better. Very likely cocoa isn't thought a lot of here, not like it is in Devizes. Perhaps you would prefer a glass of port wine ? ”

I do not often drink port just before dinner in August, and I was therefore forced into declining yet again the proffered hospitality of Mr. Oddy. That gentleman again engaged himself in silent conference with Mrs. Oddy, and again spoke :

“ At any rate,” he said, “ you will eat a bit o' dinner with Mrs. O. and me ? ”

I acceded readily to this charming proposition ; and the owls, after blinking confusedly at each other in silence, then blinked benignantly at me, and, speaking as with one voice, exclaimed :

“ Well . . . that’s one up for Jack ! ”

Mr. Oddy then extended the terms of his invitation so as to include dramatic entertainment and a “ bit o’ supper ” and——

“ You see,” he said, “ we thought perhaps, if you didn’t happen to be too busy with your writings, you would come along with us to-night to the first house at the Fastideum, where we thought we’d go to have a look at Miss Daggs, the singer, and Polgo, this educated Ape, and—all the other London actors. And after that we thought—that is, Jack thought—that perhaps you would take and show us round a few of the sights. There’s one sight in particular Jack says we’ve got to be sure and ask you to show us. It’s a kind of a hotel—a caffy, as the saying goes.”

Mrs. Nicholas Oddy now rose from her chair. “ I’ll leave you gentlemen to talk it over,” she remarked. “ It is time I got into some party clothes, if we are going to this theatre. Can you tell me, young man, if I’m expected to dress low ? ”

It was long since I had visited the Fastideum, that resort of the hardened pleasure-seeker ; but I felt safe in assuring Mrs. Oddy that any sort of bodily covering would satisfy its conventions.

Mrs. Oddy sighed contentedly. “ To tell you the truth, I’m glad to hear it,” she said. “ I’m not used to these cutaways, and they make me feel

ashamed. Nick, make the young gentleman have something, if it's only a cup—a glass of ale."

Mr. Oddy being thus exhorted, and the exhortant having departed, proceeded to wink in a profound and knowing manner. "I'll wager," he asserted "that you know a better drink than port or ale *or* cocoa, if only you're left to choose it for yourself. Now, speak up. What do folk drink in London?"

"At this hour," I confessed, "they usually drink gin or vermouth, or both."

"Then just you ask that young fellar to bring us a tot."

The brocaded Person to whom Mr. Oddy referred in these inconsiderate terms was accordingly persuaded to deal with this matter, and, when he had returned with an immense plated salver supporting some almost invisible beakers, Mr. Oddy, shutting one eye, performed an audible act of imbibition.

"K-k-keen," commented Mr. Oddy, "a k-k-keen drink. But—bless me, if I don't prefer an old-fashioned glass o' port. We're an old-fashioned lot in Devizes."

"As I was saying," continued Mr. Oddy, "young Jack was very downright about one thing: whatever else we did, we was to be sure and persuade you to take us to this here caffy, getting on about supper time. But our treat, you understand—*our* treat. Now don't let there be any mistake about that. This here caffy, they call it—now, what do they call it? Ah! they call it the Caffy da Egypt."

I started. My hat, how I started!

Mr. Oddy perceived that I started. "Ha! ha!"



he exclaimed. "You've got a toe, as well as me, I see. Ha! ha!"

I endeavoured in the most delicate possible manner to hint to old Mr. Oddy that, taking everything into consideration, including Mrs. Oddy, one shouldn't, that is to say, one couldn't—er—well, hang it! We've all heard of the Café d'Egypte.

But old Mr. Oddy was deaf to my delicate representations. And before I could argue further with him a sudden crackling proclaimed the stately approach of Mrs. Oddy.

I will refrain from describing the extremely satisfying repast which then ensued. Suffice it to say that both Mr. and Mrs. Oddy ate their dinner with great gusto and hearty appetite, and that they particularly relished the Pêche Melba. Mr. Oddy was heard three several times thus to admonish the Person in brocade :

"Hi, young fellar! You can bring me some more o' that—that canned fruit and custard."

Then the Fastideum, where the Educated Ape and other accomplished artistes were presented to us. Miss Daggs, "the singer"—i.e., Miss Minnie Daggs, distinguished for her interpretation of that almost national anthem, "Lift It Up a Little Bit"—surpassed herself in audacity. Old Mrs. Oddy, who ought, by all the rules, to have been extremely shocked by Minnie's antics, was merely sympathetic.

"Poor girl," she remarked, "I hope they gives her decent money. It must be very hard work, this bobbing about. It must be very difficult to sing so loud, too!"

The final exit of Miss Daggs relieved my spirit of its top layer of foreboding. But the top layer was a very thin one: much remained beneath it. For there was still the Café d'Egypte to be faced.

And the Café d'Egypte was in a particularly regardless mood that night, a circumstance which was rendered additionally embarrassing by the behaviour of old Mr. Oddy, who, preceding us into the highly illuminated "lounge" of that institution, seated himself at a table which was already in the partial occupation of a—a lady.

She was a very vivid lady, very definitely hatted. She looked at old Mr. Oddy with very big, bold eyes, and by the time we reached the table Mr. Oddy had already shaken hands with her.

"An old friend, my dear—or near enough," explained Mr. Oddy to Mrs. Oddy as we took our seats. "She mistook me for poor Archibald. 'What cheer, Archibald?' " she said.

"Oh! Poor Archibald," commented Mrs. Oddy. "Before he hurt his face with that motor-bicycle, he and Nicholas were always being mistaken for each other. I never knew two brothers who were more alike, except for their features and the colour of their hair. I suppose you're from Devizes, miss?"

"No," replied the lady: "from Pimlico."

"Well, I somehow thought," admitted Mrs. Oddy, "that you didn't have quite the look of a Devizes gal. It's the—er—complexion, I suppose."

I suppose it was, for the lady's complexion was laid on thick. Her two bold eyes were rendered conspicuous by contrast with this distempering.

They possessed a quality of emphasis, like solitary plums in a flattened white pudding.

"When I look round me," mused Mrs. Oddy, "at all you London ladies here, it seems to me that you've all got a sort of weary look."

"It's a weary life—in London," replied the lady.

"So I've been told," assented Mrs. Oddy. "Nicholas, ask the lady if she'll take anything. She must take something, if it's only a cup o' cocoa."

"Thank you," replied the lady; "I'll take a cup o' coffee. With *brown* milk," she added, looking sideways at the waiter.

"There now!" exclaimed Mrs. Oddy. "Brown milk. You have got to come to London to learn the latest. There's a lot of strange things in London. *We* don't know half that's going on."

The lady assented, with a thin smile.

"I should like to have a look at this milk," said Mrs. Oddy's husband, as the waiter appeared with a tray.

"Sorry," replied the lady; "they've mixed it in already." She showed them her cup; then, quickly drank up its contents.

"Pardon me, ma'am!" exclaimed Mrs. Oddy, "but you've spilt some on your collar. It's such a pretty collar. Crochet, I believe."

"Yes," assented the lady. "An old-fashioned pattern. 'Irish rose,' they call it. Easy as easy. Perhaps you'd like me to show you."

"That I would," cried Mrs. Oddy.

So Mrs. Oddy, from Devizes, breathing hard and crackling, sat up close to the distempered lady and

touched her shapely hand. And old Mr. Oddy sat close by, nodding his approval, smoking his pipe.

When we had returned to the clean street Mr. Oddy expressed his disappointment with the Caffy da Egypt and his surprise at Jack. "Can't think what the fellar sees in the place."

"Nor yet I," assented Mrs. Oddy. "But," she added, "that was a nice lady we talked to inside there. Proud to look at, but homely mannered."

"Yes," said Mr Oddy, "she was a nice lady!"

"But there now," cried Mrs. Oddy, "if we didn't quite forget to ask her how she comes to know poor Archibald!"

"Well, well ; and so we did !" said old Mr. Oddy, shaking his head resignedly.

## VIII

# Representing the Platoon

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WHEN George emerged from the Underground Station and looked questioningly about him in Edgware Road, he observed that that thoroughfare still wore its old look of detachment ; of being interested in any business but its own. Other London streets, particularly streets as wide and long as Edgware Road, have their individual attractions and purposes. Thus people go to Regent Street for soap, Oxford Street to buy hats, and Bond Street to look at jewellery. They get their motor cars in Long Acre and their bicycles on Holborn Viaduct. Such a dirty street as Old Street or such a little street as Telegraph Street has specific character—one being noted for rolled top desks and the other for sixpenny Revenue Stamps. Even the places which people never go to are famed for something ; such as Aldgate, which is associated with a pump. Bur Edgware Road is remarkable for possessing absolutely no distinct qualification beyond that of leading elsewhere. So all the people who form the



crowd in Edgware Road have that look of not belonging to the place ; of being on some errand aloof from the thoroughfare.

George stopped one of these wayfarers and asked a question, but the wayfarer—a youth of countrified appearance who smelt of sheep and apples—looked indifferently at George and George's soiled uniform and tin hat and bulging equipment, and replied that he did not live in London and couldn't say. Then George tried a lady.

She was a large lady whose corsets had broken faith with her, with the result that that part of her figure which indelicate people would call the stomach looked as if it had been added to her person after completion of the main structure. It was an abrupt promontory of unsuitable shape, which was emphasized rather than concealed by a short apron of black alpaca. The lady, on being questioned by George, put her hands beneath the apron and rested them upon the promontory. She looked at George in his battered equipment with more interest than the countrified young man had shown, but she offered him no better comfort. She was wearing a shabby old black bonnet, and she shook it at him, disseminating small black beads, and saying : " Joy Street ? Never 'eard of it. I'm a stranger 'ere."

But she was a sympathetic stranger and directed him to seek information at the " Homer Colonial "—a very large provision shop which she indicated with a gesture of the elbow, her hands being still at rest beneath the apron. At the Homer Colonial, the stranger said, they were very civil and knew a lot

So George conveyed himself, and his tin hat, and his rifle, and his kit bag, and his knapsack, and various independent packages which were fixed to his belt, across the road. At the provision shop he found a lady cashier in pince-nez, and all the latest regimental brooches, who promptly directed him to Joy Street, and looked at him with real interest—particularly at his collar badges. After his interview with the lady cashier, George had no difficulty in finding Joy Street, and, as it turned out to be not much of a street, he had little difficulty in finding the particular house which he wanted. This was a little shop at No. 7, at the small square window of which he stood for a minute or two, gazing absently at the peculiar assortment of articles which was therein displayed to view.

George was a rather shy young man and he was afflicted with a slight stammer, and he always hesitated at a shop window before entering the shop—even though he knew beforehand, which he seldom did, exactly what he wanted to buy. In the window of this little shop George saw—or would have seen had he been really looking at what was before him—a distressing array of coloured postcards, all of which served to illustrate how inadequate is the margin between fun and gloom. He would have seen also a jar containing very rocky rock-cakes, a tray containing some unhappy-looking caramels, and some further trays containing nothing but the empty papers on which caramels are customarily displayed. Here and there, adhering to the windows, were cards showing penny pencils or pieces of rubber,

or bargain packets of stationery, and all along the bottom of the window were arranged screw stoppered vessels, containing bottled stomach-ache in different colours.

George saw very little of all this, however, for he was looking at himself in the window-glass and rehearsing the sentence "goo-goo-goo-good afternoon," and trying to get it terse. The face which he saw reflected in the window-glass was a refined and fastidious face; the face of an imaginative and intelligent young man. But it was at present rather twisted and agonised by reason of efforts incidental to this contest with superfluous goo's. When he thought that he had had sufficient practice, he turned abruptly and plunged at the door, which he opened amid the abusive protests of a noisy bell.

George closed the door behind him, but the bell, still shivering, continued to utter intermittent sounds, while he looked round the little empty shop. The bell had evidently attracted attention, for a voice behind the counter was heard to exclaim: "Shop!" and another voice to answer "Right!" Then the first voice repeated "Shop!" giving the word a reproachful emphasis, and the second voice again replied, "All right, I say! . . . If anybody," added the second voice, "was to cut themselves into a million pieces, then perhaps some people would be satisfied." On this the little door behind the counter was opened to give entrance to a bouncing young woman with red hair and red lips, who looked accusingly at George, and muttered the monosyllable: "Well?"

“Goo-goo-goo-goo-goo-goo-good afternoon,” said George.

“Ow. . . *Good* afternoon,” replied the young woman indifferently, “What d’ya want?”

“Y-y-y-y-*you* I think,” stammered George. “Is your name Miss Walker?”

“Bull’s Eye!” rejoined the young woman. “What about it?”

George was twisting his foot about, a sign which together with slight facial contortions would have suggested to anybody who knew him that he would answer in a minute. In little more than a minute, he did so, saying: “M-m-m-my name is George.”

“The same as Mr. Robey and Our King,” remarked Miss Walker, looking at George reflectively. “Well, George, ’ow are you?”

George replied that he was ni-ni-nicely, thanks. He went on to suggest that perhaps Miss Walker had heard of him.

“Cannot say I have, George,” rejoined Miss Walker. “But don’t let that upset you. There’s some people ain’t ’eard of Robey.”

“You exaggerate now,” protested George. “Do you happen to know a lad named Charley Dodds?”

“Not ’arf!” Miss Walker answered eagerly. “’Im as uses the nickname of Charley Chaplin. Do *you* know ’im?”

“I know him very well,” said George. “He saved my life.”

“Go on!” exclaimed Miss Walker.

“Do you also happen to know a lad named Alfred Gubbins?” continued George.

"Alf?" cried Miss Walker. "'Im as we nick-named Dan Leno? Of course I know 'im. Do you?"

"Rather!" said George. "He saved my life."

"Fancy that!" mused Miss Walker. She looked thoughtful for a moment or two and then observed: "You seem to know a lot of soldiers."

"Well, yes," admitted George. "You see, I-I m-m-mix with them."

"Ow!" Miss Walker again looked thoughtful. "Then per'aps," she suggested, "you've 'eard o' little Fatty Morgan. A Welsh soldier. 'Im as we christened Lloyd George."

"Little Morgan? Goo-good gracious, yes," assented George. *He* saved my life,"

"What *again!*" cried Miss Walker, incredulously. She looked at George with manifest wonder, and at last said, very gravely, "Pardon me, Sport, but are you a blessed cat?"

George smiled bashfully. He admitted, stammering much, that he was more often supposed to be a bit of a dog, which led him to explain, with a redundancy of "p-p-plains," the object of his call. He had been deputed by the soldiers named—Messrs. Gubbins, Morgan and Dodd—to visit Miss Walker and cheer her up.

"Me!" demanded Miss Walker, lifting her eyebrows.

"Y-y-y-you," said George abruptly. He fiddled at his belt and, detaching one of the independent packages which have already been mentioned, placed it on the counter. "Here's a souvenir from



Alfred to begin with," he explained. "Sh-sh-shell case."

Miss Walker regarded the souvenir without enthusiasm. "Young Will Parsons sent me one of those a week ago," she remarked, "and Freddy Cooper he sent me one the week before that. Are they friends o' yourn, too—young Will Parsons and Freddy Cooper?"

"Oh, yes," replied George warmly. "Why, they s-s-s-saved ——"

"I know," said Miss Walker, sympathetically. "Meeow! Meeow!"

It was George's turn to ask a question now. "How do you happen to know all these chaps?" he enquired.

"Know?" repeated Miss Walker. "Why, I'm *engaged* to them."

"I s-s-see," said George, respectfully. He detached another souvenir, a small shell-case like the first, from his belt, and put it beside the other on the counter. "Charley Chaplin sends you this," he remarked.

Miss Walker hardly looked at the shell-case at all. She was leaning across the counter and looking at George. She was looking at him with her head on one side. At last she said, speaking rather slowly, "Ain't you *engaged* to nobody?"

"Not exactly *engaged*," answered George.

"Where does the hitch come in?" demanded Miss Walker.

"Her aunt," replied George.

The aunt, it appeared, took the view that George

was too young. Miss Walker expressed agreement with the aunt. She asked, in an off-handed kind of manner, whether the young lady lived in London, and, on being told that the young lady lived in Leamington, remarked, still off-handedly, that she had heard of Leamington as being a pleasant seaside place. She went on to ask with an air of purely polite interest what the young lady did there. She was told that at present the young lady was driving a motor lorry. At this Miss Walker grinned and uttered suddenly the words "Pip! Pip!"

"War work, you know," explained George.

"Of course, I know—*trousers!*" exclaimed Miss Walker. She then asked abruptly what George did for a living.

"Oh, muck about," said George. "I'm a soldier just now."

"Go on!" exclaimed Miss Walker. "I thought from yar uniform ya might be a bishop. What d'ya do in civil?"

"I com-p-p-ose P-p-poems and p-p-paint P-p-pictures," replied George.

"My word!" was Miss Walker's comment. "This war has put some funny people into khaki. Why did the other fellars send *you* along?"

"To cheer you up," replied George. "To take you out. A bit of dinner, don't you know, and a show."

"What, a Picture House!" exclaimed Miss Walker.

"Ye-es," assented George, wincing slightly. "Unless you'd prefer a play."

“ You mean a piece,” replied Miss Walker eagerly, radiating warmth from her eyes. “ But not that piece with the Italian lady in it,” she added, clouding slightly. “ What do they call it now ? ”

George supposed that she referred to the play called “ Romance,” and she acknowledged that that was the piece in her mind and expressed aversion from it. “ What’s wrong with it ? A sell for everybody, me lad ; that’s what’s wrong with it. When she wants to click, ‘ e don’t ; and when ‘ e wants to click, *she* won’t. In the end, they don’t click orf at all. So they’re both sucked in. A *rotten* play ! ”

George suggested that she should choose some other play, and then remembering his obligations produced the souvenir from Morgan—a shell-case. “ All right ! Stand it with the others ! ” said Miss Walker, and reverted to the question of entertainment. “ If I’m to choose,” she said, “ what about a hopera ? ” George showed eager acquiescence, remarking that he was f-f-fond of opera.

“ Righto ! ” exclaimed Miss Walker. “ Let’s see Harry Binks in ‘ Cough it up. ’ ” George, surprised out of his usual bashfulness, confessed that he had been thinking of Pagliacci. But Miss Walker, looking doubtful, confessed that she had never heard of Harry Archie. Who *was* he ?

“ Never mind,” said George. “ Binks is much funnier. Get your hat on.”

But at this suggestion Miss Walker looked very surprised. “ Hat on ? ” she repeated. “ Hat on ! *Now ?* ”

“ Yes,” assented George. “ Why not ? ”

" You ain't even 'eld me 'and yet," she murmured.

George extended an unemotional hand : " P-p-put it there, old thing," he stammered.

Miss Walker accepted delivery of the hand with an air of quiet amusement. She remarked that he was a *one*. " Why ? " demanded George. Miss Walker shrugged her shoulders. She was blest if she knew, but she supposed that he had " led a wild past." Miss Walker then proclaimed her intention of leaving him for a few seconds while she negotiated leave of absence with somebody to whom she referred as her old woman. If George should see this individual he was to be sure and remember that he was Miss Walker's uncle.

" Oh, I say," protested George. " Make it b-b-brother."

" No fear ! " Miss Walker exclaimed, as she went out through the little door. " Me brother called *last week*."

After a short absence, Miss Walker reappeared through the little door, wearing a coloured woollen coat and carrying a hat. " It's all right, Oswald," she announced to George. " The old girl's turned agreeable and I can come. Where are we going for our bit o' grub ? " Miss Walker busied herself with her hat and her fringe as she spoke, there being a small mirror behind the counter which advertised on its face the attractions of a brand of nougat now unobtainable. George professed impartiality on the subject of eating-houses. " What's wrong with the g-good old Berkeley ? " he submitted at last.

'Never 'eard o' the place," said Miss Walker, shortly. "Why not go somewhere classy? The Corner 'Ouse, for instance?"

Oh . . . of course, if she would rather. . . . George's manner was polite, but unenthusiastic. Miss Walker gave him a quick glance expressive of mutual understanding.

"It need not cost a lot of money," she pointed out—"not if we keep to sandwidges." George grinned, and suggested that it would perhaps run to a steak.

"R!" assented Miss Walker in a tone of warm encouragement: "I daresay you fancies a nice rump steak. You don't get them ser often in the trenches, eh?"

"No," admitted George. "Only on al-al-alternate days."

"*Never* on a weekday?" exclaimed Miss Walker, raising her eyebrows in horror. "You pore boy! Well, you 'ave a steak then—see? And I'll interfere with a sossidge. And, 'ere—I say—take this." She had come from behind her counter and now she pressed a screw of paper into his hand. George stared down at this unexpected offering, while she cut short his anticipated protest with hurried words of explanation.

"It's a ten-bob note, kid. See? I kin spare it easy. And—and—I *know* the Army!"

The d-d-deuce she did! George was fearfully confused and appreciative and all that, and twisted his mouth and foot about a good deal,



but he happened to have c-c-cashed a cheque and ——

“ I know,” interrupted Miss Walker. “ The Army is proud. It always was. But you put that away—in *case*. I can spare it, Sport.”

Of course she could spare it. That was not for a moment in question, but did not she s-s-see ——

Miss Walker again interrupted George, saying : “ I see the colour of your coat, Sport, that’s all about it.” So George, blushing furiously, said no more, but stuffed the piece of paper into an upper pocket of his service jacket. He then asked Miss Walker if she thought it likely that he would be able to find a taxi-cab.

“ Taxi ! ” repeated Miss Walker, once more displaying horror. “ You *are* a lad ! Why a taxi to the Corner ’Ouse would cost three bob. Ain’t a bus good enough ? ”

Yes—if she preferred it.

Miss Walker replied that she preferred reason to swank. There was no sense in being rash. Besides . . . local buses were always so full in these days that people were not only permitted, but were expected to “ sit familiar ” in them.

“ What a cheery little sort you are ! ” said George.

“ Not at all,” protested Miss Walker. “ I got a big ’eart for soldiers. That’s all about it, and now, if you mind me hat, you can say ‘ Good Afternoon. ’ ” Miss Walker made a step towards him, but George remained quite stationary and uttered the word “ goo ” four times.

“ Oh, *thanks!* ” exclaimed Miss Walker with irony. “ Shall we get along now ? ” George nodded briskly.

Miss Walker, still standing close to his side, looked at him with an expression of resentful wonder. “ Ain’t you going to harm me ? ” she enquired.

George blushed worse than ever. He replied to her question with an emphatic negative. He said that he would not harm a fly.

“ You soft old thing, you ! ” exclaimed Miss Walker. “ I don’t mean *harm*. I mean *harm*.” She extended an arm in objective illustration of her meaning.

“ How slow I am,” admitted George, taking the arm very carefully and preparing to lead Miss Walker from the shop.

Miss Walker felt bound to agree that he was certainly not as fast as a fire engine. She also wanted to know, with reference to this stiff formality, whether this constituted his idea of harming a girl. He confessed that it did.

Miss Walker remarked that he made her laugh. Then, putting her own arm round his waist, and seizing his arm with a cry of “ ’Ere—*Come over!* ” she flung the latter about her neck, explaining cheerily : “ This is our style in Paddington.”

George was very surprised at this, and looked at her very thoughtfully. Then, still looking thoughtful, he deliberately lifted her chin and kissed her. A thoughtful kiss. A scholarly kiss. A kiss suggestive of psychological research.

“ Oh,” remarked Miss Walker, on regaining her breath. “ So you *are* a soldier after all ! ”

“ Yes,” admitted George. “ And re-re-representing the Platoon.”

## IX

### Private Jupp's Mission

---

My pretty cousin had been entertaining me to what she called a "spin" in her brother's motor-car. My pretty cousin had only just learnt how to drive her brother's motor-car, and she drove it with more courage than art.

My pretty cousin's brother had gone to be an Army doctor at Aldershot, and my pretty cousin remained in charge of his house and of the new car and old "locum" which he had left behind him.

I am glad to say that we completed the spin without bloodshed, though my head did a little spinning on its own account as we mounted the doorstep of my pretty cousin's brother's pretty house. It is a suburban house.

A maid opened the door to us, and, after spinning round and round (as it seemed to me), addressed my pretty cousin, who also was spinning round and round. The maid said something about a drawing-room and a soldier, and then my pretty cousin, still

spinning, took my arm ; and then we revolved in unison.

Very soon I found that I was sitting on a revolving chair in a revolving drawing-room looking helplessly at a large, revolving soldier, who carried a bandaged arm in a revolving sling. He had a very large mouth and very white teeth, with which he performed a revolving grin. I then closed my eyes. When I opened them the room had left off revolving, so also had my pretty cousin, and so also had the soldier. But the soldier still grinned. His grin was wide, enthusiastic, and respectful. He spoke to my pretty cousin, and his voice was enthusiastic and respectful, too. He said :—

“ Miss Pike, I believe ? Right ! George Wyatt’s bit o’ stuff, I believe ? Right !

“ Well, miss,” continued the soldier, “ I’m glad to meet ya. George Wyatt is my chum.” The soldier extended his effective arm—the left one. My pretty cousin extended an arm also, and they shook hands with mutual warmth.

“ I reckon as George Wyatt,” the soldier then added gravely, “ is about the best fellow we got out there. ‘Tenerate, I won’t ‘ear no different, not from nobody. ‘E’s my pal, is George Wyatt. ‘E’s the most splendid fellar we got.”

I was able to meet the soldier’s eye, and to associate myself warmly with these sentiments. George Wyatt is a splendid fellow, although he did fail to pass into the Indian Civil Service. But his pull to leg is worth watching, and he can do a perfect imitation of G. P. Huntley. In fact, he is a perfect



young man, and there is nothing at all the matter with him except his belief that he can play bridge and that he is good enough for my pretty cousin.

The soldier resumed his conversation with Miss Pike.

"My name," he said, "is Jupp, Private Jupp. I dessay you've 'eard George speak of me."

"Of course," replied my pretty cousin. "You are Bill Jupp."

"That's me," assented the soldier. "Well now, miss, I've come 'ere out of friendship for George, like, to return a bit of kindness what he done me Christmas time, when 'is arm was tied up dolly-wise, the same as mine is now. I dessay you'll remember the time, for 'e came back 'ome on sick leave, and I dessay as you seen him then. Just once or twice like. Eh? Ha, ha."

My pretty cousin, blushing rather evidently, confessed to having not wholly forgotten the circumstance of Mr. Wyatt's last stay in London.

"Good," said the soldier. "Well, miss, old George 'e done me a very good turn the last time 'e was 'ome. I—er—I got a friend as live in Plumstead. A young lady. She—er—well, miss, not to make a song about, she's *my* bit o' stuff. See? Miss Walker by name. I daresay you've 'eard George talk of 'er. No? That's strange!

"I call it strange, miss," continued Mr. Jupp, "because George 'e seemed to think a lot of Miss Walker the time 'e came back to the trenches, after his bit of sick leave. 'E talked about 'er a lot to me, 'e did."

“*Oh*,” said Miss Pike.

“Yes, miss, ’e talked about ’er zither-playing an’ that.”

“*Oh*,” repeated Miss Pike.

“Yes,” continued Mr. Jupp. “’Er and some of ’er young lady friends, they got up a bit of a party be’ind ’er uncle’s little shop in Edgware Road, and George ’e talked a lot about that party. ’E told me ’e could write a book about that party.

“Ya see, miss, before ever he got this push in the arm and before ever I got ditto, George an’ me made a bargain. I showed ’im Miss Walker’s picture, ya see, and he showed me your’n. And one day, when we was chumming up together like in our dug-out, I says to him : ‘ I’ll tell you what, mate,’ I says. ‘ If you gets one afore me,’ I says, ‘ you go and see my girl,’ I says, ‘ an’ take ’er to the pictures.’ ‘ That’s a bargain!’ says George. ‘ Yes,’ I says, ‘ it’s a bargain, George, and whenever I gits ’ome I’ll run yor bit around likewise!’ ‘ Three cheers!’ says George.

“Well, miss,” continued Private Jupp, “as things fell out it was George’s turn for to go ’ome first. As ’e said, so ’e done. ’E treated my girl proper. ’E took ’er to the pictures. ’E took ’er to the play. ’E bought her a pound o’ toffee, a new zither and a gold watch, and ’e paid a fellar to take her photograph for to bring back to me in France.

“Well, miss, poor old George ’e’s in the trenches now, well and ’earty, worse luck, and it’s my turn for a rest at ’ome. ’E kep’ ’is word to me, and I’ll keep my word to ’im. As ’e treated my bit, so I’ll

treat 'is. And . . .” the soldier hesitated and coughed, the cough of modesty . . . “And, well, miss . . . HERE I AM!”

My pretty cousin looked extremely pleased. “I suppose,” she said to me, “that you can amuse yourself here for an hour or two while Bill and I go round the town a bit?”

I supposed that I could.

“That’s all right, then,” said my pretty cousin. “Now, please, find Bill a glass of whatever it is that he oughtn’t to have while I run up and stick on a better hat.”

My pretty cousin came down again soon, having put on a better than better hat, and a dress to match.

“What oh!” cried Private Jupp, by way of intimating that he had noticed and approved this change of costume.

“’Ow do we go to find a taxi-cab?” he then enquired, adding, with a profound wink: “I can see you ain’t the tram sort.”

“Never mind about that,” replied Miss Pike, “there’s a little car outside. I’m driving it at present. We can go for our joy-ride in that.”

“What oh!” exclaimed Bill.

It was dusk and half-past dinner-time before they returned. They had lunched and they had tea’d. They had been to the play, they had been to the pictures. Bill had bought her the toffee, the zither, and a tortoise in a jar. He carried these offerings up the steps and deposited them about my feet. He then took off his cap and uttered his adieux. He said :—

“ Then, all bein’ well, miss, I’ll see you Thursday. I must git off to Plumstead now. The other one’s waiting for me there. Ya know the one I mean—Miss Walker. I’ll say good-bye, miss.” He held out his hand.

“ Oh, but George doesn’t say good-bye like that,” exclaimed my pretty but surprising cousin. “ Say good-bye properly, Bill.”

“ What oh ! ” cried Private Jupp.

And, winking furiously at me, that warrior completed his mission in style.

## X

### A Joke for a Horse

---

HAVING read about all the Peace celebrations in London, I naturally wanted to celebrate too ; but, having no guns to burn, I burnt a piece of coal instead. This, if you trouble to think about it, is a more daring sacrifice than that of any gun ; for there are still five thousand guns to come, but where or when another piece of coal is coming, Heaven only knows.

Anyhow, I put fire to my coal, and, in the fulness of time, ignited that indurate lump. Subsequently when the coal was giving heat and glowing bright, I sat on a little stool and searched the embers for alchemic visions. In the red heart of my thank-offering I saw a picture gradually form of trees and cottages, at peace, of shadowy by-lanes and of hot white roads, of old bridges and of great oaks and hornbeams. These were not prostrate and dismembered like their war-time fellows but erect and in full green. They changed their shapes for my amusement.



The picture, however, contained one stable and unchanging feature which figured always in the foreground. This was a mysterious living-waggon ; the kind of wheeled house which people who do not understand the smug associations of that word called a "caravan." The waggon which stood in the picture was my waggon, now wintering in Farmer Twose's barn. Pre-war bloom was still upon the green paint of its window-frames and the snows of 1914 were reflected in the white canvas of its roof. The woman who walked by the side of this visionary waggon was my woman, with a pre-war poppy in her hair. The whip in her hand was my whip, studded all over with odds and ends of brass, which have accrued to it in pre-war taverns as the love-offerings of other and more honest wagoners. The harness of the horse was my harness, shining with the shine imparted by my elbow. But the horse inside this harness ? Here was my mystery.

Where I looked for a white horse, slow-paced, deliberate, and of more than military age, I saw a more vigorous animal, thick-set but limber, and having, moreover, a somewhat impudent manner—the manner as it might be of a horse who looked upon my waggon as a joke. The colour of this horse was not white. It might have been brown, or black, or bay, or strawberry roan. It might have been any colour you please to think of, excepting white. It was this decided quality of not being white which made me perceive so clearly that the horse in the waggon was not my horse—not my *old* horse, I mean. That animal offered unfailing testimony to

the wisdom of Arabia ; for there is an Arab saying that the man who buyeth a young wife or a white horse buys trouble.

Then, as I sat on my humble stool and looked at this flickering picture of the familiar waggon, the flower-decked woman and the strange horse, it occurred to me suddenly to remember that my old white horse is dead. The war hay killed him, and whatever horse comes waggoning with us again will necessarily be a stranger. Then I thought I would shed a tear for the old white horse, but reflected that a horse who had lived to be twenty-three, and had died of sheer contempt for his victuals, did not merit the memorial tribute of a strong man's tears. So I whistled at the picture in the fire, got up gaily from my stool and took down the brass-studded whip from its rack. Whistling more than ever I carried this whip outside my cottage door to clean, and as I cleaned it my whistling became excessive, for I was thinking of the fine new horse I mean to have.

The sun was on view out of doors, and a wonderfully good sun too, for November ; and, while I was dabbing on the brass-polish and blowing out the semibreves, who should appear upon the public road but old Mr. Rummery. Mr. Rummery, who is the village odd man and gossip, and who was evidently on his way to avoid some job of work, was attracted by my whistling and stopped at the gate. He saw the whip in my hand and the smears of brass-polish on my forehead and made suitable comments.

“ Shoining up the old whip, be you ? ” said Mr

Rummery. "See you out on the road again come April, shouldn't wonder?"

I nodded. Mr. Rummery, leaning on the gatepost, stared at the whip and manifested his approval, as each new bit of brass was rescued from obscurity, by a quick intaking of his breath. "Hipff! Hipff! Hipff!" breathed Mr. Rummery. And when the last bit of brass was brought to light, I added the "Hurray!" But of a sudden Mr. Rummery looked down his nose and his eyelids flickered—a sign of impending speech—and he shook his head and spoke, in tones of anxious doubt.

"But how will you be goon an for waggoning," said Mr. Rummery, "now as you have lorst old Three-Pun-Ten?"

Three-Pun-Ten was the name of my old horse. This was derived from the circumstance of my having bought the quadruped at public auction; an incident which in its monetary aspect has clung to the local memory. I answered Mr. Rummery's question by saying I would have to buy another horse.

"Ha!" exclaimed Mr. Rummery, "but you will never buy a horse like Three-Pun-Ten—not for double or treble the money, you woon't."

"I shall buy an army horse," I said.

"What?" demanded Mr. Rummery, "one of they great cavalry gawks?"

This was not the kind of steed I had in mind. I thought of something small, thick-set, yet limber. The sort of animal who has been right amongst it with a water-cart. A silver-badged horse: one who has had some gas, for preference. I explained my requirements to Mr. Rummery.

Mr. Rummery nodded wisely. " Rackun that sort of horse 'ull goo cheap, do ya ? "

" Cheap or dear I am having it," was my reply.

Mr. Rummery looked puzzled. " What's the idea ? " he said.

The idea was difficult to express, being a sort of psychological one. However, I did my best to explain it and Mr. Rummery did his best to understand my explanation.

" I see," said the old gentleman, again nodding his head : " you waunts for to benefit the animal. You waunts for to find him a soft job like, same as if he was a discharged soldier. You waunts for to make a pet of he."

Now this is not at all what I " waunts." I happen to be in possession of a tremendous joke—this living-waggon—and I want to get a worthy friend to share it. A horse who has been well amongst it—who has lost some friends and some illusions, but never has lost heart ; one who has suffered pain—is the kind of horse I want to share my joke with me.

We will go out for weeks together, the woman with the poppies, the old war-horse and I. We will dawdle steadfastly in the most secret lanes where there is sun and shade commingled. There will be a continual absence of abrupt noises. The only sounds which the old horse is often going to hear will be the welcome trickle of the springs and water splashes and the morning High Mass of the bees. There will be continual pauses for refreshment and reflection, when, free from harness and halter, he will crop his full of no man's grass along the wayside wastes.

And then there will be the continual jokes ; the fussy mother-partridges with their anxious young, scurrying to the hedgerow. The fat policemen, too, who look for the prescribed particulars on the right-hand side of our dash-board and sorrowfully find them and copy them out into note-books. The astonished old people who stand amongst their beehives in the cottage gardens and are so glad and so surprised to see us, and who will bring out pieces of bread for the old war-horse to eat. The farmers, pursing shrewd mouths, who far from giving anything to horse or man will inevitably refuse to let us draw into their fields. Finally, there is the best joke of all—the children, boys and girls, with their following of sexless toddlers, who will dart out upon us suddenly at all odd moments, uttering their delightful cry of “ Oo Er ! The Circus ! ”

Then, in the early part of the afternoon when the sun is growing urgent, we shall seek and find our “ pitch ”—a piece of wayside grass, remote and shaded, with a pond at hand and the white-thorn at full blow. When we have found this admirable pitch—we would scorn to pick a worse one—I shall take the old warrior from his shafts and remove the harness from him, and I shall rub his skin down with a clean, soft cloth, and blow a little on his warm, wet ears. I shall get him a feed of good oats, mixed well with bran and chaff, and he will stand and sniff about him, whinnying softly while this repast is fabricated.

By the time the old war-horse has finished his oats, a curl of smoke will be issuing from the waggon chimney, and somebody inside the waggon will be



singing softly and I shall sense the imminent approach of eggs and bacon. Then I shall wink at the old war-horse and the old war-horse will wink at me, and at this moment a little lump of thankfulness will form in the throat of man and horse. As the old lad will by now have quite finished his oats, I shall give him a smack behind and speed him forth to graze at no man's charge.

All this I explained to old Mr. Rummery, who listened patiently and then said :

“ Thank you, sir. Well : I will be getting on.”

## XI

### Stuck to the Wire

---

“EXCUSE my ‘gravy eye,’” he said. “I’ve had some gas.” He was a soldier, looking for Tea, in a wooden hut, at a Base Camp, in France.

This soldier infected one with what I call the “mad shepherd feeling”: a feeling which imparts itself to imaginative persons who get mixed up with the great B.O.R.E.—*i.e.*: “Brotherhood Of Religious Endeavour.”

Having become identified with the B.O.R.E.’s you find that your lot in life is to stand behind an enormous urn and distribute fluids (tea when tapes are hanging out of the urn and coffee when they aren’t) to a ceaseless procession of mud-coloured sheep. They “baah!” at you.

“One tea,” they say: “one bun: two Woodbines.”

“Coffee,” you answer, shortly: for Time is Money at the B.O.R.E.

“Corfee, then,” they say: “and one bun, two Woodbine.”

“No buns!” You jerk this out, T. being M.  
“Cut cake only.”

“Cut cake, then, and two Woodbine,” baahs the old sheep.

You throw these commodities at him, and then concentrate yourself on the next sheep, who baahs for chocolate. And so on—for four hours or so. On they come: a continuous procession of muddy sheep. They all have round faces, two eyes, and a nose. They all have coughs and colds. They “baah” at you in an abrupt and uncouth manner, saving here and there one, who has the tentative, apologetic, indeterminate baah of good breeding.

While they are shuffling up and baahing about, one’s fellow “workers” go among them. Older “workers,” such as Mr. McBegg, from the Island of Egg—a certified Minister—keep physical order “Take your turn, please: take your turn. Everybody will be served in turn.” Younger “workers,” such as Mr. Hosanner, aged nineteen, from the Theological Institute at Cannock Chase, preserve the spiritual amenities. Mr. Hosanner passes, rather than walks, among the sheep, exhorting them to be pure.

Mr. Hosanner’s neatly kept black clothing is lined with inner pockets, from which repositories he continually brings forth printed “pledge” forms. These forms he furtively presses upon all sheep whose “baahs” excite his trained susceptibilities. The signatory of such a document is thereby bound to abstain from committing that sin which Mr. Hosanner, aged nineteen, pronounces to be more deadly

than all the other sins combined—such other sins comprising drunkenness, lying, and theft.

Mr. Hosanner conducts his purifying labours with an unfortunate impartiality which one day will secure for him such a bang in the eye—or, as he himself would perhaps prefer to express it: such an unprovoked assault—as will surprise him more than any event which has hitherto occurred during his nineteen years of bland endeavour.

In other words, Mr. Hosanner will thrust his detestable pledge-form into the face of one old sheep too many. His impartial habits bring him much into touch with middle-aged and married sheep: sheep who were investigating sin before that impure event was even contemplated which resulted so conspicuously, nineteen years ago, in the earthly advent of Mr. Hosanner.

When the day arrives which I foresee; when Mr. Hosanner has been hammered out of conceit with himself by some offended soldier, old enough to be his father, Mr. Hosanner will perhaps become dissociated from this evangelising movement which is being conducted in France by public subscription. Young Mr. Hosanner will then, I take it, return to England—not to enlist, for he has a conscientious objection to enlistment—but to do further good works. Perhaps he will then teach purity to his grandmother, and leave off nagging British soldiers on active service.

But to return to our sheep. I had the “shepherd” feeling badly that day. I thought that they were all sheep: uncomplaining, helpless sheep: all

looking alike, all making the same noises and all wanting the same things—food, shelter, company. And I was one of several shepherds, who went complacently among them, handing out lemons.

Principal Muckie was one of us : Principal Muckie, of Portobello, Scotland. An improving gentleman, having “ r-r-r-r’s ” with which you could have filed a horse’s hoof. He lectured. He lectured very loudly, on such subjects as “ Primitive Man,” “ The Balkan Problem,” and “ Masterpieces of Italian Architecture.” His lectures were sometimes interspersed with, and were always followed by, hymn and prayer. I regarded the whole combination—lectures, lecturer, hymns, and prayers—as being rough luck on the British Army : as being an unchivalrous thing to do to sheep who had strayed into your hut for food, shelter and company. Particularly when (as was always done) one locked all the doors on them, so that they couldn’t get out.

Being one of the shepherds, *I* could get out, through a door conveniently placed behind my counter. And I did get out, not wishing to become mad in fact as well as in fancy, which evil would certainly have befallen me if I had had to stand continuously in a dark, breath-laden hall, while Professor Muckie drivelled on, and the British Army coughed and coughed and coughed.

It was after one of Professor Muckie’s lectures, when that learned gentleman had described minutely for two hours a journey to St. Malo, which he undertook in the year 1903, that I became conscious of the gravy-eyed man.



I was standing behind the counter in the lecture hall, having been instructed to "carry on" there, when this soldier approached and bought some picture post-cards. He was my only customer; for the Professor is dry work, and when he has dried up, and the communicating doors are unlocked, it is customary for a stampede to take place into the refreshment hall.

"I tried to make you see me, an hour or two ago, when you were behind the urn," said the soldier, "but I couldn't manage to get you, not with this eye. I've had some gas."

"Where did you get it?"

"At Blitsam, during the big fight in August," answered the soldier. "That place where the sunken road is."

"Why did you want me to see you?"

"I heard you were a chap that knew about books and I wanted you to recommend me a book out of the library here. And—and I wanted you to take me away from that horrible little boy who works the purity stunt. I don't know whether I'm taking a liberty, but you look like a chap with a sense of proportion. I mean to say, you would draw the line at a boy of that age crawling up to a man of my age—the father of two kids, I am—and talking through his hat, in a luscious whisper, about—about things which don't concern him. A boy of that age!"

"How do you come to be one of the Ayrshire Borderers?" I asked, by way of avoiding a public avowal of my antipathies, rather than to satisfy my curiosity—though I had noticed a London twang in

this soldier's voice: a matter which contrasted oddly with his Highland uniform.

"Swank," replied the soldier. "They were recruiting at the time, and *I* was enlisting, and—well, I fancied myself in a kilt, and so did my wife. I wonder what they'd think of *this* kilt. Look!

The soldier, who had all this time been mopping at his eyes with a damp handkerchief, now left off doing so, in order to lift a corner of his kilt and bring it closer to the light. A brown stain, which looked rather like an emphasis of the fabric's natural dun, was spread, in patches, over it.

"That's blood, that is," said the London Ayrshireman. "This kilt comes off some chap that's gone west. They served it out to me down here at the base, after I came out of hospital, when they marked me 'T.B.' My own kilt was fairly done in on the wire, along that cursed road. I can see that road now, and that wire, with all the brown things hanging on it—hundreds of 'em, hanging loose, like scarecrows. Hundreds of 'em!

"That's one reason," continued the gravy-eyed soldier, "why, if ever I touch Blighty again, I'll never have a brown thing in my house—not even tea! I'll have arty-green furniture, red carpets, and chess-board curtains. I don't want ever again to see the colour of khaki, or anything which will remind me of the colour of khaki. And if ever I catch my nipper playing with a box of soldiers, I'll—I'll give him a dose of rat poison, and end it." All this time the soldier was dabbing at his horrible eye.

"Khaki!" he ejaculated, still dabbing at the eye,

"I see that some of the jolly old sportsmen at home are still sentimentalising over khaki. 'The sacred colour,' some of 'em call it. I hope they'll keep it sacred—out of sight—like they keep their God. There'll be a general rising of retired soldiers if they put much of it in the windows. It's an ugly, damned colour, anyhow, but if it was as lovely as a Dorothy rose, *we'd* want to forget it. Anybody who's seen that road will, anyhow." More dabs at the eye.

"That road!" he exclaimed: "and that wire!

"Imagine it, my son: yards and yards of wire, miles of it, for all that anybody could see, stretching all along the road. German wire, specially made for promoting culture. Spikes a full inch long and half the thickness of your finger. And sticking to them everywhere, like flies on gummy paper, hundreds and hundreds of limp brown blobs, flapping about like scarecrows.

"Hundreds of 'em. (More dabs.) Hundreds of brown blobs, stuck to the wire, like socks on a clothes-line, all hanging limp. And the gas coming up in clouds and the shells bursting.

"They say that a Cockney would joke in hell. Well, I must be a proper Cockney, for I laughed at one thing there. I laughed at one of those limp blobs, stuck up on that wire. The joke about it was it was a *black* blob. A civilian blob. I don't know why I laughed, but I did laugh. The thing was—what's the word? 'incongruous.' There he was, an unfortunate, neat civilian, in a black suit, and a bowler hat. So neat. And so dead!

“ His silly black reach-me-downs,” continued the soldier, “ looked so conspicuous among the blobs of brown that he might as well have been dressed in Aldershot Red.

“ I don't know what he was doing there, to get himself hung up, along with us, I can't think *what* he was doing. Unless . . . Unless . . . I wonder! Do you think he travelled in purity?

“ You people bring your wares pretty close to the firing line, and—one never knows. A black suit and a bowler hat . . . I wonder . . . But he *was* dead. Ha!”

## XII

### The Fortunate Boots

THEY cost a lot of money—at least, what *I* regard as a lot of money. Rich gentlemen, who buy their boots in Conduit Street, would probably think I had bought them cheap. All that I have to say is that this single pair of boots cost me as much as I usually pay for two pairs of ordinary boots.

I bought them because, rather than in spite, of the fact that they were inelegant. They were called “Watertight Shooting Boots (guaranteed),” and, although what I wanted was a foot-covering rather than a gun, I bought them feeling that if I didn’t load them they wouldn’t necessarily go off and that their guaranteed antipathy to water would be useful in the summer time.

I have now to report that these boots, regarded merely as boots, have justified the confidence of their manufacturer. They have, furthermore, surpassed my own expectations; for, they are magic boots. They confer fame upon their wearer. They have conferred fame upon me, as I will explain.



This is where Kathleen and Bryan come in. I don't suppose that Kathleen and Bryan will ever read what I am writing here, but I kiss my hand to them. I don't suppose that Kathleen and Bryan will ever see my boots again, or that I shall ever see Kathleen and Bryan again. But I kiss my hand to them.

Kathleen is Bryan's sister and Bryan is Kathleen's brother. And Kathleen is ten years old and Bryan is nearly eight. And Kathleen wears a blue frock and a dirt-proof overall, and her hair (which is hazelnut colour) in a prolonged and undulating kink. She has blue eyes and a freckled face, and she continually asks questions. Bryan has dark hair and a nose inclining upward. He wears a "go-anywhere" of knitted brown stuff and short knickerbockers which tear. He stands up to the bowling of boys considerably taller than himself, and he continually asks questions.

Both Kathleen and Bryan, together with supervisors, inhabited (temporarily) a cottage in North Wales. I, together with certain supervisory factors, inhabited (also temporarily) an adjacent cottage. And in close proximity to both our cottages there runs a rivulet—a dancing, shallow, laughing, jumping, scoffing, singing stream, having its glittering surface freely adorned with large stones or miniature rocks. High hills, sometimes bare, unfertile, rocky, and aloof, sometimes green and generous or tall and elegant, being powdered white with mayflower, bound this stream upon her either bank. She does not appear to notice it, however, but goes on just

the same, quick and dainty, but very cold in summer time, rushing, and occasionally bursting things in winter. The Romans found this rivulet in B.C. something, and erected walls and pediments, the ruins of which are still to be seen, for the purpose of subduing her. She still continues, however: still laughs, still leaps, still sings her cold, cold songs. And the Romans have gone away; they have been "gone away" for a very long time.

Well, this little river is worth knowing, and that is the reason why one hires cottages upon her banks.

On the evening of the first day of hiring, one naturally visits these banks and gazes fondly at the mocking rivulet itself. And whilst one gazes who should heave in sight but Kathleen and Bryan.

What do Kathleen and Bryan do? They stare with wonder at one's unkempt person—for one has travelled two hundred and thirty miles by horse-cab, railway train, and motor-bus in order to reach this rivulet—and they look with palpable contempt at one's watertight shooting boots, which are heavy, ill-shapen, and dusty. And then they go their ways.

Very well. One waits. Minutes and hours elapse. A night elapses. One awakes at lark-crow fresh and curious. One gets up. One washes, prays, and subsequently clothes oneself. One doesn't forget the watertight boots. One then goes down—for then is nothing else to go down to—one then goes down to the mocking rivulet. And while one stands upon her rock-strewn bank, watching the little trout and other edibles which leap about her rock-strewn bosom, who should again appear but Kathleen and Bryan

Kathleen and Bryan again direct a quick, contemptuous glance at one's watertight boots. One tries to seem unconcerned about this and yet to appear of friendly disposition. These are difficult and complicated things to express both at one time, and one nearly dislocates one's mouth in the effort. But Kathleen and Bryan do not seem to notice it; they continue to stare abstractedly at one's boots, and Kathleen, sucking in her lips, makes shishy noises.

Now, when a fellow, at the risk of a permanent malformation of his mouth, addresses looks of friendly disposition towards a girl like Kathleen, and all which that lady does in return is to make shishy noises at his boots, there is only one step which a fellow can take, and I took it. I flung myself into the mocking rivulet.

I am a bad jumper (especially when those boots have been clamped in place) and no diver; and I therefore would not, even for gold, have had you deceived into the belief that I really jumped or dived into the stream. What I did was to walk, with some deliberation, about the surface of the stream, stepping from rock to rock, in the course of which process my wonderful boots became partially or wholly submerged. This—if I may thus colloquially express myself—this did it!

Kathleen immediately left off shishing. Bryan at once desisted from his derogatory occupation of making funny faces. Both young people regarded me, as it were, with an awakened interest: with attention, with excitement, with wonder. Kathleen spoke. She said:

"I say. You'll get your feet wet, won't you?"

This being the question which I had reckoned to elicit, I was prepared with the reply. I uttered it carelessly. "No," I said; "my feet will keep quite dry. These are watertight boots."

There was a long, incredulous pause. Then Bryan spoke. He said:

"Do you mean to say you can stand in the water, the same as you are doing, and yet your feet will keep quite dry?"

"Quite dry," I repeated.

Kathleen left off shishing and came closer to the wet: closer and closer still, until the point of her sandalled foot was almost touching the damp rocks. She looked at me with large, intelligent, and approving eyes. She spoke:

"How long can you stand there without them getting wet?"

"All day," I said.

Kathleen eyed me thoughtfully. Then she spoke again:

"There are some wetter stones on the other side of the bridge. Do come and try those stones."

So I went and I tried. The trial was completely successful. Kathleen and Bryan became extremely agitated with pleasure, admiration, and approval. I was a made man, as the saying goes.

They took me to their cottage and introduced me to Bryan's mother and Kathleen's father. They said:

"This is Mr.—Mr.—well, we don't know his name but he is living next door, at Mrs. Williams's cottage,

and he can stand in the water for hours and hours and hours, and his feet will keep quite dry, because his boots are watertight. Those are the boots he's wearing now. And Bryan wants a pair the same as his, and so do I. And you ought to have a pair, daddy, and then you could stand in the water for hours and hours and hours and your feet will not get wet."

"A good idea," responded daddy. "In the meantime, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Boots!" I interjected.

"In the meantime, Mr. Boots, will you have a cigar?"

I would and I did.

All that day I walked about the riverside with Kathleen and Bryan. We played, intermittently, at all the games which are known in North Wales; but mostly and primarily we talked about boots. And Kathleen and Bryan, who had lived in their cottage for a month and were therefore well acquainted with the chief people of the neighbourhood, would take me up to people—mixed people: lead-miners, publicans, a sawmiller, a curate—and they would say:

"This is Mr.—Mr.—Mr.—we *don't* know. But he's got a splendid pair of boots. Just look at them. He can stand in the river for hours and hours and hours but his feet won't get wet. They are shooting boots."

And the mixed people all smiled, and sometimes they gave me cigars.

Is it any wonder, then, that I here celebrate my possession of these Fortunate Boots?



Every morning early, Kathleen and Bryan would come to the door of the cottage which I temporarily inhabited, and they would say :

“ Please will you tell Mr.—Mr.—Please, will you tell the man with the boots that we have got up and we are waiting for him.”

And all day long, throughout my whole fortnight, I played about the banks of that mocking rivulet with Kathleen and Bryan. Kathleen’s hand was mine for the holding, and I lent my boots to Bryan. And I achieved great honour.

For standing there, impervious, amid the clammy tresses of that enchantress who had resisted all the wiles of Rome I would listen to the honeyed voice of Kathleen, adjuring all chance-comers to wait and watch.

“ This is our friend, Mr.—Mr.—I don’t know. But his boots are watertight. He can stand in the river for hours and hours and hours and his feet will not get wet ! ”

The chance-comers stopped, and stared respectfully. Kathleen would then give me caramels, and her hand to hold.

Oh, fortunate, fortunate boots !

### XIII

## The German from "Perhaps"

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[*Period*, the autumn of 1917. *Scene*, a railway train.]

WE slowed down at Matcham Halt—an irregular act, and, therefore, quite unprecedented in the ordered history of the 6.15. Wonder and interest were displayed by my fellow-passengers.

The 6.15 (p.m.) is what they call a "motor-train." It is not a train at all, in the true sense of that word, but a single, self-propulsive carriage: choo-choo in front; milk and passengers behind. Its passenger accommodation consists of one long compartment, looking rather like a battered Pullman car and devoid of privacy like a Pullman car; though lacking somewhat in the comfort of Mr. Pullman's own authentic products.

In a motor-train you can see everybody else and hear everybody else; and so I both saw and heard the excitement created by our call at Matcham Halt. We opened all our windows and put out heads and exchanged opinions about this unusual event. The

opinion first put forward, and at first generally accepted, was that the London express was late. There was a lifting of eyebrows at this, and a sucking in of breath. And animated dialogue.

FIRST PASSENGER: "You don't never say that, Mr. Brown!"

SECOND PASSENGER: "I do indeed, though, Peter. There's a signal be down, 'tall events."

THIRD PASSENGER: "My opinion 'tis cattle strayed across."

FOURTH PASSENGER: "Or a breakdown."

HIS SON: "Hey, father, I say, what? Do you reely think it *is*, father? Is it *reely* a breakdown? Hey! Hoo! Hey!"

FIRST PASSENGER: "D'ye think, Mr. Brown, 'tis a stoppage—out Newhaven way? I did hear them things was over again larse night?"

SECOND PASSENGER: "Depend upon it, that's one thing if 'taren't another, Peter. There's a signal be down, 'tall events."

There were a few passengers in the carriage who kept aloof from these speculations and researches. They occupied the adjoining seats to mine, and I was struck by their composure and indifference.

One of these neutrals was a clergyman. He was a clergyman of the agricultural type, ruddy gilled. He smelled of ferrets and was reading a paper about goats. Next to him there sat a pale-eyed, beerless man, having no particular colour. He was reading a paper called "The Lamp." Opposite to these two (for the seats in a "motor-train" are arranged in little sets of four) a middle-aged woman was seated

by the side of a younger woman—evidently her daughter. She was an unobtrusive woman, with a tired mouth. It was the mouth of one who hoped against all hope to find a bit of cheese or bacon somewhere. Her daughter was wearing a new hat, of the largest possible diameter, and this object, which required continual adjustment, absorbed the whole of her attention.

It was amusing to contrast the apathy of this group with the animation of the others. I looked again at the farmers and cowmen, who were pressing round the windows. They were still gaping, still arguing. Then, with a galvanic suddenness, the whole situation was reversed.

One of the investigators saw something, and announced what he saw in a tone of boredom and disappointment. His companions, looking also bored and disappointed, at once returned to their seats, and resumed the humdrum of existence, reverting to their interminable, passionless discussions about tegs and heifers. But the smaller group now became animated. Clergyman, beer-hater, mother and daughter—all stared out of the window with wonder and interest. For the disappointed man, who was now seated, had stirred their curiosity.

"Why," he had said, "it's on'y some Huns, arter all! Half a dozen German prisoners: that's all we're stoppin' for!"

And sure enough it *was* all. The Germans could be seen now, tramping up the wooden steps which gave access to the little platform. They were

marching, heavy-footed, from their work in the fields.

There were five Germans. Four of them were dull fellows enough; clodhoppers; lumps; dressed in a torn and shabby uniform, to which their captors had added scarlet patches—squares and triangles. But the fifth German was by way of being a younger and smarter man. He wore a smarter uniform and a contented smile.

The prisoners, led by their escort, entered our carriage. The escort consisted of one corpulent private: an elderly man, with a touch of asthma and a fixed bayonet. He led his captives to the far end of the carriage where, I now noticed, some seats had been fenced off with a piece of cord. The old Reservist withdrew this cord and the prisoners sat down. When they were all seated, he sat down too. Then the train moved off, and the clergyman spoke.

“They look healthy enough,” he remarked. “Bursting with health. Get better food here than they ever got at home. We treat these chaps too well—too *well*, sir!” He addressed himself to the man with the beerless eye.

“I don’t agree with you,” replied that individual. “I don’t agree with you at all. It is our duty to behave well to all the victims of this unfortunate war.”

This statement surprised the clergyman. On the face of it, it was a reasonable and an honest statement, but yet it was not uttered in a reasonable voice nor had the beerless one an honest face. The



beerless one struck me as having the face of one skilled in argument.

The clergyman looked at the beerless one with disfavour, and opened his mouth. Then, remembering he was a clergyman, he shut it again. So the beerless one continued :

"If," he mused, "the German Kayser could hear these hypocritical remarks being passed he would smile, sir. After all the fuss we made about Wittenburg! No, sir! If we expect the Germans to show favour to our men we must be particular not to pass insulting remarks about *them*."

"Passed no insulting remarks at all, sir," protested the clergyman. "Said the men were too well treated. I stick to that. I repeat it."

"The brave men you refer to," replied the gentleman whom Nature had deprived of beer, "have mothers and sisters and sweethearts in Germany, just as our own unhappy conscripts have dependants here. I appeal to this lady opposite: a mother is a mother, is she not: a sister is a sister, is she not; a sweetheart is a sweetheart, is she not, all the world over? Is she not?"

The lady opposite, being thus appealed to, burst into tears, and brought forth from her handbag two butter-cards, her son, her nephew, her brother, her brother's wife's brother, and her eldest daughter's young man. The clergyman gave these portraits his sympathetic attention, but the devotee of water had evidently no use for family sentiment outside the sphere of pure argument, and he waved the pictures aside as he resumed his remarks.

“Look at that poor German over there,” he said: “the very young one, in the new uniform.” We looked, all of us, including the Lady-Opposite’s daughter, who turned right round, hat and all. The young German was looking at us with a thoughtful and benevolent expression. The other Germans were gazing at the floor. Their guardian was having asthma.

“That young German,” resumed our Instructor, “may come from some beautiful old-world town, like I have seen myself, in his beautiful native country. As he sits there, perhaps he is thinking of some quaint old house, with a carved doorway and a paved courtyard in which a grey-haired mother sits and thinks of him. (Gulps from lady opposite). Or perhaps he is thinking of some fair field in the Rhine-country. He may be dreaming of some beautiful maiden who walks between the vines and dreams of him. Or, perhaps, he is thinking of some quiet little cottage in the mountains close beside a waterfall. And there a little fair-haired sister has tamed a blackbird, and——”

“Brighton! Brighton Central! All change ’ere! Brighton!”

We had reached our destination: an event which completely interfered with the Professor’s further “perhapses.” The German prisoners and their escort stumped out of the carriage.

We stood by the window and watched them set off up the platform, Asthma leading. Then we saw the very young German, the pilgrim from “Perhaps,” run forward and tap the old invalid’s shoulder.

"Alf, Alf!" he exclaimed; "you are taking us wrong. It's Platform *Three* we want."

Old Alf turned round, scratching his head and coughing. "Are you sure, boy?" he asked.

"Sure?" repeated the German from "Perhaps"—"not half! Why, I used to hold a 'season' on this line."

## XIV

### St. Winefride's Shrine

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THIS is the testimony of one who has witnessed the Miracle of the Blood.

The Miracle of the Blood is to be examined by the curious and proved by the devout at all times of the day by the shrine and Holy Well of St. Winefride, in Wales.

In a certain "Pilgrim's Manual," published with the approbation of the Lord Bishop of Meneria, it is written that :

"Holywell has been long famous for its shrine of St. Winefride and its Holy Well, the healing waters of which have brought back health and strength to the sick and ailing ; and, no doubt, many are the spiritual favours that have been obtained from God through the intercession of this great Saint. The record of miracles worked at this shrine goes back to the beginning of the twelfth century, and in former times Holywell was a favourite resort of pilgrims of all classes. . . . .

"In the preface to the Life of St. Winefride are

found these words: 'It seems certain that Divine Providence designs the marvellous cures so constantly occurring at St. Winefride's Well to bring back many to the Church of their forefathers.' That this may be the case should be the earnest prayer of all who visit the shrine. Let them pray often: 'St. Winefride, most admirable virgin, even in this unbelieving generation still miraculous, pray for England.' "

There are two wells of St. Winefride—a little and a greater well. Within the greater well is situated St. Beuno's stone, which possesses extraordinary powers of healing. The little well is surmounted by carven pillars and surrounded by beautiful old walls, upon which are displayed, in great profusion, crutches and trusses and spinal supports and leg-irons—all of which objects have been deposited there by pious pilgrims as a testimony to the mercy of God and the beneficence of St. Winefride and as a rebuke to doctors, carpenters, and smiths.

It is at the south end of the great well that you may behold the Miracle of the Blood. This part of the well is framed with woodwork, upon the surface of which great oily bubbles may be seen by all. If you hold your hand within the water, and with persistence, patience, and earnestness recite the prayer of St. Winefride, these bubbles will sometimes form in great black clots upon your fingers: and they are then said to be the blood of St. Winefride, the presence of which is a sign that you are to be cured of deformity or disease

These are the words of the prayer to St. Winefride:



St. Winefride, who for so many centuries hast shown favour to pilgrims in this place of thy martyrdom—*pray for us.*

An indulgence of sixty days, applicable to the souls in Purgatory, and granted by Pope Leo the Thirteenth, may be gained once a day by all who with contrite heart shall venerate the relic of St. Winefride, and repeat the foregoing prayer.

The relic of St. Winefride consists of the finger-bone of that virgin martyr, which is contained within a silver box.

Five young factory girls, all kneeling in a row, were praying for the Blood at twelve o'clock the other morning. One of them was blind. One had a deformed hip. Two others were lame. Other cripples and many stout women sat on benches behind them, urging them to pray, to keep praying, to have faith. After a long, long time a sign was vouchsafed to one of them.

“It has come!” the girl cried out. “Oh, tears of Mary! it has come to me. Mother—look!”

One of the stout old women rose from her seat and crouched down on the sopping flagstones beside her daughter. The rest of us, crippled and hale, so many as could find room, crowded round the girl, whose fellow-penitents never left off praying. On the girl's third finger a thick, black clot had formed, and had fashioned itself, strangely enough, into the appearance of a signet ring.

“Oh, the dear Blood!” cried the girl. “Oh, mother—look! It has come to me!”

“God bless ye!” said the mother.

Another woman said :

“Th’art a good lass, Bridget. Th’ast tried hard for this. Thee shall be cured for certain sure. See if thee shalln’t.”

“But nothing don’t ail her,” said another woman. “That’s the awkwardness of it. That blind girl yonder, she’s tried for the dear Blood all morning, but it hasn’t never come to her, poor lamb.”

“How do *you* know what ails her?” cried Bridget’s mother, wrathfully. “A person ain’t got to be a cripple to be ill. A person may have indigestion, or cramp, or annything. A person ain’t got to *show* it to be ill. God bless the dear Blood, I say. Pray, Bridget—pray!”

“Look there!” cried somebody, suddenly. “Look there, at Kathleen’s hand!”

Kathleen was the blind girl, and, looking at her hand, we beheld a great black dot which had formed itself on her first finger.

“Kathleen, Kathleen,” cried the girl who knelt next to her. “It has come to you. Oh, my dear, it’s come to you. Ccme quickly, all of you, and look at Kathleen’s hand.”

Kathleen began to cry.

“Why it’s shaped like a heart,” said one of the women. At which all the women, save one, knelt down and prayed.

Then Kathleen’s mother, assisted by other women, pulled Kathleen to her feet. Kathleen could not rise without help, because her legs had gone dead, she having knelt in constant prayer and supplication for three hours on the wet, wet flagstones.

Kathleen lay on the wooden seat beside her mother

kissing her mother's face and crying, while the mother bathed her daughter's eyes with water from the Holy Well and comforted her, saying: "Oh, the dear Blood, the precious Blood! God bless the dear Blood! Ye'll get ye're sight back now for certain sure."

The woman who had pointedly refrained from praying with the other women, and who wore an expression of enlightenment and smelt of carbolic soap, now spoke. She carried in her hand a little dry stick with which she tickled the surface of the precious water. She said:

"It isn't blood at all. It's bubbles. See—I've got one at the end of my stick."

The stout women crowded round and reasoned with her. "*Look* at it," cried one. "What can't speak can't lie. It's as black as a piece of liver that's been kept too long. It *must* be blood."

They conducted her to the little well and showed her the crutches and other trophies which adorned its walls and pillars. "What can't speak can't lie," they said, again. And they related, with detail, the history of many recent miracles. They told her how only two days previously a little girl with curvature of the spine had been completely cured by one immersion, saying to her mother as she entered the water: "Oh, mother, I can walk!" They showed her the actual crutches and supports which this child had left behind her. They told her of a woman having cancer who had that morning entered the well, and from whose bosom the sickness had immediately departed, falling from her in the shape of a silver ring.

In the meantime, many grievous cripples had seated themselves by the little well in preparation for the regular morning service, which was shortly to take place.

A man cripple, whose lower limbs were wholly paralysed, was carried in on a litter. One of the girl cripples who was just able to walk dragged herself up to make room for him on the cripples' bench.

The man cripple said that he had bathed three times: that the icy water gave him great pain, and that the last time he thought he would have fainted because of a feeling like red-hot swords thrust in the sensitive parts of his body. The other cripples comforted him and told him to have courage.

"You never know when the favour will be granted you," they said. "You simply have to persevere."

"Cert'nly," assented the man cripple. "And besides . . . . I've been a great villain in me time."

Of all the people in that place, those who comported themselves most chivalrously towards the cripples were—the other cripples. Those crouching women, blind, or hunched, or aged, as the case might be, were kinder and more cheerful than all the lusty wives one met upon the road outside.

The most painful little figure of them all was that of a young girl whose hand was all twisted by some dreadful rheumatic complaint. She had had the Holy Blood upon it many times: she had laved it in the icy waters day after day, hour after hour. She had told her beads unceasingly, and was telling them now. But still her hand was twisted.

A woman said :

“ Ee ! I do wish as that poor lass theer could get a cure. She’s a *good* lass. Many’s been cured as haven’t tried a half so hard. Did ye have another bad night, Agnes ? ”

Agnes replied that she had had a very bad night indeed ; but she did not mind *that*. When the pain was very bad, you had to keep awake, and then you could pray.

“ Ee ! ” cried the woman. “ That’s good. That’s a good sign. The sign of a strong favour. You’ll be cured, my girl, for certain sure.”

The girl made no answer, but continued to pray, with her eyes cast down. A stranger who was present ventured to ask her how long her hand had troubled her.

“ Two years,” she said, lifting her eyes (he wished that she had not). “ It’s a cramp from the loom. The doctors said they could not cure it ; but God will cure it, through the intercession of St. Winefride. I’ve had her blood upon me fifteen times.”

“ And when He has cured it, what will you do ? ”

“ Get back to my loom,” she said.

Then the priest came in and preached to them about the importance of unremittent confession.

And they sang a hymn—the hymn of St. Winefride :

Full of faith we come to thee,  
Dear Martyr Saint of Wales ;  
Though our hearts distressed may be,  
Our courage never fails.

And we gather round thy shrine,  
Thy blessed praise to tell,  
While the gifts of God divine  
Flow from thy Holy Well !



Thus singing, the pilgrims marched in procession round about the holy well, and the prostrate figure of a fellow-pilgrim. It was that of a rich and beautiful woman, clothed all in silk, who lay there, praying loudly, with her hand in the water.

Then the women had to leave the precincts of the well, while for two hours men, crippled or whole, bathed in the miraculous waters. An official notice, affixed to the carven pillars of the well-head, states that :

No fixed rule can be given as to the number of baths that should be taken. Whilst many striking cures have been effected by a first bath, in other cases the cure has not come until after three or nine and sometimes as many as twenty or more baths have been taken.

Another notice warns the faithful against the danger of prolonged immersion. The shuddering bathers, white to the lips with cold, scrupulously observed this admonition :

It is quite sufficient to pass three times through the little Well, and to kneel for a few seconds on St. Beuno's stone.

So they hobbled in and hobbled out, kissing the holy shrines in passing ; whilst a pious bystander recited prayers.

Out in the rugged streets a little later one heard the sound of music. This was produced by an earnest man with a flute, who, surrounded by cripples, was playing rather badly a dirge or wail.

" Eh ! " cried a woman, " that's a good man. " He's left a good business in Preston to do that.

He does it every day to cheer up the poor people."

The priest came by, and a man with a withered hand went up to him.

"See Father, see!" cried the man, "I have had the dear Blood on it, and this morning I can move two fingers."

"You must thank God for His favours, my son," said the priest. "You must pray: keep praying. But . . . be careful not to strain that hand."

## XV

### A Waggoner's Dream

---

I WANT to be lighter than air. I want some inaudible shoes and an invisible suit. These things are required in order to spite the Police. I refer especially to one particular policeman, Police Constable Juggins, of the J. Division of the Mid-Sussex Force.

Mr. Juggins happened to find my pony-waggon the other night, and he found me in it—or underneath it, the top part being full of girls. These girls had deprived me of my usual comforts, and I had to “lay rough” on straw between the wheels.

\* \* \* \*

We had travelled eighteen miles that day, over roads which were straight and flat, over country which was green and gay, if uneventful. And we had found a good sort of halting-place at last: a good “pitch.” The road did actually kink just there. Where it bowed out, there was a little

rectangular patch of common land, furnished with a pond of water, a little cottage, and a bevy of tall, old beeches. We "drew" in beside the beeches, and pitched beneath their shade.

"Pitching" is to my mind, the supreme lark of all the good larks which are bound up with waggoning—a gentle, gracious, unaggressive, meditative, pastime, well suited to a Man of Inaction, such as myself.

I don't think it is nice of professional meditators—story-writers, poets, philosophers, investors, and persons of that kind, to cultivate the animosities of golf, or to kill dumb things with bullets, or to hate each other publicly. Their proper pastime is waggoning.

Let then buy an old white pony, such as mine, let them build a waggon such as mine, with beds therein, and a chimney-piece, and a crockery cupboard, and a wardrobe, and then let them, like me, attach their pony to its shafts, put butter, bacon, bread, and girls inside their van, and lumber off. Lumber, lumber, lumber, lumb! A thoughtful life. Let then lead their pony by a rein, and lead him gently over England, cracking a long whip, beholding the wonders of creation, thinking constructively and drinking beer.

And then again—but stay; why should we concern ourselves with the doings of famed men? Let them continue to pitch into golf balls. Let them continue to pitch into partridges. Let them pitch each other over their precipices of scorn. I will pitch my caravan.

I was saying how extremely good it is to pitch your waggon. It is a good thing to work your pony up the hills ; to work him cleverly, to ease him sideways, to make your wheels perform judicious zig-zags. It is good to have cultivated perfectly your feeling for gradients, so that you can stop your beast in just the fitting place, give him a puff of wind, and start him off again, all slick and easy. It is good to amble beside him, along a straight road, cracking your whip. to make a sort of song in keeping with his slow hoof-beats and the jingle-jangle of his bells and buckles. It is good to hear the quiet laughter of the women in the van, and to look up sometimes and see their white teeth and brown faces and their gay sun-bonnets. And it is good to drink a pint of beer with other waggoners, and to exchange your bits of harness-brass with them. It is good to scowl at the village children as they come about you on the roadside, saying, " Please, sir, are you the circus ? "

These things are all exceedingly good. But the best of all things is to find a cool, green corner at the close of your long, hot journey ; to find a patch of no-man's grass for the old, white drudge to nibble at ; a pool of water to wet his feet in ; a clump of trees to shade your waggon-top ; a cottage to supply you with well-water, gossip, eggs, and admiration.

Having found such a place, drawn in your waggon and " shut out " your pony, you then take the sweat-sodden harness off him and rub him down, and he then stretches his unbitted mouth and yawns. And he whinnies for his corn and grass and water. And you talk a lot of cant to him about the virtues



of patience. And, then, white smoke begins to creep up from the waggon chimney, and the world begins to smell of eggs and bacon, and an Oldest Inhabitant is standing at his cottage gate and grinning at you, and the bit of no-man's grass is purple and golden, shaded and sunned. Your pipe draws sweet, your collar tightens. A little prayer is born inside your throat.

\* \* \* \* \*

Such was the place we found this night. We were very thankful, for we were very tired. Three times we fed our pony. We ate our supper. We "did" the cottage. We eulogised its stock and asters. We bought its eggs. Then, at the first fall of dark, we went to bed; the brown girls in their waggon, I between my wheels. And soon we were sleeping—a waggoner's sleep; heavy and solid and careless. . . . Then Mr. Juggins appeared.

He arrived when it was quite dark, and woke me suddenly with his noise. The following noise:

"Hi! Hi! What's this? What the hell? Come along! Get a move!"

Naturally enough, I sat up. The noise continued. I blinked at it in the darkness for about thirty seconds, and then, as it were, I recognised it. A policeman noise. Hurrah! I love policeman noises when I go a-waggoning. Because, I have studied the laws of waggoning, and the habits of policemen; and I have acquainted myself with the wrongs which are suffered by nomad persons. Your clump-soled

interfering constable is *hors d'œuvre* and oysters to my ethical appetite. Hurrah!

He then did it again. "Hi! Hi! Hi! Wake up, ya dirty tykes!" He turned on a lantern, and flashed it into the waggon where the women were sleeping. I could hear the women feeling unhappy. I then spoke. I spoke in the measured, cultivated, accents of the Idle Rich. I spoke like a man with a banking account. I said:

"What is this noise? What is the mattah? Who are you?"

"Police," replied the voice of Mr. Juggins.

"Then take your lantern away at once," I said. "There are ladies in theah . . . sleeping! What do you want, constable?"

"I—I—I want you to move on," replied Mr. Juggins, with a perceptible weakening of vocal power.

"Why do you want me to move on?" . . .

"Well," said Mr. Juggins. "You can't leave yar waggin 'ere. Ya know ya can't."

"Why not," I demanded. "I am well off the road. This is common land. I am a Sussex ratepayer. Why shouldn't I put my carriage here if I want to?"

"A *ratepayer*, did ya say?" demanded Mr. Juggins.

"Yes," I repeated, "a Sussex ratepayer!"

"Oh," said Mr. Juggins. "A ratepayer. A ratepayer. I see. Then, in that case, you ain't one to do nothink in partickler. You don't. . . . I meantersay, you ain't just travellin' like?"

“ Oh, I do nothing in particular. And yet I do travel. But, as a ratepayer of this county, I fail to see, as I said to the sergeant at Blowfield, *before I had him reduced*, why I should —— ”

“ A ratepayer,” interpolated Mr. Juggins. “ Oh! I see! Then you ain’t a *regular* waggoner like? ”

“ This waggon is not connected with my way of earning a living, if that’s what you mean. I’m not a rough man, buying rabbit-skins. I do this sort of thing for pleasure.”

“ Then, sir,” said Police Constable Juggins, “ I’m very sorry as I interfered with you, sir, and I think, sir, as perhaps you’d better take no notice of me. Good night, sir. Thank you, sir. And don’t you take no notice of me at all.”

With these words, Police Constable Juggins hurriedly shut up his lantern and walked away.

\* \* \* \*

That is the end of the story, except that I went to sleep again, and dreamed a dream. That is why I want to fulfil my dream, by floating around in the wake of Mr. Juggins.

I dreamed of following Mr. Juggins on a dark night. I dreamed that I was unseen, but all-seeing. I dreamed that I followed Mr. Juggins down a dark lane, until we came to a space whereat a pony-waggon stood. And, in this waggon, brown women and little tired brown pigmies were sleeping, and, under the waggon, tired brown men were sleeping—honest men, if dirty, who were surrounded by

rabbit-skins, old motor tyres, torn kettles, and soiled sacking.

Halting at this waggon, Constable Juggins respectfully closed his lantern, and put on his Sunday gloves of white cotton. Then he hesitantly tapped on the waggon wall, and spoke in a hesitating voice :

“ Ahem,” he said. “ Good evening. Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, but . . . are you Sussex ratepayers ? ”

## XVI

### The Man in the Grey Hat

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THE tea shop had a mauve carpet and pink curtains, and it was absurdly embellished with pink ribbons. Bows and streamers of pink ribbon were attached to the legs of little bamboo tables and even to the languishing waists of potted indiarubber plants. But the customer in the grey hat didn't notice these things. He was blind.

A lady had led him into the tea shop and had guided him, not with conspicuous skill, between crowded little tables, awkward, angular little chairs and innumerable umbrella points. The man in the grey hat was big-limbed, shy and awkward. He was careless about the disposal of his shambling feet in their heavy boots. Several ladies in the tea shop uttered exclamations of pain or indignation which they speedily repressed on looking up at the grey mask under the grey hat. The man went blundering on under the direction of his guide until the controlling pressure of her fingers at his elbow



brought him to a standstill before a vacant space on a little pink silk divan in a crowded corner.

"There's a seat here," the guide announced and impelled her charge towards it with a little push of encouragement. But the blind man held back.

"There ain't much room, is there?" he questioned. His guide agreed that there was not much room, but assured him that there was enough.

"Ah! but what about my hat?" said the blind man.

"I can hold your hat," suggested the lady.

The blind man looked doubtful and said, after a little hesitation: "I wouldn't like to give you that trouble, ma'am."

The lady then suggested that the hat could be hung on the post of a chair, but the blind man shook his head. "Perhaps I had better hold it," he remarked, "it would be safer to hold it."

"He! He!" ejaculated the lady quite suddenly. It was an unexpected noise, not in the least mirthful, but evidently put forward in token of high spirits and jollity. Urged by his guide the blind man then sat down, removing the grey hat from his head and placing it on his knee and holding it there with a hot, determined hand. His other hand—the left one—was raised to the lapel of his coat, where his fingers sought reassuring contact with a silver ornament—the badge of a discharged soldier.

We were very crowded in that corner, as I have already remarked, and, although the little bamboo pot stands that did duty for tables were severely separate, in conformity with the etiquette of really

“nace” tea shops, there was a certain inevitable contagion of knees. My own knee happened to touch that of the blind man, who immediately brought his left hand to his hat in reinforcement of his right hand, his whole body becoming rigid with the impulse of defence.

“I can feel as we are sitting pretty close,” said the soldier to his companion and guide, who assented with a louder “He! He!” than before. She looked across our little tables at me, and in explanation of this noise said loudly:

“One *must* be bright.”

I could see from this that the blind man’s fair companion shared the quite general but very strange belief that blind men are devoid of hearing.

The waitress brought them tea, picking her way through the huddle of furniture. The tinkle of spoon against saucer carried a message to the blind man, who put out his left hand and drew a tea-cup cautiously towards him. His right hand still grasped the hat. His companion plied him with tea and toasted scones, and he showed much ingenuity in conveying these aliments to his mouth by the single efforts of his left hand. His companion, after looking nervously at the table-cloth and the carpet, at last put forward the bold proposal that he should use both hands. “You would find it so much more comfortable,” she said. The blind man shook his head. He declared that he was getting along first class. Then he lifted the cup and spilled some more hot tea; but he got a good deal into his mouth, and under its homely stimulus became quite talkative.

“ You may wonder,” said the blind man (and these three introductory words elicited a “ He! He!” from the lady). “ You may wonder to see me go fiddling about with one hand the way I am doing. But, to tell you the truth and to be quite frank about it, I don’t want to lose a-holt of this hat. It’s some hat, this is; a very good hat indeed, with a bit of style about it and not half a brim. It is the shape of hat I’ve always seemed to fancy, and the lining’s silk. They tell me it’s got a motto wrote inside it: ‘ As worn by the King.’ That speaks for the style. They tell me it’s a grey hat. I hope it’s not a dark grey. I like a *cheerful* hat, I do.”

The lady again looked across at me, shaking her head, which even in the shadowy light of the tea shop could be seen to require regilding. “ Pathetic, isn’t it? ” exclaimed the lady. “ But,” she added, “ one *must* laugh,” and accordingly did so in a succession of shrill B-sharps.

To illustrate her gifts of gaiety, she turned to the blind man and engaged him in coquettish dialogue. At first the blind man did not try to play this game, but breathed profusely and clutched very firmly at the precious hat. But after the further administration of tea his spirit rallied. By the time his companion, resting her arms on the table with a confidential gesture of the shoulders, had reached the point of enquiring (He! He!) “ how old he really thought she was—joking apart, you know”—the blind man had found enough to say. The tea shop had almost emptied by now and he seemed to be

quite conscious of this fact, and was therefore at no pains to lower his voice.

"I should say, lady," replied the blind man in answer to her question, "that you was neither young nor old."

An expression of disappointment appeared on her little grey face, but she proceeded hopefully. "That is no answer," she argued, "it is an evasion."

"It's the truth," insisted the blind man, "what I mean to say is you ain't very old but you might be a great deal younger."

"Oh . . . !" gasped the lady. "But how do you *know* that?" she said, after thought.

"Can't say," replied the man with the grey hat, "I just do know it, same as I know you got a good heart. You ain't very clever per'aps—not too sensible—but you got a good heart and you would not be rude of a purpose."

The lady could at first find no word to utter save another "Oh"; but she was not lacking in courage and returned to the contest. "If you know so much," she said, a little nervously, "do you know what I am like?"

"Thin," replied the soldier.

"Dark or fair?"

The soldier gazed with all his sightless might at her dim hair. "You ain't dark nor you ain't fair," he said. "You're grey. But," he added thoughtfully, "you hide it well. I am sure of that."

The lady getting up from her table looked down at him with a little sigh. "Are you just guessing all this?" she asked.

“Not at all,” replied the man, getting up, too, and putting on his grey hat and turning his face very gravely towards her. “Not at all. Us blinded chaps can’t hear much per’aps, but we *see* a lot.”



## XVII

# Brotherhood

---

MR. PLUMMER, our local rate collector, first mentioned the Village Brotherhood to me. He said that the inaugural meeting of this Society was to be held in our Parish Hall on the following Saturday, and that, while he felt my sympathy, he would like to see my subscription.

On my way to the Parish Hall on the Saturday night I fell in with Mr. Jacob Bunyard, our Vorticist laundryman, who takes away my plain shirts and striped pyjamas and gives me back the most imaginative assortment of lace and chiffon. Mr. Bunyard explained the Village Brotherhood to me.

He gave me to understand that the Village Brotherhood is the expression of a brand-new social spirit, a spirit of atonement, born of the war, and fortified by ideas of genuine democracy, co-operative rabbit-keeping, and all that. Rich people had started the Union, it seemed, but poor people subscribed to it, and everything else accomplished itself. You paid your shilling and class feeling

became abolished, tyranny expired, and you bought your poultry food in bulk. . . .

Mr. Bunyard's premises were not uncomplicated, but they were varied enough to inspire me with real interest in the forthcoming meeting.

This meeting had already begun when we reached the Hall. It was a very crowded meeting, and I noticed that the new spirit of unity created by the war had not waxed strong enough to interfere with the traditional arrangement of the chairs.

Everybody who mattered was there, but the fact that they mattered was signified in the usual way. Those that mattered most occupied a semicircular row of chairs behind the Chairman's table. Those that mattered next had the front row of chairs in front of the Chairman. Behind these chairs was a space or aisle, behind which were ranged two further rows of chairs for those who mattered less. There was a very wide space indeed behind the last row of these, for the use of people who didn't matter at all. Here the subscribers sat and gaped.

The Chairman was speaking when we entered the hall, and, although we entered lightly, peace-time footwear has a quality of insistence which is not to be subdued. We entered at a very noteworthy point in the Chairman's address: the point at which he was explaining how this war—this dreadful war—would not have been fought in vain if it had resulted, as he believed it had resulted, in a quickening of the sense of brotherhood and equality between man and man in a village such as this. He himself happened to be an employer of labour—a considerable em-

ployer of labour—but he felt, as all large employers of labour now felt, that it was his duty to consider the interests of the labouring population of this village in every way, and to treat the labouring population with that courtesy and consideration which he would expect to receive from them and (here our footsteps intervened)—and (more footsteps) . . . “Stop that shuffling about over there!” said the Chairman. “Simmons, make those men sit down!”

After Simmons, Mr. Bunyard, and myself had exchanged a few brotherly words, nearly all beginning with B, the Chairman resumed his remarks, which were conceived in the spirit of an employer of labour who had found salvation.

The Chairman, I may remark, does not, like his semicircle of immediate supporters, belong to the class who subsist on rents and dividends and unearned increments of capital. The Chairman, Mr. William Job, a professional tomato grower, had been chosen to preside at our conference in his capacity of a practical man. As a tomato grower on the wholesale basis, he is regarded as belonging both to the economic heights and the social depths; and his chairmanship was intended to express the essentially democratic basis of the whole Village Brotherhood idea.

“As a large employer of labour who has learned his lesson from this war,” said the Chairman, “I hold that village life wants waking up in every way. As far as this village is concerned, some of us intend that it *shall* wake up. We are going to alter the

whole tone of the place. Why, we're going to have a village stud-goat : *and* we're going to start a *cinnemer* ! ”

The ladies and gentlemen in the semicircle behind the Chairman applauded these proposals very loudly. The subscribers went on gaping. The Chairman then intimated that his address was at an end, and invited the Honourable Mrs. Welch-Smith to carry on. This lady arose, and, in a nervous undertone, punctuated frequently by abrupt and irrelevant giggles, contributed some confused remarks about intensive hens. The Brotherhood had been recommended (giggle) to lay its own eggs (giggle), that was to say (gurgle, giggle) the Brotherhood had been recommended to acquire some hens, and then they would lay, and then—at this point there was further commotion at the far end of the hall.

It was occasioned by the entry of a small white-haired lady, with fierce black eyes, who carried a thick, oak club, and was followed by two or three dogs. These were white, short-featured dogs, of the bull terrier type, who immediately found trouble in the person of a small Schipperke. The lady with the resolute eyes, whom I recognised as my Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly, got busy with her oak club, and there was much noise and excitement. The oak club proved irresistible, and all the dogs lay down, and my Aunt Elizabeth, who was very out of breath, shouted loudly for a chair, and, every chair being occupied, was forced to accept the invitation of a lady in a brown silk dress, and sit on half of hers.

Throughout all these proceedings the Honourable Mrs. Welch-Smith continued her advocacy of intensive poultry keeping. A particular breed of hen (giggle) had been recommended to the Brotherhood. A breed (giggle) which she thought (giggle) went by the name (giggle) of White Leghorn. Interruption, with flourish of club, from my Aunt Elizabeth.

“White Leghorns are namby-pamby birds. Too delicate. What we want is Langshans.” Cries of “No!” “Yes!” “Wyandottes!” “Light Sussex!” Complete subsidence of the Honourable Mrs. Welch-Smith.

The Chairman, having risen and related an amusing anecdote about a novice and a gun, order and good humour were restored. The Chairman then referred to what he called “Mrs. Welch-Smith’s very able and convincing speech.” He went on to point out that, if the Brotherhood should acquire some prize hens as suggested, practical arrangements would have to be made for their upkeep and care. He suggested that they should start with one pen and that some capable member of the Brotherhood might be found to look after it, food, of course, being provided by the Committee. At this a member of the Brotherhood in the body of the hall stood up and nodded. “Ah, Mr. Twyford,” exclaimed the Chairman, “I thought we could rely on Mr. Twyford. Well, Mr. Twyford, what have you to say?”

Mr. Twyford, who looked rather like a stage Irishman, having a long, clean-shaven upper lip, a straight mouth, and grey chin tufts, said that he



supposed the party as volunteered to mind these chicken would keep the eggs for his trouble.

The Chairman's reply, which was prolonged and suave, may be expressed in the four words: "Nothing of the sort." He pointed out that the whole object of the Brotherhood in maintaining these birds was to obtain sittings of eggs for distribution to its members.

"Then," said Mr. Twyford, "the party as volunteers to mind these chickun don't get no repayment for his trouble?"

"Well, no," admitted the Chairman. "The idea of this Brotherhood is that the members help each other without question of payment."

"Under that consideration," replied Mr. Twyford, "I must decline to volunteer." Saying which, he sat down.

The Chairman looked round the hall and his eye came to rest on an individual at the far end. "Perhaps Mr. Moggeridge can make a suggestion," said the Chairman.

Mr. Moggeridge rose and revealed himself as a Red Twin of Mr. Twyford: a physical replica of that gentleman in all respects save that of colour. "I know a party," said the Red Twin, "leastways, I *think* I know a party as *might* oblige you." With which words *he* sat down.

Then my Aunt Elizabeth, thumping the floor with her stick, shouted an enquiry. "What about coops, Job?" she demanded. Mr. Job is a plain tomato-grower to my Aunt Elizabeth, on all occasions, always.

“ Ah,” said the Chairman, thoughtfully, “ coops ! Have *you* any suggestion to make about coops, Mr. Twyford ? ”

Mr. Twyford believed that there was a tidy few old coops knocking about his plat, and he had no objection to obliging the Brotherhood with them, providing that the price offered by the Brotherhood could be looked upon as satisfactory.

“ The point is,” said the Chairman, “ that we have hardly sufficient funds to buy coops. Nor do we really require to buy them. Perhaps you could lend us a couple of your coops for the season ? ”

“ I could,” said Mr. Twyford, “ and I would—for a consideration.”

The Chairman’s eye went travelling again, and again it came to rest on Mr. Moggeridge.

The Red Twin rose slowly to his feet and drew in his breath with an air of profound thought. “ I think I *know* the party as might have a coop to lend,” he said : “ I *think* I doos,” and then sat down,

My Aunt Elizabeth thumped her stick again and wished to know where the Committee proposed to buy these Langshans. (Cries of “ Minorcas ! ” “ Brown Sussex ! ” “ Rhode Island Reds ! ”)

Amid this confusion Mr. Twyford stood up and raised his arm to secure silence. “ If the Brotherhood want a few good birds—Leghorns, Light Sussex, or any other kind,” said Mr. Twyford, “ I should be very pleased to oblige them, for a small consideration.”

Then a modest cough was heard in intimation of the fact that the Vicar had come among us.

That gentleman, enfolding us all in a broad, pastoral smile, was sorry to have to inform us that as the clock now pointed to half-past nine the meeting would have to terminate. He ventured to remind us that these were church premises and that the rules appertaining to church government must be observed, even by institutions which saw fit to usurp some functions which the inhabitants of that village had in other days been content to entrust to the care of the Church. Brotherhood was a beautiful thing, but there were some in that hall, and those not the most humble, or least educated, who seemed to need reminding that the idea of Brotherhood could not be divorced from religion, nor the duty of preaching the gospel of brotherhood be lightly assumed by laymen and——” And so on for fifteen minutes, after which we were allowed to go home.

My Aunt Elizabeth allowed me to see her home. In the dark and muddy lane outside the churchyard she took my arm and said, rather eagerly, “Who was that pleasant woman in the brown silk dress? The one who gave me her chair?”

“That!” I answered: “Oh, that was Mrs. Pond, the bailiff’s wife at Slugwash Park.”

Aunt Elizabeth released my arm.

“Bailiff’s wife!” she exclaimed. “Why, damn it, I lent the woman a pocket-handkerchief!”

## XVIII

### An Absentee

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THIS is a further extract from the annals of my Derby Dog.

While "Passed to you for information and necessary action, please" consumed a great deal of that individual's attention, there were interludes of semi-official sunshine. Mr. Horace Muster was one of these.

Mr. Muster was inaugurated by a stout police-sergeant, who reported the discovery of Horace on Piltown, where prehistoric giants, stone dwarfs, and curiosities of all kinds are continually being found. Horace Muster was neither a giant nor a dwarf, but, as he confessed to having slept for several nights on the open down, he was thought to possess an unofficial temperament. Also, he had failed to produce any documentary evidence of his right to wear plain clothing, and had therefore been arrested as an absentee from military service. They had lodged him in a detention cell at the Town Hall, and this fact was now reported by the stout police-

sergeant for "information and necessary action, please."

The necessary action was, as usual, assigned to the Derby Dog. That small warrior was instructed to accompany the police-sergeant to the detention cells, to take delivery of the absentee, to conduct that individual to the barracks on the hill (some three miles distant), to have him medically examined, and then to return him to the police. Having received these instructions, and an Army Form B. 178 which was void of all data save the bare postulate of Horace Muster's existence, the Derby Dog saluted, put up his ink-bottles, and went away with the police-sergeant.

This personage was far from being what is called a chatterbox. He walked in silence, with a flat foot and loud bronchial symptoms. But towards the end of their journey to the Town Hall he did utter a remark. This was singular in substance as well as kind, and impressed itself upon the Derby Dog's memory. The police-sergeant's solitary lapse into speech was occasioned by the sight of a public house, which exhibited shuttered windows and the dismal notification "No Beer." He emitted a noise like the farewell gurgle of a bath waste and said: "Ah, corporal, this is a terrible hard war for the licensed victuallers."

Arrived at the Town Hall the Derby Dog was taken into a subterranean labyrinth, giving access to a number of small cages. These were the detention cells. Latticed ironwork in front of each cell created the suggestion of a poorly furnished passenger



lift. Some of these cells were empty, but most of them were populated by watchful men awaiting the necessary action, please. In the last cage of all was the Derby Dog's man. He was a small man with a jerky smile, and active, incandescent eyes, and he wore a brightly coloured neckerchief and a cap of checkered pattern, boldly peaked. He blinked at his visitors through the bars of the cage with his little wild-beast eyes, and then he jerked his sudden, irrelevant smile at the Derby Dog and uttered the mysterious words "Hi, buck!"

"Go in cautious like," said the police-sergeant, in a bronchial whisper: "We don't like the look of 'im. We don't like that sloppy grin of his. Keep him in front of you."

With these words the police-sergeant unlocked the iron door and drew it back along its guides. He motioned the Derby Dog to enter the cage and take possession of its inmate.

The Derby Dog entered cautiously but without much fuss, for he somehow didn't share his companion's suspicion of the jerky smile. Unblinking solemnity is no doubt the best sort of facial expression for daily use in a damp climate; but after nine months in the British Army the Derby Dog was prepared to welcome anything different. He walked up to Mr. Horace Muster, and, assuming a negligent posture, returned his grin. Horace, having rolled his eyes about and dribbled somewhat at the mouth, lifted an unsteady hand, prominently knuckled, and smote the Derby Dog upon the shoulder, exclaiming triumphantly: "Hi, buck!"

“Hi, buck!” replied the Derby Dog, hitting Horace back again, thus establishing a relationship of mutual confidence.

The Derby Dog then broached with Horace this amusing project of a nice walk up the jolly hill to the pretty barracks. Horace smiled agreeably and immediately collected his luggage in token of his readiness to leave home at once. Horace's luggage consisted of a faded bunch of primroses, which he pinned carefully into his cap, and a large bundle wrapped round with a blanket and string, and containing a powerful smell.

The Derby Dog then signed a receipt for Horace (“Un-examined”), and guided him up the forty-nine steep steps, all dark and stony, which led to the fresh air and the jolly hill and pretty barracks. Half way up these steps Mr. Muster gave vent to one of his “Hi, buck's!” with accompanying gesture, but otherwise the journey was accomplished without incident.

On reaching the streets they started on their journey at a good pace. Mr. Muster scrambled along nicely at first, rolling his eyes in all directions, continually smiling and occasionally dribbling. But after a few minutes of this Horace's shuffle began to slacken. His smile became jerky, his demeanour unhappy. He dragged behind and stared anxiously about him as if looking for something. At last, apparently, he found it, for he stopped abruptly outside a flower-shop and bolted into it.

The Derby Dog was obliged to follow Horace, and was just in time to avert the catastrophe which

would certainly have resulted from Horace's evident intention of "Hi, buck !-ing" the young lady behind the counter. She was a haughty damsel, wearing tier upon tier of auburn hair, with everything stuck in it except the plated toast-rack, and she responded distantly to Horace's facial jerks.

That child of nature was now gesticulating. First of all he removed the ex-bouquet from his cap and showed it to Zonia, or Maud, with evident disfavour, and then he pointed to his empty cap and to a pretty bunch of primroses and violets which were displayed on the counter. The young lady nodded appreciatively, picked up the bunch of flowers, laced it rapidly with wire, and presented it to Horace, who thereupon took it and pointed explicitly to the Derby Dog's right-hand trouser pocket. This poetic interlude cost the Derby Dog a shilling, but it was worth the expenditure of this small sum to behold the air of quiet contentment with which Mr. Muster came out of the shop in his newly decorated cap.

They resumed their walk, at first in silence as before; but suddenly Horace spoke. Stopping abruptly, and jerking a smile of shrewd significance at his companion, he said: "Do you know that your Redeemer liveth?"

Being surprised, or perhaps shocked, at this unexpected question, the Derby Dog merely nodded, whereupon Horace smote him briskly between the shoulder blades, and exclaimed: "Well, Hi, buck!"

After this the absentee relapsed into silence, and they went on—ever on, aiming for the jolly hill and

pretty barracks. They had travelled about half a mile when Horace was seized suddenly with a jerk of that peculiar significance which intimated the approach of speech ; but this time he did not speak to the Derby Dog. He darted suddenly into the road and addressed himself to a fragile old lady in a bath-chair.

“ What price them ear-rings when ye’re dead,” demanded Horace in a rapid whisper. “ Yar time’s up. No good to ’oller. They’ll burn you to a small black lump.”

The fragile old lady simply lay back in her bath-chair and screamed, and the Derby Dog simply called a four-wheeled cab and pushed Mr. Muster into it, and the remainder of the journey was accomplished *en prince*. An anxious moment was experienced by the Derby Dog when Horace brought forth a clasp-knife and began to sharpen it on the sole of his boot, but a few words of friendly enquiry and explanation soon put that matter right.

The Derby Dog : “ Why are you sharpening your knife ? ”

Horace : “ It ain’t my knife. It’s another party’s knife.”

The Derby Dog : “ It’s a very nice knife.”

Horace : “ Ah ! The party what used to ’ave this knife, ’e cut ’is froat wiv it.”

The Derby Dog : “ Why are you sharpening it ? ”

Horace : “ ’Cos it’s blunt, old buck.”

The Derby Dog : “ I’m very nervous of knives. Do you mind if I ask you to put that one away ? ”

Horace (heartily) : “ Hi, buck ! ”

The Derby Dog : “ Hi, b-b-b-b-ba ! ”

Horace (closing his knife and throwing it into the road): "There y'are. Now *larf*."

They arrived at the barracks soon after that, and the prescribed period of delay having elapsed they were in due course admitted to the chamber where the officers of the Medical Board were assembled. Here Mr. Muster conducted himself with great propriety, though the essential sunniness of his nature was somewhat eclipsed by the influence of Board-room ritual. Also he insisted on being accompanied by his precious bundle, the aforementioned qualities of which were so marked as to attract notice. The P.M.B. demanded bluntly what the bundle contained. Horace, with equal bluntness, but with a good deal of eye-work, answered simply: "Clean shirts."

The medical examination of Mr. Muster was thereafter concluded, and I have reason to know that its results were not favourable to any idea which may have been formed of adding Horace to the strength of the British Army. The phrase "*talipes equines*" was written, among other disqualificatory expressions, on Horace's medical history sheet. Persons thus afflicted are only considered fit for the General Staff.

As no hackney carriage was easily to be obtained at the barracks the return journey was necessarily performed on foot. Mr. Muster shuffled along quite cheerfully, commenting in no way whatever on his recent experiences. For two-thirds of their journey, indeed, he uttered no speech at all; but, on reaching the crowded centre of the town, where



shops abounded, he stopped with his usual abruptness and asked a very sensible question. He said :

“ Have you got any money ? ”

“ Why do you ask ? ” replied the Derby Dog.

“ Because, if you got any, I’ll ’ave some,” said Horace.

The Derby Dog then asked what Horace proposed to do with any money which might be forthcoming, and Horace replied as follows :

“ Why, to cheer me up like where I’m goin’. It’s dark down there. It isn’t jolly. They don’t know what He suffered.”

This statement might or might not be considered to form a valid reason for wanting money ; but it was evidently the only statement which Horace was prepared to make, so the Derby Dog gave him half-a-crown.

Horace immediately punched him in the back and exclaimed “ Hi, buck ! ” He then went straightway into another flower-shop and bought five bunches of daffodils. If the Derby Dog felt any momentary chagrin respecting this disposition of his half-crown it was dissipated by the cheery enthusiasm of Horace when he explained that he had bought these flowers with the object of distributing them to the police. “ A slop with a flower in ’is ’at,” remarked Horace truthfully, “ is somethin’ you don’t often see.”

He shuffled along very happily after that, with the daffodils tied to his bundle, the special attributes of which they greatly modified, And, when they reached the Town Hall, Horace went down the dark, stone stairs with a brisk step, and on reaching the

cellars below he uttered a loud "Hi, buck!" and delivered a mighty punch. Then Horace took the Derby Dog by the arm and led him up to a policeman, saying:

"'Ere y'are, sergeant: l've brought the little beggar back, you see."

## XIX

### Lucy's Holiday

—

A RICH lady in Kensington, who has a kindly habit of remembering my existence from time to time, recently wrote me a letter marked "Urgent."

Here are some extracts from that letter:—

" . . . . . I am pleased to say that another dear friend of mine—Lady Sybil Smee—is also greatly interested to hear of you. If you will send me the titles of one or two of your latest books I will ask Lady Sybil (providing they are of a suitable character) to enquire for them in her own name at the library.

"And, by the way, my dear boy, there is a small service you may render me. The person who sews for me—Lucy Tite—you may remember her—she did a great deal of plain work for your poor mother—is looking far from well, and I have *insisted* on her going into the country for a week or two's complete rest. Kindly secure accommodation for her at some respectable farm-house in your neighbourhood, and inform the people that the rooms are for the

dressmaker of Mrs. Pott, of Kensington, who will defray expenses. I wish Lucy to begin her holiday not later than the day after to-morrow, as I shall require her for some curtains and things at the end of next week. . . ."

I have quoted more of my rich patroness's letter than is strictly pertinent to the facts of this simple narrative, because I hope by that means to mark my sense of obligation to her.

As for Lucy Tite, I should jolly well hope I did remember her. It was Lucy who made my first shirt—a definitely masculine garment, with buttons down the front. And, if family tradition is to be credited, she sewed each one of its less specific predecessors, not excluding the regalia employed for my inaugural toilette.

So, I lost no time in carrying Mrs. Pott's epistle to Mrs. Winch, of Polecat Farm, who is my nearest neighbour, and a splendid mother to her children, with a perfect hand for butter-making.

Mrs. Winch received me in her parlour, where everything is so exactly in its place that you instinctively walk round, as if in a museum, and touch things. First you touch the iron candlesticks: three big ones which hang, and two little ones which stand erect on tatted mats; then the porcelain figure of Dick Turpin; then the porcelain figure of Tom King. After stroking this, you pass on to the antimacassars, three in a row upon the horse-hair sofa, and stroke *them*, leaving yourself at liberty then to poke the chest of a stuffed owl who glares at you severely from a wooden perch affixed to the

oaken centre-beam, and to shudder at the wicker arm-chairs and a cabinet of dead butterflies.

Mrs. Winch was prepared to consider favourably the proposal of receiving Lucy as a paying guest. "'Tis true," she reflected, "as I areun't 'ad neer a lodger 'ere for seven years or more—not since a furrin lady come from 'Astings and brought *cats*, but—tell me, sir, be there e'er a cat or dog along of *this party*?"

I hastened to acquit our Lucy of cat hunger.

Mrs. Winch grew visibly more cheerful. "They cats," she explained, "they do be so rough with their clawses. Be this a married party, sir? Because if so be as I am expected to 'arbour children——"

"No children!" I ejaculated.

Mrs. Winch grew still more cheerful. "They be so rough on the tablecloths with their boots, they gentlefolk's children," she exclaimed; "but, if so be as this party be a Sabbath-keeping party, and aren't got no children and aren't got no cats——"

"You will be pleased to receive her at the price agreed upon?"

"Well," said Mrs. Winch, by the way of assent, "I often 'ave to think to myself what a pity that be to give up takin' lodgers at Polecat Farm, what with they two good bedrooms at the front and our new vestibule, and what not. There bean't not another farm in the parish 'ave got a vestibule the same as we."

And so the bargain was struck. Lucy Tite came down on the following morning. Of course, I went to meet her at the station, and, of course, I got there



rather late. I found her in the station yard snapping viciously at a hard biscuit, whilst Benny Pearce, our youthful fly-driver, conveyed her luggage, with deliberation and ceremony, to the box seat of the fly.

"So you 'ave come, sir," remarked Miss Tite, when I had made my obeisance. "I should like to have a friendly talk with 'oever darns your stockings. Is it the gardener?"

I replied with another question. "What is inside that box?" I asked, pointing to the boy Benny, whose narrow shoulders were supporting, with difficulty, a curiously shaped coffer.

"Me sewin'-machine," responded Lucy. "You don't suppose I was goin' ter leave *that* at home, do you?"

I have heard that ladies like to have their little things around them when they travel, and so I made no comment on this explanation.

"A piece of tomfoolery, I call it, me comin' away at all," continued Lucy. "*I'm* all right; never felt better; and I never *was* struck on cows and 'edges and 'aystacks. She must do good to somebody, your aunt: I knew she'd start on me sooner or later."

Miss Tite's reflections were at this stage cut short by Benny, who invited us to enter the postchaise. Lucy, seating herself forcibly, as performing an act repugnant to her feelings, was immediately provoked to further discontentment by discovering signs of neglect in the fringed cotton slip which covered the front seats of the landau. "That thing

could do with a bit of attention," she remarked. "It ain't been darned since the time of Queen Anne, I should think."

I begged her to take comfort in the thought that many worse cases of the same kind had come under my notice; but she merely sniffed. I called her attention to many attractive features of the landscape: to some thatched cottages, a vast house, some well-nourished pigs, some brilliant cloud effects, and to the remains of a handsome gallows-post, on which it was at one time customary to hang politicians. But none of these diversions diverted Lucy from her humour of complaint. Only when we actually arrived at Polecat Farm did any sign of improvement exhibit itself. There, as she slowly descended from our chariot, my anxious ear detected a faint, faint sigh as of satisfaction.

"It's a relief, at ennerate, to get away from the sight of that ragged old ticking," she observed.

I left her then, having presented her with proper ceremony to all the household of Polecat Farm. Mrs. Winch invited me cordially to stop and take tea with them all. But I have had a wide experience of farm-house tea, and I knew, besides, that Lucy has an objection—based upon no principle of servility—against partaking of food in the company of what she calls "the upstairs sort."

Next morning I called at the farm, hoping to assure myself that Lucy had "settled down" and that her spirits had been restored to their natural brightness. But I was disappointed in that hope.

Lucy met with me a countenance free from anger, but distinctly peaked and woeful.

“Oh, I’m comfortable enough,” she declared; “quite comfortable, but—well, I dunno! It’s a tidy place, and very clean; she seems to be a decent needlewoman, too. Nothing, as I can see, that anybody could find fault with. But—well, I dunno!”

“She ain’t got much to say, of course. But Mr. Winch is quite a pleasant-mannered man. He seems to be a considerate man; he takes a lot of trouble to try and entertain a person. He showed me a cow this morning, and a little later he showed me a calf. I’ve just got back from a walk up the lane with ’im to look at another novelty—the Baptist chapel. I’m to see some sheep this afternoon if it keeps fine.”

Upon the following morning I again went round to Lucy, again hoping for better things. But this time my hopes were dashed as soon as ever I arrived at the farmyard gate, for here I was met by Mrs. Winch, in pursuit of recalcitrant piglings. “Goin’ in to see the lady?” hazarded Mrs. Winch. “Well, ’tis a good job you come round for I bin thinkin’ as somebody had oughter send for a doctor. She don’t pick up at all. Sim reglar mopish, she do, and there’s naarthun’ in the shape o’ food don’t sim to tempt ’er, neether.”

Lucy, looking positively tragic, met me on the doorstep. “Look here, sir,” said Lucy, “I want you to send me home. These ’olidays ain’t in my line. I—I dunno what it is, but—I seem—I seem

to feel reglar wretched. I——” the rest was tears.

When we had dried things up a bit, Lucy made a startling proposition. “I—I think,” she declared—“mind you, I only say as I *think*—there’s one thing would make me feel better. I believe I’d be right in five minutes if on’y you would catch that little boy there—the one that stands be himself in the pigsty—him they call Bert. Catch ’im, sir, and bring ’im ’ere. *I want ’is little trousies!*”

“No,” continued Lucy, “I ain’t gorn mad; you needn’t look like that. What I want, sir, is a bit o’ sewin’ to keep myself alive. There isn’t a thing in the place—not even a duster—what needs a stitch, on’y that boy’s trousies—and the old man’s, on’y I don’t ’ardly—like—to—ask—for ’is. Now, do oblige me, sir, and fetch the little fellar ’ere.”

When, a little later, I walked out of the farm-yard gate, all the varied noises of the countryside were drowned by a strange new melody—the sound of Lucy’s voice, lifted in song, and accompanied by the whirr, whirr, whirr of her sewing-machine.

And when, this very morning, I went back again, there was Lucy still hard at it in the porch, whilst Mr. Winch, wearing his Sunday blacks and a ritualistic expression, lolled by her side and gazed upon the flying wheel with ever growing wonder.

“What!” I exclaimed. “Do you mean to tell me that they are not finished yet?”

Lucy looked up. The October sun shone full upon her fading hair, and upon the autumn fall of vine and creeper, too. Lucy looked up. Her eyes were

wrinkled with laughter. And her mouth was full of pins.

"*Them* little things!" she cried, referring to my question. "Why I run them off last night. This is—this is another affair." She winked, while Mr. Winch was suddenly assailed with a disagreeable cough.

"Ain't it a splendid day?" continued Lucy, speaking thickly, by reason of the pins. "This, I say, is something like a day. This is proper holiday weather." "Whirr, whirr, whirr!" assented the wheel. "Oh dear," continued Lucy (whirr, whirr, whirr!), "I wish I could always amuse meself like this. I call it simply *grand*!"

"Well," she continued ("Whirr!" echoed the wheel), "I shall have to make the best of this holiday: of these three days. On Friday, I've gotter go back to *work* again!"



## XX

### Persuasion

---

ON a gloomy afternoon, in the autumn of 1915—which was a gloomy autumn—I was taken by a small niece into what is called a Picture Theatre. Here we sat for two hours, waiting for a certain Mr. Bunny, while the darkness flickered, and homeless heroines, prairie mustangs, comic firemen dithered past us, black on white, as if a nervous boy were rattling an ebony walking-stick across white railings.

I don't think we actually saw the Mr. Bunny in question, because, ere we had sat for more than two hours, an interruption occurred.

It was a military interruption, and when the lights went up I saw that it was being produced by a soldier with a bugle. He was blowing out great brassy gusts of sound: high-spirited sound—the “Charge!” I think.

The sudden accession of light which displayed to me this soldier and his bugle displayed also other things, as, for example, an almost empty hall, a boy in blue and silver with a tray containing chocolates

strapped to his person, and a very young and proud and upright little officer, who stood beside the bugler.

When I had looked at the bugler and the little chocolate-boy and the little officer, I looked about me at the almost empty hall, and I saw that it was sparsely peopled by women and children and a few Italian waiters.

To his sparse audience the little officer addressed himself. He climbed on to a platform in front of the white sheet upon which the shadows had been flickering. The little officer lifted a little cane, and the bugler, standing just below him on the floor of the hall, finished up his "call" with a deafening flourish and lowered his bugle.

The little officer then looked at us all very sternly and spoke. This, to the best of my knowledge and belief, is a literal transcription of the words which he spoke :

"Ladies and gentlemen. Hem! I am—hem!—sorrah to interrupt yahr little amusements, but there is a war goin' on in Belgium and other places, and I want to say a few wahds.

"It just comes to this. While all you people are sittin' heah amusin' yahselves, the country is at war—fightin' for its existence and men are needed to carry on the war.

"I am sorrahh to interrupt yahr little anusements, but if you think you can all sit heah, amusin' yahr-selves, while other people do the work, you are all mistaken. You men sittin' there—if you call yahselves *men*—are all wanted to go and help the men who have shown a little British pluck: the

men who are fightin' now in Flanders for their King and Country, as you would be, if you were men, instead of sittin' heah amusin' yahselves.

“Of course, you men, who are sittin' heah to-day, lookin' at pictures while yahr country is in danger, you can please yahselves about joinin', but I'm sure I don't know what you call yahrselfes, sittin' theah while yahr country is in danger and men are dying by the thousand. And I may as well say that you won't always be allowed to go on like this. The time is not far off, I am glad to say, when those who do not join us of their own free will will jolly well be *fetched*. There will be conscription and that will mean an end of picture theatres for some of ya. I don't know what you call yahselves, I'm sure, sittin' heah like this while yahr country is in danger.

“I wonder what you'll think about it if the Germans get here. Some of you will look very funny then. I don't know what you call yahselves, I'm sure.

“Now, the reg'ment I belong to is the Umptah-second Royal West Umpshires and we have room for 250 men to fill up vacancies in our third battalion. This regiment has got one of the most splendid records in the Army, and a month or two ago we were full up, and if any of you men heah, if you call yahselves men, had offered to join us we were full up, and you would have had to join some other regiment. But we have just sent a big draft to the front, and so we have vacancies for 250 men in our third battalion. So theah's a chance for some of you men, or whatevah you call yahselves, to join one of the

smartest regiments in the Army, and anybody that thinks he's looked at pictures long enough while 'is country is in danger can join this reg'ment to-day.

"I am to be found in the office outside and I'll answer any questions. I don't see anybody movin'. You don't seem in a hurry. I can only say I don't know what you call yahselves. I'm ashamed of you."

Having uttered these few words, the little officer descended from the platform and marched stiffly out of the hall, followed by his bugler.

A few weeks later, the newspapers proclaimed that the principle of voluntary enlistment was wrong.

## XXI

### Zenobia

---

A NUMBER of my intimate friends were recently so kind as to pass a special resolution in my interest. They held an extraordinary general meeting, and decided that I ought to buy a donkey. So I bought a donkey, and I think she is for sale.

Her name is Zenobia.

It was Jack Bevan who first acquainted me with the verdict and sentence of the tribunal to which I have referred. "Taffy and Fitzgerald and I," he said, "have come to the conclusion that week-ends with you are spoilt by the difficulties of transport. You ought to get a smart little donkey and a little cart."

I said: "Ought I?"

"If you went about it properly," continued Mr. Bevan, "you could get a little beauty—something very 'blood' indeed—for about a fiver."

I said: "Could I?"

"Only," pursued my instructor, "you must go to London for it."



I said: "Must I?"

"You see," explained Mr. Bevan, "these country beggars haven't any notion of the potentialities of the donkey. They spoil their donkeys by overworking them and underfeeding them and not grooming them and hitting them and—all that sort of thing."

I said: "Do they?"

"What you want," said Mr. Bevan, "is a costermonger's donkey. Taffy Jenkins says that the costermonger's donkey is the Arab of its species; and Taffy breeds Airedales, so he ought to know. With your knowledge of the East End, you ought to be able to find a rather special thing. Why don't you write to that doctor pal of yours to get him to enquire amongst his grateful patients? By jove, that's a good idea! Write him now. I'll post the letter for you when I get to town."

"Will you?" I said: and obediently wrote the letter.

My friend, Doctor Brink, who is what they call a "sixpenny surgeon," and who does it for that sum, all day long, week in and week out, medicine and a top hat included, speedily answered my letter.

"The man," he wrote, "who plugs my gaspipes when they leak, and who disconnects them when they don't, has a niece who is married to a publican who knows a potato merchant who has the very thing. Come up at once."

I accordingly went up that night, and by four o'clock the following afternoon I had bought Zenobia.

I don't know why I bought her, or what I paid for her. My recollections of the episode are confused. You see, they brought Zenobia to my friend's door—to his surgery door—and all the people and little boys who live in Doringdon Street came out to see me buy her. Mr. Bevan, Fitzgerald, and Taffy (accompanied by five rough-coated dogs) were also there.

All that I clearly remember is that I felt Zenobia's legs. Her owner, the potato merchant, *made* me feel them. He said :

“Jest run ye're 'ands down there, young feller. Go on. Do as I tell you. You feel 'er legs. Go on.”

“Go on, old dear—feel 'er legs,” repeated a number of ladies and gentlemen who were unknown to me. “Hand the doctor ye're watch and let 'im feel 'em,” said somebody else.

The potato merchant ignored these interruptors. He came close to me—so close that I was privileged to know that he had lunched—and he spoke to me again, from between clenched teeth.

“You do as I tell you,” he said ; “you feel 'er legs. Go on !”

I approached Zenobia, and gently patted her forelegs, amid cheers from the crowd.

“Theer !” cried the potato merchant—“'Ow's that ?”

“'Ow's that, sonny ?” demanded the audience.

“Now,” continued the potato merchant turning to Fitzgerald, whom he evidently recognised to be a more real and substantial person than myself—“'Ook up them 'ugly dawgs and I'll talk business.”

They talked a lot of business—Jack and Taffy and Fitzgerald and the potato-man—while I stood apart and thought about my mother. A lot of strange young women came round and giggled, and one of them asked me in tones of earnest entreaty to tell her if I had any brothers.

Presently Bevan came up and told them to go away. He said to me: "It is all right. We've nearly fixed it. There's only the question of the cart to be settled now. He's gone round the corner to a friend's to fetch another cart. The one he's brought is no good."

I nodded wisely. "Also," I said, "it smells of potatoes."

In a little while the man came back with another cart—a coster's barrow like the one which Fitzgerald had condemned, but newer and lighter and having green shafts. This one smelt of onions.

Fitzgerald looked at it carefully and then shook his head. The potato merchant thereupon whistled, and a man came pushing through the crowd with a third barrow—having red shafts and smelling of oysters.

On seeing this vehicle Fitzgerald brightened up. He said, "This is just the thing."

The potato merchant then walked up to me, and, after working his lips in a strange manner for some moments, spat out a penny stamp, which he cleverly caught on his thumb and thence transferred to a piece of dirty paper. "Ere's yer receipt," he said. "It comes to twelve pound ten in all."

"That includes everything," explained Fitzgerald

at my elbow—"donkey, cart, harness, curry-combs, and portion of whip."

Still thinking of my mother, I paid the man his money.

Then we brought Zenobia here, to her new home at the foot of the South Downs.

I will spare you the harrowing particulars of her entrainment at Victoria Station. Suffice it to say that a number of waiting cabmen were edified.

It was not until we disentrained (at midnight) in Arcady that I ceased to think of my mother. Then I had other things to think about.

She got out of her loose box quite quietly. She walked along the platform and out through the "goods" entrance and looked respectfully at a gas-lamp and brayed—a distinct and powerful, but a somewhat mirthless bray it was.

She quietly stood while the smell of oysters was brought up and harnessed to her. She allowed us to lead her gently forth. And then—the gas lamp suddenly went out. Just as suddenly Zenobia sat down.

We struck a match, and perceived that she was trembling. Also, she had broken out into a profuse and palpable sweat.

"This," said Fitzgerald, "is rather a strange performance,"

"Quite remarkable," assented Taffy.

"She's a London donkey, ain't she?" enquired a voice from the darkness. We struck another match, and beheld the Cockney porter.

"Them London cuckoos," he explained, "always

'as convulsions when they gits out into the kentry after dark, They ain't used to the dark, you see. They misses the good old lamp-posts."

"But I say—dammit—what are we to *do*?" demanded Fitzgerald.

"I'll lend you a lamp, sir," said the porter, "and you'll 'ave to tempt 'er."

We accordingly sent him for the lamp, and tempted her. But the temptation wasn't big enough. She cheered up a little and left off trembling, but she didn't move.

So we sent the porter for another lamp.

The effect of additional candle-power was distinctly encouraging. Zenobia sat up and brayed again. But even now she refused to get up and walk.

"Try 'er with a call or two," suggested the porter. We asked him what a "call" might be.

"This way," said the porter, raising his voice:—

Rabbit skins, oohh!

Buy a rabbit, a rabbit?

Chimney sweep!

Crab, crab, any crab?

Fresh oysters, oh!

Any speregas?

Ripe speregas!

As he spoke these words, the cockney porter turned him round, and, holding a lantern in each hand, walked slowly forward.

Zenobia, shaking herself violently, got up and followed him.

He left us just outside the station yard, but Zenobia sat down again. So we shouted to the



porter, and he came back, and we bribed him heavily to walk Zenobia home.

Her home is five miles distant from the railway station, over rough heath paths and sludgy, dripping lanes : and it was raining and the night was bitter cold and oven-black.

And the porter was a realist. He walked at the true costermonger's pace, which is something slower than that of a telegraph boy.

Zenobia also was a realist. She stopped at every house, at every wayside barn or cottage upon the route of procession, until the porter had sung his song three times.

These events were the events of yesternight. They seem to have happened a hundred years ago. Now, as I write these lines, the voice of Fitzgerald is borne unto my ears upon the evening air. He is trying to lure Zenobia from her pen.

Buy a rabbit, buy a rabbit ?

Crab, crab, any crab ?

are the impassioned words which he is uttering in very earnest tones.

If we can get her to the cottage door, and if Fitzgerald's voice last out, I am going to sit inside the barrow and be wafted through the oyster-laden air to the railway station, there to dispatch this statement. If you see it in this book, you will know that we have got there.

But, on the whole, I think that Zenobia *is* for sale

## XXII

### The Frights

---

IN a respectable market-town, in a southern county, I was lately drinking beer. And, while I was drinking, I saw something extraordinary.

It was of a twofold character, and consisted of two objects: (a) male; (b) female. Both objects were comprised within the same framework—namely, a slap-up dogcart, with red wheels, drawn by 15.2 of mincing roan, who, or which (being female), having beheld the red-brick frontage of the Dargison Arms, and me, outside it, drinking beer, nearly minced them into a plate-glass window, the property of an auctioneer.

The male object, who had a pale, clean-shaven, emotional countenance, like that of an actor, and velvet knickerbockers, and a velvet hat, which was illustrated by a wing portion of partridge, drove the nervous mare; and the other object, a lady, sat beside him, and behaved accordingly.

When I say that the lady behaved accordingly,

I mean to say that she behaved according to the example and precedent set by the man. And the man set astounding examples and precedents.

To begin with, he smiled at everybody. He smiled at everybody in a particular manner, a manner which, if I may say so, without giving offence to the matron, suggested Piccadilly. And the lady who was with him reproduced this smile.

There they sat, in their very high dog-cart, smiling in a confidential, significant, heart-to-heart manner at everybody in that market-town : at Mr. Mudge, the Vicar, at Mr. Donkin, the draper, at Avery, the auctioneer, at Mink, the greengrocer, at Moggridge, the builder, and at me, with my pot of beer.

The Dargison Arms, upon the steps of which famed edifice I happened to be situated, is always watched and guarded by a company of keen-eyed, beardless men, in constricted trousering, who wink continually and suck old straws. Some of these persons now went forward ; one took the head of the mincing mare, another erected a step-ladder, a third put a wicker shield against the gaudy wheel. And the smirking gentleman and the smirking lady then alighted from their equipage and trod the common clay. But they did not leave off smirking.

Having swayed about a bit in the roadway, as was becoming to persons treading an unfamiliar substance, they then walked slowly forward, readjusting and emphasizing the smirk as they did so. The male half walked in front, smiling everywhere and sometimes raising his plumed hat, to disclose a little white curl on a bald forehead. He smiled with particular

energy at young women, and with overwhelming distinctness at little girls, to whom he sometimes addressed himself in speech, uttering snatches of badinage, such as :

“ Good morning, Little Red Ridinghood ! And where may you be off to, so early in the morning ? ”

“ To the station, if you please, sir,” the little girl would answer. To which the smiling gentleman, still smiling, then rejoined :

“ Then be careful of the great big engines. They might run over you ! ”

Close behind him the lady walked. She, too, smiled always. Her smiles were particularly directed to very old women and very young men. It was the smile of unspoken sympathy which the old women received. It did their coughs good. But the young men got a little, fleeting tribute from the corner of her eye : a half-clandestine greeting, which they appeared to accept with varying degrees of embarrassment and pleasure. Some of them fumbled, nervously, in their waistcoat pockets, and it seemed, to my coarse mind, that they were fumbling for guineas.

Well, these twin Frights paraded the High Street of this respectable market town, smirking and ogling at everybody. They made little purchases. They bought a pound of grapes, a newspaper, some sewing silk, a box of cough lozenges, and two little woolly dolls which they presented to two little dirty babies in a public manner, on the public square, simpering, squirming, and ogling as they did so.

I followed in the wake of this remarkable couple,

being actuated by a professional thirst for drama and psychology. They were the subject of a great deal of winking comment from the regular inhabitants of the town, but they were not publicly molested or insulted, a fact which I attributed to their evident wealth.

Having reached the public square, and having there published their benevolent interest in wool, these two peculiar persons then turned round and retraced their steps along the High Street. Again I followed them, and again I was surprised. They now walked exceedingly slowly, squirming and simpering more than ever, and often stopping to conduct convulsive dialogues with tradesmen and other citizens.

The male Fright stopped at the open door of Mr. Tunks' shop. Mr. Tunks is a plumber and the owner of a hot-air engine: the only hot-air engine which exists in this town, and perhaps in this county. It is naturally a rather celebrated hot-air engine, and Mr. Tunks is proud of it, and shows it many little attentions; and he was thus occupied when The Fright accosted him.

"Ha! ha!" exclaimed The Fright, wriggling, simpering, and jerking off his hat. "Ha! ha! Mr. Tunks! And how is Mr. Tunks?"

Mr. Tunks who lay prostrate before his engine, having in one hand a metal spanner and in the other a vessel containing oil, looked up, and, beholding the wriggle and the smile, said: "Eh?"

"And how is Mr. Tunks?" repeated his twittering visitor.



“Eh?” said Mr. Tunks again. The hot-air engine was “ticking over,” and it was ticking over with a vehemence which precluded the facile interchange of ideas.

The effervescing gentleman said his little speech again, at which Mr. Tunks, getting up from the floor, clutched at a lever and arrested the activities of his engine.

“Boy!” he shouted. “You keep your finger where I told you. Don’t let goo. Watch that jint! Keep a tight holt, mind. . . . And now, sir,” he added, turning to the ever-smiling one. “And now, sir: well, sir?”

“I merely said,” replied that gentleman, pulsating with pleasantry, “‘and how is Mr. Tunks?’ And how *is* Mr. Tunks?”

“Oh, rats!” responded Mr. Tunks, causing the engine to begin again and throwing himself on the floor.

The Fright, with a paroxysmal smile, then resumed his walk, sniggering, bowing, bobbing, pulsating at everybody, jerking off his hat, uttering complacent noises. Behind him walked his glad-eyed lady.

Being unable any longer to contain my curiosity, I spoke to a little boy.

I said to him: “Who are those extraordinary people?”

“Which uns?” demanded the boy.

“That man and woman over there,” I answered. “Those nervous, jiggerty people with the St. Vitus’s smile?”

“*Them*,” answered the boy. “Why, that’s our Member of Parliament and ‘er’s ‘is wife.”

## XXIII

### Parafark

---

You remember my donkey, Zenobia. She was my pet, my prize, my Mile End Canary, who took the carrot for voice production in open competition against the elect of five parishes. I know I have written preceding anecdotes about the old girl, for, when she lived with us, I thought of nothing else. I hadn't the time.

Zenobia has now, alas! gone from me, under circumstances too pitiful to relate; but, until Fate parted us, we were deeply intimate. I call a celebrated Thinker to witness whether he himself has not beheld Zenobia standing on three legs in my sitting-room, performing gestures of welcome, and at the same time emitting the chorus of a college song, to which he (the Thinker) listened with profound astonishment. Every morning in summer, Zenobia followed the early tea into my bedroom, and drank out of my saucer, besides taking tribute from my sugar-bowl. She would follow me about the garden, and could be trusted with all things save the very young rose-shoots. Or she would stand on the

verandah, demurely and patiently, for hours at a time, while I read or gossiped. But whenever Mr. Tracey came to "do" the garden in a hat more than ordinarily objectionable, Zenobia would give me a sly little dig with her foot, and slide up to Mr. Tracey, and bite the hat off his head. Mr. Tracey was one of those men who cannot see a joke, and he gave me notice.

Such was Zenobia. This being so, I will relate the following true story of donkey magic.

#### Chapter I: THE AUTHOR DECIDETH

One evening in June, Zenobia having had her corn, and looking comatose and trustworthy, I decided to go out to dinner. And, as I decided, so I did; alone, in a small motor-car.

#### Chapter II: HE GOETH

I drove in my small motor-car to no other place than the local lunatic asylum. Strange? Not at all. I would e'en drive to an abbatoir, if it contained such good wine. My host at the asylum was a doctor—the doctor, having his own sideboard and cellar.

We dined considerably and talked till late, and the more we dined the more we talked. Seldom have I come away from dinner feeling myself to be so sound in judgment and contented in mind. The doctor, it appeared, experienced a similar sense of well-being. He came out into the Drive with me and we deliberated jointly as to which of my two starting-handles had backfired. Then we talked some more, and said good-bye a few times, and

together gazed with reverence at the moon-bespangled sky.

After this I started homeward, little dreaming that Zenobia would do, or, rather, not do, such a thing as to be, or not be, where she was, or wasn't, when I—Oh, dear! This is a muddle. Let's get on to the next chapter.

### Chapter III: HE RETURNETH

I found the little donkey at the end of our lane, just within sight of our house. If I hadn't braked somewhat suddenly, and chanced the ditch, she would have found me first. Howevah!

I got out of the car and rebuked her. But she stood aloof from me, a bored expression in her eye and with a slightly contemptuous curl of her little white nose. Then, to my surprise, she pushed past me, brusquely, disdainfully, and walked away; away from me and away from her home. I called to her, but she heeded not. I ran after her and seized her tail. Imagine my amazement when she kicked!

That tore it, as vulgar people say. I dropped the brother and sister business, there and then, and became authoritative. I put up a warning finger, and wagged it at her, uttering a word well-known to us both, and having a private and rather grim significance:

"Parafark, my girl," I said. "Parafark!"

She tossed her head. I repeated the word. Then, with the most insulting expression I have ever seen on the face of a donkey, she turned round and brayed in my eye!

After that, to hell with chivalry!

A tussle ensued, which was no ordinary one. Step by step I forced the lady back, gripping her neck with stubborn arms, and butting her in the chest with an unconquerable head. It must have taken me quite twenty minutes to push her to her shed; but I got her there at last, and forced her backwards into the open doorway and closed the door upon her, with a vicious bang, and made it fast. Then, with a parting shout of "Parafark," I left her and hied me to my car, and brought it home, and so to bed.

#### Chapter IV : HIS WIFE SPEAKETH

In the morning I got up late, having been thoroughly overwrought by my contest with that stubborn creature. My shaving water was cold, and the razor blunt. And there entered one to argue with me.

"Are you never coming down? What were you doing so late last night? Such a noise. It woke up everybody!"

My reply was seasoned with reproach. "Zenobia! Somebody had let her out . . . I had to stop up half the night."

"Oh. . . what did you do about it?"

"I put her back in the shed."

"Indeed! You are sure that you *did* put Zenobia back?"

Of course I was sure. (Damn the razor!)

"You needn't swear," said my visitor. "A better thing to do would be to go down and have a look in the shed. Ellen tells me that there are—ahem!—*two* donkeys there this morning."



## XXIV

### Strawberries and Cream

---

THE first strawberries of the season were brought to my door this morning by an arrogant man with a push-cart. He summoned me to my gate with a shrill whistle, and when I got there he looked as if he didn't see me, but uttered, in a harsh, disdainful voice, these words :

“Simpkin's 'Early Giant.' First of the season. Field-grown. English. Me last basket. Ninepence. Take it or leave it.”

I took it. I set it upon a porcelain dish. I called for sugar. They brought me sugar. I called for cream. There was no cream. 'Sdeath! I called for my hat. I bellowed for my hat. The cringing executive brought me three hats. I put them on and trudged out into the beastly sunshine to look for a rotten farm. I hated to do it; I hated to leave *them*; but it had to be done. You must have cream for the first of the season.

But “must” is not always an easy word to make good. The cream, as it happened, took some

finding, if I may employ a vulgar turn of speech. The lady-wife at Polecat Farm had sold her last half-pint of cream. The lady-wife at Mallow Farm was similarly situated, and eke was the fair suzeraine of Salter's. All these grim persons attributed their dearth to the same cause—strawberries. "You see," they each explained in turn, and in almost identical language, "the strawberries have begun. We don't sell pennyworths in strawberry-time. You might try Mrs. So-and-So. She might oblige you."

And so one tried Mrs. So-and-So, only to get moved on again. It was a continual case, if I may venture to write like a Literary Gentleman, of shattering the frail barque of one's Hope against the hard, inhospitable rock of rude Reality.

In other words, it was No Earthly.

However, I stuck to it, setting my face to the sun, and plodding on, along the dusty roads, up flinty lanes, across unstable, sticky stiles, and over the hot fields. And all the time some half-remembered line of verse kept obtruding its unwelcome company upon me:—

The gloomy glutton crawls his creamward course.  
Or should it be?

The gloomy glutton creamward crawls his course.  
Or?

His course the gloomy glutton creamward  
crawls.

I didn't know. I don't know even now. All that I can swear to is a feeling of what the scientists call "precognition." Somewhere, in the dimmest attic

of my mind, lurks the dumb conviction that I have met this irritating line before, when we were both much younger, and that I have often tried to parse it.

The Line was still with me when I got to Lunce's Farm, which I had sternly sworn should mark the limit of my journey. If Lunce's Farm afforded no cream, then I would own myself beaten, and determine this fatiguing pursuit of the Ideal. *They* would jolly well have to submit to being eaten without cream.

I am familiar with the precept that an Englishman does not know when he is beaten ; but, hang it all, you can't be Anglo-Saxon *all* the time. There comes a moment in the life of every Englishman when he simply has to perceive the obvious. But when I got to Lunce's Farm I thought no more about the cream ; and the Creamward Crawling Glutton was likewise cast out from my thoughts. Things were being done at Lunce's Farm so weird and inexplicable, so strange to look upon, that I could think of nothing else.

In a large and extremely unsequestered field, appurtenant to Lunce's Farm, a number of stout women, apoplectic and unclean in aspect, were herding a much larger company of evidently exhausted children. The children were scattered about the field in an unhappy squatting posture ; and they seemed to be poking feverishly at the earth, which was covered with a blue-green foliage, of thick but stunted growth. All of the children were hatless, and some of them quite bareheaded, though a few of the boys wore small caps of the air-proof

material which has been evolved for the comfort of youth.

Some of the stout women to whom I have referred squatted among the children and likewise clawed the earth. But most of the women were employed in exhorting their young. They didn't look to me like local women. I don't know what breed of woman they were. *Our* women possess a visible waist line : we let them grow prize hips in middle life, because by that time they have earned repose and a seat in the carrier's cart ; but, until their feet give out, and they lose their faith in foot planks, and can no longer walk the meadow ways, we like them to keep "lissome." Besides, they *have* to ; because we specialise in a peculiar kind of stile, the local name for which is "squeeze-gate." For "gate," read something else, not fit for publication in a book which is likely to be read by the old and unsophisticated. You need only change one vowel, and omit the other.

Well, dear Hearts, these women were certainly not like our women. They had such dirty faces and such beery eyes, and bits of black crêpe all over them ; and they kept on saying "Blast you !" to their children, who droned and murmured in the sun glare, like bees that were oppressed. Oh, how they sweated, those dirty little children !

While I was watching them, and wondering why they acted so, and why these fatted women urged them to it, my thoughts were suddenly distracted by a sharp and sudden sound : the word, or byword, "'Ush !" hissed out at my feet. I looked along the ragged path, and beheld a Maid in ambush.

She lay on her back, not two yards from me, at a point where the rough hedge which bordered the path broke into a little clearing. The clearing—which consisted of a patch of couch-grass, about two yards square—was bounded by a ragged, moulting hawthorn bush, and under this the maiden lay. She was a comely maiden, though pale, with unsoaped patches. She was sixteen years of age, to count at a venture, and her clothes consisted, principally, of sack and stocking. She showed a lot of stocking.

The girl was resting on her elbow when she saw me, pressing a finger against each temple. Her eyes, which were darkened with pain, contrasted strangely with the rich crimson of her lips. She looked at me for some time in silence, and then she spoke :

“No 'arm meant, Mister. Don't give it away, that's all!”

“Give what away?” I enquired.

“Me bein' 'ere,” answered the girl. “I crep' 'ere on the quiet. See? Got a aunt in that field. See? She ain't spotted me yet. Won't 'arf comb me eyebrows when she do. Gawd! My 'ead do ache.”

“This is very headachey weather,” I submitted, with a wise look.

“Weather don't trouble me,” answered the girl. “It's me 'ead. I come over queer at times.”

“Have you been playing with those other children in the field there?” I enquired.

The young woman, still holding her temples, looked at me wonderingly. Then she said, quietly,



but with a queer little smile : “ Yes, Mister. That’s what I been doin’—*playin’*. Playin’ with the other children in the field. And then I come on queer. And then I crawled ’ere. And when me auntie finds me I shall feel a bit queerer yet. She won’t ’arf dot me one, I know. Oh, me ’ead! Strawberry time and ’oppin’ ain’t no use to me. I never was one for—for playin’. It brings *them* on.”

I asked what “ them ” might be.

“ These ’eadaches, these — fits. Me aunt, she thinks it’s only a game I’m up to ; but I know better, ’cos I seen my pore mother come on just similar. Some o’ them say I’m bilious ; but nobody can’t be bilious on tea and squash-fly biscitts. That’s all I’ve ’ad to-day : straight it is. Bilious? Rats! It’s Epilepsy Fits what I got, same as me mother. When a person’s bilious you don’t get so’s ya’re mouth won’t open and there’s devils in ya’re ’ead, and you can’t move and ya can’t speak, and ya lie there till it’s over. And then ya wake up stiff and awkward, same’s if anybody had kicked ya. Bilious? Bah! It’s Epilepsy Fits I got. That’s my belief atennerate. They on’y come in Strawberry Time—and sometimes at the ’oppin’. But there’s more shade at the ’oppin’. Pull me skirt down, will ya, Mister? Thanks. I feel that stiff and awkward. Goo-er! My ’ead do ache.”

“ Go hon!” exclaimed a voice at my elbow. “ Do it reely? Shall I send to the chemis’ for some Owdy Clown, dear girl?”

I then perceived that a triple-chinned lady in black crêpe and a perspiration had silently joined our counsels. She said to me :

"Good morning, Archibald. Havin' a day out with my niece? She's a nice girl, ain't she? Suffers from 'eadache, poor thing."

"Yes," I assented, "she suffers badly. You ought to take care of her."

"Certainly, young man," said the lady with the chins. "I'll look arter 'er. I'm a great one for lookin' arter 'em; ain't I, dear girl?"

The dear girl did not offer any reply to this question, but pressed her fingers tightly to her temples and looked away.

"Stayin' 'ere long? Come up on business?" demanded the older woman, suddenly, turning on me.

"No, ma'am," I answered, politely: feeling it improper to exhibit the great dislike of this woman which had taken possession of me. "I have merely called round for some cream."

"I see," exclaimed the woman, baring a wide expanse of mottled gum. "Strawberries and cream, eh? They're a nice fruit, strawberries are."

"Ye-e-es," I replied, looking at the burnt-out eyes of the girl on the ground.

"I think y' oughter look nippy, if ya want that cream," continued Auntie. "Strawberries are *in* to-day, remember. I'll look arter Gertie 'ere. The silly gal's 'ad too much omelette for luncheon. I'm a great one for lookin' after gals."

I couldn't, with any show of courtesy, force my further conversation upon the two ladies, and so I made my adieux and went away. Shortly afterwards I found myself holding a jug of cream which somebody had doubtless sold to me.

As I walked home with the cream in my hand I looked again at the field where the children were playing, and I saw that Auntie had kept her word. The girl with the headache was so far restored as to have returned to the field, and was playing with the other children. She was playing under Auntie's immediate supervision, putting a hand to her temple whenever Auntie looked away. The children still moaned at their play.

When I reached home, still carrying my jug, it suddenly occurred to me that my appetite for strawberries and cream had departed. So I called for Mistress Sandy Manx, the cat. That wise creature lapped up all the cream, but left the strawberries.

## Mr. Ap Elwes

—

I HAD almost forgotten Mr. Ap Elwes. I've not seen him since the winter of 1913, and, like everybody's, my memory does not work well if you ask it to go back beyond the August which followed that winter. . . . Still, I did happen to think of Mr. Ap Elwes this morning, and of his two friends, and their sudden arrival at my house, or, rather, in my ditch. It is nice to think about things which happened in those gay, forgotten, far-off days : the days before that August. It is nice to write about such things. I will write about Mr. Ap Elwes. I will write about him aimlessly, formlessly, just as I think about him.

We found Mr. Ap Elwes in a ditch.

We came home to dinner very tired and very cold on a very January night, having driven four miles through a very spiteful snow-storm. On reaching home, we found a snow-storm gathering, as it were, upon the hearth : a spiritual snow-storm. This was manifested in the cold voice, the chilled eye, the

frozen manner of a certain little serving-maid, who received us with these words :

“ Please, there is a gentle—a person—a—party—have called to see you. He’ve left his name wrote out upon a paper and he will call again. Him and a young woman is waiting up the road there now. They be laid on a blanket, under a hedge, beside of a ditch. And, if you please’m, I’ve stayed on but I didn’t like it, and there’s no one else here, on’y me. Hepzibah, she didn’t like it at all. She have gone home to her mother.”

I examined the paper. It set forth, in a neat and clerkly hand, my visitor’s name—which was Mr. David Ap Elwes—and certain biographical particulars, from which I learned that he was a man belonging to the landless people of Little Egypt, that he possessed literary tastes, a wife, a blanket, and some clothes-pegs, and that he had walked from some very distant place to visit me in the capacity of one who had read with satisfaction certain works of fiction published in my name.

I therefore staggered out into the snow again—my cab by this time having driven off—and groped about the hedgerows in search of Mr. Ap Elwes’ particular ditch. This I ultimately found, with Mr. Ap Elwes inside it, together with his lady wife—who was likewise a person of Egyptian blood—the blanket, and another man (a young man) who appeared to be a permanent and valued, if not readily explicable member of this unconventional ditchhold.

They lay all in a lump, all under the one blanket.



It continued to snow, and Mr. Ap Elwes recited chunks of Borrow. There was sirloin of beef in our house, and the hour of its apotheosis was imminent. The snow fell so continuously that I could not smell anything: neither Mr. Ap Elwes, nor his wife, not the gentleman their friend. So I asked them all to dinner. And, snuffling loudly, for they had all got colds, they came to dinner.

There is a certain composition in rhyme which we used to recite at school: an utterly unrefined composition, beginning "There was an old man of Madrid" and ending with the words: "What ho, when they opened the lid!" I mention this purely academic matter here because I wish to say of Mr. Ap Elwes and his wife and friend:

"What ho, when they entered the room!"

But they were nice people. Depraved, perhaps, but unaffected: just like overgrown sparrows. And, if there was something about them which definitely did not remind one of Florida Water, they were all quietly conscious of this circumstance, and did not diffuse themselves, but hung together in a tight bunch.

Mr. Ap Elwes himself mystified me. While proclaiming himself to be a genuine Egyptian, ditch-born, bracken-reared; whilst disclaiming honesty, intelligence, and all the other virtues—he said that he had thieved for a living all his life, like a gipsy and a gentleman—he spouted bits of Latin, talked French with a decent accent, and mended the magneto of a motor bicycle. He also played some fiddle; but he played it worse than ill. He sang

songs, too—hymns. Most of them are not printable, but I recall with emotion the refrain of one of them : “ For he’s a jolly good saviour ! ”

It seemed to me difficult to believe that which Mr. Elwes evidently wished me to believe : that he was an ordinary native-born Egyptian who had picked up smatterings of “ culchaw ” at taverns and race meetings and from scraps of old newspapers. It was difficult to believe that he had learnt to talk good French and to know Rousseau by heart merely from patient study of those literary fragments in which tradesmen wrap up bloaters. If, on the other hand, my Mr. Ap Elwes is a psychological fraud, if his gypsydom be all “ fake,” and his is merely one of those mad Borrow worshippers who have “ turned ” gypsy, then I can only describe that smell of his as a piece of very fine realism.

Mr. Ap Elwes stayed on in the ditch opposite for some three more days and nights. During the days he quoted Borrow. During the nights he fiddled. At odd moments he came in to breakfast, lunch, or dinner, and we exchanged opinions, he and I, upon a variety of profane or sacred subjects.

Then, one morning, when it had left off snowing, Mr. Ap Elwes gathered up his blankets, his wife, his pegs, and his friend, and stole away. Before stealing away—significant word—he bade me adieu.

Holding both my hands in his own, Mr. Ap Elwes uttered a series of vows and invocations in the speech of Little Egypt : he also shed a number of smells—I mean spells—and incantations. These ceremonies, he gave me to understand, converted

me into his pale-faced brother, who was to command him in all things. As a start, he suggested coming back again to build me a sleeping waggon.

But that is another story.

## XXVI

# Practical Brewing

---

It was an old and accomplished friend of mine who started me on my career as a brewer. He told me that the process was simple, the accessories few, the ingredients cheap, and the resulting product delicious. He also stated that the latter would contain a very small percentage of alcohol, and that it would not therefore be subject to the imposition of duty. He wrote down explicit directions in a round hand on ruled paper. He also accompanied me on an expedition to a neighbouring town where I collected the necessary materials.

My first brew of ale was completed yesterday, and has been pronounced by those who have drunk it to be so satisfactory that I feel justified in giving an account of my methods and experiences to the world. I offer an exact description of the whole business, together with an account of the cost and nature of the material and utensils employed. I also acknowledge the advice and assistance tendered me

throughout the operation by my family and neighbours.

The principal utensils required for beer-making are (*a*) a barrel, (*b*) a vat, (*c*) a kitchen or scullery—preferably not your own, (*d*) a cooling vessel, and (*e*) bottles. Any bottles will do, but it may be here noted that those which have contained Worcester-shire Sauce are apt to retain, even after frequent washing, a quality of acidulation.

In the matter of casks, the Intending Brewer would do well, as I did, to purchase one at second hand. My cask had originally and for many years been used in the cider trade. An old cider cask, I am told, does not constitute an ideal receptacle for beer; but even less so does a cask which has been used for paraffin. That was the alternative offered to me.

The vat presents a difficulty. It has to be of copper. Brass, bell-metal, or galvanised tanking won't do. A suitable receptacle can usually be found, embedded in concrete, in the back part of any old house. To judge from my own experience, however, the Intending Brewer should disguise as far as possible the actual purpose for which he intends to use this article.

The Intending Brewer, having gathered together or marked down the necessary utensils of his craft, will now secure his ingredients. These consist of (*a*) water, (*b*) hops, (*c*) yeast, and (*d*) sugar. All are inexpensive, and all, with the exception of (*d*), are easily secured. The plan which I adopted was to buy the hops from a chemist, and the yeast from a



baker, and to draw the water from a well. A tap would serve the same purpose, but I haven't got a tap.

With regard to the sugar my proceedings were more complicated. Without going into unnecessary detail I may say that I have taught myself to go out to tea and to drink it bitter, but to mention my little dog, for whom I am ostensibly collecting sugar. It took me rather more than two weeks to assemble the required number of lumps (net weight 1lb. 2oz., sufficient for  $4\frac{1}{2}$  gallons of beer). The Intending Brewer, however, will probably adopt some other means of obtaining sugar, as so many systems are in vogue. Almost any good system will serve.

I will now describe my actual method of brewing beer, which all the readers of this book are at liberty to copy without fee or conditions of any kind.

Having collected my sugar and bought my yeast and hops, I accepted delivery of the cider barrel, and carried it privately to the gardener's tool shed. I there measured it with a foot-rule to ascertain its lineal dimensions. This enabled me to calculate that an earthenware bread-pan which stood in the kitchen would be large enough to serve as a cooling vessel. I therefore carried the bread-pan to the potting shed, leaving its lid and the bread behind me. This was an oversight which the Intending Brewer, profiting by my example, will do well to avoid.

I now made some trivial excuse for entering the scullery, unaccompanied by anybody else, and there humming loudly I ascertained that the household

copper was disengaged and clean. I then hummed back again to the family circle, and waited anxiously for nightfall. When it at last grew dark, and after I had several times remarked how tired they looked, the members of the household went to bed, and I sat up, ostensibly to smoke and think. A state of profound quiet having been thus established I then pushed on with my brewing.

My first step was to collect some wood, and a few Departmental Instructions about gooseberries (now obsolete) and to build a fire beneath the copper. I then went on tiptoe to the well, the winding winch of which I had previously oiled, and drew two buckets of water, which I carried secretly to the copper without disturbing anybody. I transferred an estimated quantity of water from the buckets to the copper, using for this purpose one pint jug with a hole in it.

I intended to brew enough beer to fill my cask, the capacity of which is  $4\frac{1}{2}$  gallons. To allow for evaporation and other unavoidable causes of wastage, it is necessary in brewing to start with a quantity of liquid greater in bulk than the amount which you have in ultimate view. I reckoned to start with  $5\frac{1}{2}$  gallons of water, which I measured out on a basis of four jugfuls to the gallon, spilling some on the way. My basis of calculation, as mathematicians will readily perceive, was inexact. But there seemed, nevertheless, to be a lot of water in the copper, as well as on the floor, when I measured out my pints.

I then secured a few clean tea-cloths—the Intending Brewer would do well to follow my example

in this—and thoroughly dried the floor. While I was thus occupied, a question was addressed to me from an upper window. Somebody wanted to know what on earth I was doing. I replied that I was simply reading Lord Fisher's "Memoirs."

At half-past five on the following morning I got up and lit my fire. I then added my hops to the water, the former being securely tied up in an ex blue-bag. The Intending Brewer should note this fact, as the improvised receptacle which I used for the hops may have exercised some influence on the subsequent changes which took place in the colour of my beer. Perhaps our water, which contains a proportion of iron deposit, may have been chiefly responsible for this. Anyhow, the fact remains that, so soon as my hops were added to my beer, my beer became blue. A sort of inky blue. As the beer became warmer, the blue became bluer. Before I removed it from the copper, it was almost black, with a thick purple scum.

The Intending Brewer should clearly understand that the correct way of making beer is to add the hops to the water when the water is quite cold, then to bring the liquid to boiling point, and then to boil slowly for a specified period. In my case, aiming as I was at an ultimate residue of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  gallons, the specified period is two hours. But I had omitted from my calculations the length of time required for the preliminary process, that of "bringing to the boil." I thought that the length of time required for bringing a domestic copper to boil could be

measured in minutes—say 40 or 50. Instead of which—well, at twelve o'clock the liquid had barely begun to smoke, and by that time it was looking so blue and smelt so beery that I was unable to disguise the nature of my operation, and I had to confess the purpose which I had in view. Intending Brewers will learn from this how important it is to start one's fire overnight.

Amid a scene of domestic protest, I then began the next process in the art of brewing. This consisted in removing the beer from the copper and putting it in the cooling vessel, which I had placed ready in a sheltered corner of the garden. A sort of purple track across the grey stones of the scullery remains still as evidence of my toil and care. When all the beer now available—some three quarts—had been put into the cooling vessel, I added sugar and browning. The latter is used for imparting a good colour to the beer, but the man who first prescribed it had evidently overlooked the possibility of beer being blue to start with. When I put the browning in my cooling vessel the liquid inside it became quite green, much to the interest of my audience.

Did I mention the audience? Well, it consisted of a lot of old gentlemen from an adjacent mansion which has been converted, as a result of the war, into a temporary workhouse. These old gentlemen, smelling beer, had come forth in considerable numbers, and their large red noses had led them infallibly to the spot where my beer was being made.

They hung on my fence with watery eyes and moist, expectant mouths.

When the beer was seen to turn green one of the old gentlemen became voluble. He said that this condition of colour indicated a need on the part of the beer for the addition of vinegar. He said I ought to put in a pint of vinegar and then leave the beer all night and then warm it up again before applying yeast.

I followed his directions amid the loudest possible protests from my household, particularly at the re-warming process, and when I came to the point when yeast should be added (Intending Brewers, mark this!) I found that the yeast had turned into a sort of fuller's earth, and I had to walk a matter of eight miles, there and back, to fetch some more yeast. This I added to the lukewarm beer, which began to foam and sizzle in my face. Twelve hours later the beer was ready to be skimmed and casked. On removing the scum, however, I could find no beer. The process of casking is therefore deferred until next time.

The old gentlemen from the workhouse, who had again assembled, were very nice indeed about the regrettable absence of actual beer. In default of the beer itself, they proposed to drink or eat the scum. This was now of a rich blood colour, streaked with yellow. The paupers ate the beer and pronounced it to be very good beer indeed—as good beer as they could wish for, though perhaps a thought too bitter.

This, I pointed out, could be remedied by spread-



ing the beer on bread ; and Intending Brewers, who propose to follow my recipe, will do well to adopt this method of utilizing any beer which they may find in their vats after completing the boil.

## XXVII

# The Laughing Soldier

---

THE Germans have recently marched through this village, and there has been a row about it. Eunice Fuller, aged six, provoked the row.

Eunice Fuller—who is usually called Nicey, to save time—was playing in old Ashby's orchard at the corner of our three roads when the Germans came along. There were four of them, strapping young men, all mounted on great horses. Behind them rode a British octogenarian in khaki. The Germans, you see, were captives.

It is a fact which I am bound to state, since this is not a piece of fiction but the record of an actual event, that the Germans as they passed by inspired us all with a strange sense of rejuvenescence. This is because they were young and vigorous men, such as we had not seen in this village for four years. We had become so accustomed to seeing only aged or half-whole men about the place that the feeling created by the sudden advent of these four strong striplings was one almost of good cheer. We were

reminded of far-off things—the traditional English scene at harvest time and village sunsets as they used to be. We were reminded of “before the War,” and that made us remember that an “after the War” was to come.

With some such feelings as these the people about the village looked at the Germans and smiled. The Germans, looking quite unwarlike, quite un-German, in their British corduroy trousers, smiled back. We then all frowned.

One particular German who went in front of all the others, riding the best horse of all, and leading the second best, was actually laughing and singing. What a German should have to laugh or sing about in October of 1918, none of us could imagine, excepting Mr. Brunt, the blacksmith, who suggested that this German had probably just killed a canary. Mr. Brunt's view of the case was unanimously accepted.

Anyhow, there the German was, young, healthy, undeniably good-looking, riding a fine horse, and singing and laughing. And then what should Eunice Fuller do but scramble through the hole in Mr. Ashby's hedge, and run up to this German and give him two apples—Mr. Ashby's apples.

To say that all the village stood aghast is but faintly to express the inexpressible emotion which overtook us. There were we, a loyal Mid-Sussex village, brought up exclusively on the “Mid-Sussex Times” and the “News of the World,” standing about in broad daylight while one of us gave apples to a German prisoner. And such good apples, too: Mr. Ashby's best.

Before our inarticulate murmurings had died down, the German prisoners had gone on, and all that remained to mark their passage was a dwindling pillar of dust afar off in the roadway. So we turned our attention to Eunice.

Old Miss Miggins, a doer of good works, one who visits the paralysed paupers at the workhouse every Sunday for three hours and reads to them from the Book of Job, was the first to bear down on Eunice Fuller. Miss Miggins was closely followed by the Grand Duchess, a widowed lady of narrow means but superb dignity, whose title dates from the Battle of Tannenberg. In a crowded village shop, this lady rebuked the village shopkeeper for pessimistic utterances. "Believe me, Mr. Moon," she said, "the Russians will recover, and I object to your criticising them. I have great faith in the Grand Duke . . . *great* faith in the Grand Duke." This lady, then, went hotly after Eunice Fuller at the heels of Miss Miggins, and was in her turn followed by Mr. Brunt, the blacksmith.

"There's a young upstart for you!" exclaimed Mr. Brunt: "giving apples to a German prisoner. She couldn't give one to the English soldier then? That's what gets *me*!"

Old Mr. Ashby, who followed Mr. Brunt, said: "They was *moi* apples be Gard!"

By the time all these representatives of right feeling had reached the spot where Eunice Fuller was standing, that little maiden no longer stood there, having re-entered the orchard through her hole in the hedge. Miss Miggins beckoned, Mr. Ashby

gesticulated, Mr. Brunt shouted, and the Grand Duchess, who was fashionably clad and tightly corseted, reached over the hedge with her long-handled umbrella and seized Eunice Fuller with the crook. Eunice Fuller could not ignore so many invitations, and came out again through her hole.

Miss Miggins then offered her a few well-frozen words of reproof. Eunice Fuller stared. "I on'y gin him a apple," she said at last.

"They was *moi* apples," old Mr. Ashby pointed out.

"They was crumplings. Fallen down. I digged them from the grass." Eunice Fuller assumed a defensive attitude and looked at Mr. Ashby boldly.

"I don't grow *moi* apples for to give to no ugly Germans," Mr. Ashby protested.

The Grand Duchess here took part. "You ought to be ashamed," she said, "to give good apples to a German. No little English girl ought to give good apples to a German, Who told you to give those apples to a German? Not your mother, I'm sure!"

Eunice Fuller stared up at the Grand Duchess, blinkly slowly: "I haunt never gin no apples to a German," she said at last. "I gave them to a soldier."

"That you never done, my girl. That I'll go witness to. You gin them to a German. I seen you. We all seen you. And none at all to the English soldier. We all seen that too." All this from Mr. Brunt, the blacksmith.

Miss Fuller put forth her lower lip and put on a



stubborn and assertive air. "I never gin no apples to no Germans," she repeated. "I give they apples to a soldier---a laughing one."

Old Mr. Ashby, who is Nicey's uncle when he remembers it, remembered it now, and assumed a less angry expression. Putting a hand on each thigh to steady himself, he crooked his knees, thus reducing his stature to an equality with that of Eunice, and he smiled at Eunice, and the end of his long grey beard made contact with Eunice's chin and tickled it.

"'Tis true he did laugh, that chap you gin they apples to," he admitted, with reference to Eunice's last assertion, "and 'tis true he were a soldier; but he were a German all the same, a German soldier."

Eunice Fuller stepped back a pace and rubbed the tickle from her chin. Then she smiled incredulously at her uncle's little joke. "That laughing one a *German*? Ha! Ha! You won't catch me out that way, Uncle Ashby!" Miss Fuller laughed and wriggled.

"I ain't a-catching you, my little maid," protested Mr. Ashby. "I'm a-tallin' you the truth of what you done, so as you can be more cautious the next time, and not go giving apples to a German."

"I never gin *no* apples to a German," again repeated Eunice. "I gin them to a laughing soldier."

She looked at her uncle with a puzzled expression, as if doubtful whether his remarks were offered seriously, or were prompted by his well-known zest for harmless merriment. But here Mr. Brunt inter-

posed. Mr. Brunt's face had been undergoing changes of expression, and the expression which it now wore was one of extreme indecision, as he tilted his hat and scratched his head.

"'Pon my word, Mr. Ashby," he said, "I'm a-wondering if this maiden ain't got the laugh on us after all. That fellar's face was mighty similar. These land-working uniforms is all much of a like."

Mr. Ashby slowly straightened himself, and blinked at his friend in acknowledgment of a responsive doubt "Now you mention it, Mr. Brunt," he admitted, "the fellar did look English like."

"Perhaps he was an Englishman after all," suggested Miss Miggins. "Eunice's eyes are sharper than ours."

The Grand Duchess delivered judgment. "We are all very silly people and Eunice is the wise one. *Of course* that soldier was English. He laughed so pleasantly."

But then I interfered and mentioned that the soldier had asked me the time in German.

At this all the inquisitors turned again to Eunice and stared at her sternly. And old Mr. Ashby again stooped and tickled her chin with his beard. As I saw that Eunice was very shortly going to cry, I came away and wrote out this.

## XXVIII

### Three-Pun-Ten

---

I BEGIN with the horse, because the pedestrian efforts of that creature brought me into contact with the other ones.

The horse to which I refer is poor old Three-Pun-Ten, an animal who before the war-hay killed him was sold for that sum of money into my service, and who put all his stout old heart into the task of pulling our waggon from one end of Sussex to the other. I bought the horse at public auction, and I am now going to set down the solemn truth concerning the transaction.

The lady who shares my hearth and other vicissitudes was the prime mover in the business. She had, with difficulty, persuaded our local craftsman, Mr. Tunks, to forgo his native passion for an economical colour called plum red, and to finish the pony waggon in bright green, with white facings. She then declared that, failing a green horse, which our remote and unprogressive village could not readily supply, a white horse and no other was

essential to the completion of her colour scheme. And, by an embarrassing stroke of fortune, news was forthwith brought to her of this auction sale, where a horse of the requisite hue was to be publicly bartered. I was forthwith hustled into a hard, green hat and carried off to Snape's Farm.

Here, in the presence of the ripest agricultural intellect of this county, I was invited to feel a horse's legs.

"There's legs!" said the auctioneer. "Now look at his teeth."

The horse at this moment happened to sneer at me, so that I was able to obey even this somewhat harsh command. "There's teeth!" exclaimed the auctioneer, adding, "And ten? Shall I say 'And ten,' Mr. L.?"

I nodded to the auctioneer, who was standing on a wheelbarrow and who held a mallet in his hand. I had no sooner nodded than the auctioneer, suddenly and violently, hit the wheelbarrow with the mallet, and I found that the horse was mine and that I was expected to take hold of the thing which was fastened to his face and lead him home.

So Three-Pun-Ten leaned up against me—he had recognised a fellow-hack, no doubt—and, thus intimately conjoined, we staggered home. Some of the ripe neighbours—the ripest—laughed a little when we started; but most of them were in tears. They had been unripe once. They, too, had bought their first horse.

The homeward journey was a slow and arduous performance, broken by several brief pauses, as

Three-Pun-Ten coughed, or, with a dazed and stupefied expression, regarded the grass all round him. And we halted, once, for a rather lengthy period, when my companion went into a shop and bought a sack wherewith to conceal the more salient points of Three-Pun-Ten. At last we reached home ; and then we put him into a meadow and went indoors and drank a lot of cider in order to forget him.

But this is an age of marvels. Would you believe that Three-Pun-Ten was not really a thin horse at all? He was merely a hungry horse. In our meadow, parts of which are profusely covered with grass, he thrived exceedingly. Two days after joining us he left off leaning ; on the third day he refused to have his legs felt ; on the sixth day he yawned when we patted him ; on the seventh day he kicked. He weighed more than the Vicar before he had been with us for a month. After eight weeks of steady feeding, he became the most clerical-looking horse in all the broad county of Sussex. He shed the sharp points. His ribs disappeared. He developed a modest, hesitating manner. His eyelids drooped. He ceased to walk ; he progressed in a dignified manner. He would often stop to think.

Three-Pun-Ten had evidently graduated in the railway service. Trains excited him. The shriek of a steam-whistle, however distant, disturbed his wonted lethargy, and he would break out into a wild and palpitating amble, which suddenly subsided when he realised that he had been beguiled



by that foolish process known as the Association of Ideas: that we were not preaching in Lewes today, after all, and were at liberty to resume our meditations upon the predatory habits of the may-fly. Clerical, did I say? Pooh to your clerics! Three-Pun-Ten in his final phase would not have disgraced the chaise of a prelate. He looked like a horse who ought to live in Chichester and muse along before the timid chariots of the august, the Gaitered!

Instead of which, he pulled our pony-waggon. Let me tell you that he pulled it very well and steadily, and that he looked extremely handsome, with brass on his harness and a rosette at each ear.

One of the first things we found on the public road was a perfect English Gentleman; the kind who does not speak until he's spoken to. He was a thin, clean-shaven gentleman with hair severely brushed back from a protruding brow. He wore a semi-clerical collar and a hook-on tie and he rode a high bicycle with three or more speeds and looked down and about him with a "Why wasn't I told?" expression. One somehow gained the idea that he was a schoolmaster.

This gentleman rode before us all the way from Cross-in-Hand to High-and-Over Hill. Now and again, he smiled, very faintly, and with an air of quiet self-possession. I wondered why he did this and why he always looked at us while doing so—turning sideways on his bicycle in order to look steadily. But, at the foot of High-and-Over, I found out why: for something sudden happened to

the waggon and I fell away from it and hit my head upon the roadway—hard. After a prolonged pause, I got up from the roadway and saw that a wheel (the front, offside wheel to be precise and technical) had parted from us, shedding innumerable spokes and spikes and things in the process. The school-master had alighted from his bicycle and stood by my side, smiling benignly.

“I rather thought that your spokes were working loose,” remarked this gentleman. “It began to happen just this side of Cross-in-Hand. They came out one by one. Perhaps you saw me looking at you?”

The complete sanity and self-possession of this gentleman infuriated me, and I received his reminiscences with a marked absence of warmth, and he went away. Then, in order to restore my faith in the intrinsic wisdom of the human race, I got into conversation with a roadside idiot. (This was while the wheel was being re-assembled by a roadside wheelwright, together with his under-secretary, and the latter’s boy-help.)

The idiot was a quiet-looking lad, not extravagantly different from the other lads of High-and-Over Hill. But he had an aggrieved manner, a brooding eye, and very soft hands. Also, he was eating a swede turnip: eating it with deliberation and gusto.

All the same, I should never have suspected this young man of mental infirmity. It was he himself who mentioned it. I had asked him to direct me to an inn, and he answered thus:

“ 'Tis no use you arstin' me. No manner o' use I be the village idiot.”

I laughed pleasantly, in the knowing manner of one who is versed in the subtleties of democratic humour. But—

“ 'Tain't naarthun to laugh at,” protested my young friend. “ I *be* the village idiot.”

“ Who says so ? ” I enquired.

“ Everybody says so. 'Tis what they calls me.”

“ But why do they call you that ? ”

“ Because I don't go out to work,” replied the young man.

“ But why don't you go out to work ? ”

“ Because I goos fishun'.”

“ That,” I said, after a little thought, “ is clever of you.”

“ Yes,” assented the young man, “ I be very clever. That's the joke of it all. 'Ave a lump of turnip ? ”

Being a food reformer and humanitarian, I don't eat turnip. It isn't fair to the poor dumb creatures who depend on turnip for their winter pleasures. I said, looking at my young friend with a firm eye, “ Your joke is one of those jokes which can't last, you know.”

“ Certainly not,” he agreed. “ They'll stop me fishun' one day. Then I shall turn out a bad 'un.”

“ How bad ? ” I asked.

“ Very bad,” he answered.

“ But in what way bad ? ” I persisted.

“ Goo about and pinch things,” he explained.

“ Goo about with rabbit skins, and sleep in a tent

longside the 'edges. Goo killun' birds, I will. Unless I takes to preachin'. I got the roight looks for a preacher."

He was not mistaken in this. His brooding eye was calculated to win the most abandoned mind from vain and cheerful thoughts.

"Or perhaps," continued the Idiot, "I could learn to frow meself about, and be a Comic Man, like you see on the pictures. I did fall downstairs once, and it never 'urt me. Or else, if anybody was to give me a 'orse, I could go and be a jockey. 'Tenerate, I'll never take to wheelwrightin'—not quietly, I won't."

"But why won't you be put to wheelwrighting? It's a good trade. And an honest one," I added, not then having counted the cost of affording entertainment to a schoolmaster:—

	£	s.	d.
To clearing, cleaning, and reboxing old hub	0	2	0
To testing old hub	0	1	0
To making new hub, 8½ by 4½, boring and finishing same	0	4	0
Man's time, ditto	0	2	0
Material, ditto	0	1	0
Making, setting and finishing one set of spokes, new front wheel	0	6	0
Felloe ditto	0	3	0
Setting ditto	0	3	0
Boxing hub and finding new bolts and wedges	0	2	0
Boy, fetching bolts, 1-in.	0	0	9
„ returning with same	0	0	9
„ fetching bolts, ¾-in.	0	0	9
Man's time	0	2	6
Unseating old tyre and shutting same on new wheel	0	3	0
Making, finishing, boxing, and tying new wheel	0	7	6
Fitting same	0	1	0
Man's time	0	1	0
	<u>£2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>

“ Why don't you want to be a wheelwright ? ”  
I asked.

“ 'Ammer, 'ammer, 'ammer, ” replied the Idiot.

“ But think of the money you could earn, ” I argued.

“ Money bean't no use to me : nor yet 'ammering. I should 'ammer their 'eads with it. ”

“ Whose heads ? ”

“ People's. They got sich lumpin' 'eads. ”

“ That is true, ” I admitted ; “ but— ”

“ Look at that man's 'ead, ” interpolated the Idiot.  
“ What's the use of a 'ead like that, on'y to 'ammer it ? ”

The gentleman referred to, a person of austere deportment, walked past us and bade the Idiot “ Good evening, ” in a meeting-house voice.

The Idiot clutched at his partly devoured turnip, pressing it close to his waistcoat.

“ R ! ” he mused. “ They can all say ‘ Good evening ! ’ when ye *got* anything. Other times, 'tis ‘ Git out o' moi road, ye fool. ’ ”

With a very wise deflection of the eyelid, he poked his turnip into a pocket and walked away, looking wouderfully unconcerned.



## XXIX

### Jim-Jam

---

“FOR East is East and West is West,” says the wise Mr. Kipling ; “ and never the two (or was it twain ?) shall meet.” But I am not so sure about this, since making the acquaintance of Jim-Jam Bhoy.

Four years have passed since I met Mr. Jim, in the spring of 1915 : but I remember this warrior very distinctly.

It was Mr. Ephraim Bunter, of Polecat Farm, who brought the Jam to my notice. I had asked Mr. Bunter if he could find some quiet rabbits to be shot at by a wounded soldier named Smiff, and Mr. Bunter replied as follows :

“ Oi woon’t say as they rarbutts be that owdacious on moi farm they would foller a lame man round the turnups. But oi will say as they be owdacious enough. They be owdacious enough to offer some sport to a lame man if on’y ’e can ’obble any sense at all. If you was to bring your lame soldier along on

Thursday arternoon, the same as I say, that will goo 'ard if us don't find a scut or two to shoot at."

I thanked Mr. Bunter for his kind invitation, and told him that Mr. Smiff and myself, all being in order and the crutches going well, might be expected to arrive at Polecat Farm not later than eleven o'clock on Thursday morning.

"Good!" said Mr. Bunter. "There'll be a young friend 'o mine theer: a young brown fellar, a very noice young fellar, of the name o' Jim-jam, or Boy."

The colour of Mr. Bunter's friend appeared to be unusual. Also his name. I said to Mr. Bunter, "Why these alternatives?"

"Eh?" said Mr. Bunter. "What *be* an all turny toe?"

"To put it differently," I said, "why do you sometimes call your brown friend 'Jim-jam' and at other times 'Boy'?"

"R"! exclaimed Mr. Bunter. "Now I got you. You see, sir, this here little brown fellar—a very nice young fellar he be—he come from abroad. He come from Injer. He be what they calls a Gerker. And Jim-Jam, that's the name as he do go by, unless Jim-Boy, unless Jam-boy. But his *real* name, so he tell me, that be Mukto."

"I . . . see!"

"Well, then," continued Mr. Bunter, "we calleth he Jim-Jam, unless we call he Jim-Boy, or else Jam-Boy. He come from abroad, d'ye see? He come from Injer."

I saw.

"Well, then," said Mr. Bunter, "they got a more

partickler way o' callin' theirselves out there, abroad in Injer. There's more than just 'Alf' in it. See?"

Again I saw.

"A nice young fellar he be; a *very* nice young fellar, this here young Gerker chap," continued Mr. Bunter. "He've orfen told me about his home an' family, an' all that, abroad, in Injer. A sort o' farmer his father seem to be, and a sort o' merchant, likewise. They seem to live up high, like, from what he tell me. They got a bit o' land upon a hill, like, some distance from a railway station. He's father he grow rice and barley, he do; and he foller a bit o' trade, likewise: leather an' cutlery an' salt an' all that. A very respectable, old-fashioned family, from what young Jim-Jam tell me. Young Jim-Jam he tell me as he don't think a lot o' the way we grows our barley hereabouts. We ploughs too deep, *his* way o' thinkin'. But then, again, that seem if they grows their barley different down his way. They don't let that come to perfection, not according to *moi* idea. 'Tis the oold story: different parishes, different principles."

"What brings young Jim-Jam to England?" I enquired.

"That's a long story," responded Mr. Bunter. "He didn't come to England, not at first. He come to France, along of his regiment. But him and his officer, they both got gas, on the same day, in the same engagement. They Germans, they give 'em the gas that strong some of 'em fair died of it. Some others they on'y took a quame, as we say. Well, this here young Jam-Boy *he* took a quame, and his

orlicer, he took a quame. And the both on 'em, they was brought to England.

“ But this young fellar’s orlicer, who should he be but young Captain Hopper, son o’ Squire Hopper, him at Quimper’s Hall, in Pucklefield. So, when young Jim-Jam come out o’ the hospital, young Captain Hopper, he fetched him over to the Hall, and there he be, a looking arter his master an’ the polo ponies an’ that.”

I need not describe Mr. Bunter’s shooting party—or, at least, not very fully. Mr. Mukto, Jim-Jam Boy—if that were indeed his name—killed seven rabbits. Mr. Bunter killed eight. I killed none, having neither gun nor heart at my disposal for that sort of work. Rifleman Smiff limped round the fields with an ancient muzzle-loader, which sometimes went off and sometimes didn’t. He pointed it at some twenty rabbits. It discharged itself at six, of which he missed five and mangled one. The light failed early.

At five o’clock we all sat down in Mrs. Bunter’s kitchen, where loaves and tea and jam and butter decked the board; likewise tinned salmon, and a baked confection called “Sussex Plum Heavy.” Respecting the last-named accessories, Mr. Jim-Jam uttered eulogies.

“ Good meat,” he said. “ Good cake.”

When these attractive things had been eaten, Mrs. Bunter went away, taking the empty plates and dishes and tea-cups with her. There remained four men—representing the respective psychologies of East and West.

Mr. Bunter invited us to sit in the chimney corner ; but in close proximity to that retreat there were barrels.

"Now, gennelmen," said Mr. Bunter, "what'll ye drink? There's beer, there's coider, there's ginger ale, there's gin, there's whisky."

"Beer," said Rifleman Smiff.

Mr. Bunter took whisky. I, of course, took ginger ale. Jim-Boy looked doubtful. At last, after thinking deeply, he said :

"All the same. Beer, cider, ginger, whisky, gin. All the same."

"Try 'em mixed, corporal!" suggested Mr. Smiff.

"Good!" exclaimed Jam-Boy, the Gerker. "I try it mix." Which he did, without visible results of any kind whatever.

Jim-Jam Boy sipped contentedly from his glass. At his right hand, in the chimney corner, there was a little leaded window, which afforded a view of Mr. Bunter's principal treasures. These included a fine colt, chickens, pigs, cows, and some rich manure.

Mr. Jim-Jam Boy inspected these assets with a benignant eye. "Dirt good," he said. "Good for rice. Pigs no good. Chickens very good. Cows.."

At that point, Mr. Jim-Jam Boy became incomprehensible. But Mr. Bunter, who enjoyed the advantages conferred by a six weeks' acquaintance with that nice young fellah, was able to translate him.

"He say," said Mr. Bunter, "as the brown cow have got the best heart of 'em all. But he say I have overmilked her. He say it were time she be took



from the herd. He say she would be better for another calf. 'Tis very true what he say."

Rifleman Smiff then spoke.

"Where did ya cop that lot o' gas?" he said. "Did ya cop it at Matteaux?"

"Right: me catch it there," replied the Gerker. "Me belong one hundred eight division. Me become sick. Captain too. Me kill five German. Me kill with hand. German no good. He kill with smoke. He run away. He kill with smoke."

"Some smoke, though," said Rifleman Smiff.

"Oh, yes. Some smoke," assented Jim-Jam Boy. "German clever dog, but dirty."

"That's him," said the Rifleman. "But too clever."

"Too clever," echoed the Gerker. "One day we bite him."

"That's right," said Mr. Smiff. "One day we'll bite his bluggy head off. Nasty place, Matteaux. Any good be'ind?"

"Good behind?" said Jim-Jam Boy. "Oh, yes. Billets very good and——" Mr. Jim Boy again became incomprehensible.

Mr. Bunter, offering a convenient, if rough, translation of Mr. Jam Boy's comments, represented him as having said that the billets behind the trenches contained good straw and that associated with these billets was a farm-house containing coffee—good coffee, chickens—fat chickens, and ladies—kind ladies.

"Any beer?" said Mr. Smiff.

"No, responded Mr. Jim-Jam Boy "No beer, but plenty wine."

“Wine,” cried the Rifleman. “Red wine. What ho! And good-hearted smiling Frenchy girls. What ho! Give me the Army. Give me France. Give it me all, bar the war.”

“What ho!” repeated the un-meetable little brown man. He then added these words:

“Beer, cider, ginger, whisky, gin: all very good. Army very good. France very good. Girls very good. War very bad. What ho!”

XXX

## The Poskman-Poskman

—

*An Epic Poem*

### CANTO I

Deep down in Marshy Hollow, where the osiers  
abound,  
A cottage may be found.  
And here the village Postman wore his hair a little  
long  
And wove a net of song.

Compact of brilliantine and brain,  
He held that goods were little gain,  
But wooed the coy diphthong.  
The Postman-Poet, justly famed,  
His soul was far and wide proclaimed:  
And he was rather aptly named  
Sid Long.  
There, in his bower of minstrelsy,  
We did foregather, he and I:  
And he would give me gifts of rhyme,

And letters, too, from time to time.  
 And he would make this proud decree :  
 " The only Postman-Poet, Me."  
 And then he joined the Army.

## CANTO II

All down in Marshy Hollow, where the water-weeds  
 excel,  
 Another came to dwell.  
 The Postman-*Painter* this one was and was it very  
 much.  
 He painted sows and such,  
 With thumb and knife, he did express  
 His utter scorn for mere " finesse,"  
 And lived for being Dutch.  
 His thumb was far and wide proclaimed  
 He was appropriately named  
 Ed. Hutch.  
 There, in his marshy studio,  
 His canvases would grow and grow,  
 And I would view those works of art,  
 And get my letters, and depart,  
 While he would hint, with gesture free,  
 That England's Jacob Cuyp was he.  
 And then *he* joined the Army.

## CANTO III

It was in Marshy Hollow, where the King-Cup  
 spreads its face,  
 A P.S.A. took place.  
 The Postman-Preacher did arise to gird at worldly  
 hope,

And criticise the Pope.  
This fellow was a man of words,  
And flourished them about like swords,  
Nor limited their scope.  
His zeal and bigotry were famed,  
And he was reverently named  
Rev. Jope.  
There, in his damp consistory,  
We studied Bible history,  
And, while my correspondence waited,  
We talked of girls and things we hated.  
And Jope would modestly submit  
That Postman-Saints were rather IT :  
And then he got *his* A.F. W.3236.

## CANTO IV

In marshy, Marshy Hollow, where the yellow weeds  
are rife,  
Came next a man of strife  
The Postman-Politician this, who argued high and  
low.  
Nor ever argued slow.  
He thought extremely ill of Kings  
And Earls and Editors and things,  
And gave them all what-ho !  
The " People's Palmerston," installed  
By popular acclaim, and called  
Bill Blow.  
And, in his domicile fungoid,  
Our minds were mutually employed,  
And when he'd cursed the ruling clan  
*My* letters sort of " also ran,"



A most engaging lad was Blow :  
And pity 'twas he had to go—  
To Dartmoor.

## CANTO V

Not far from Marshy Hollow, on a less aquatic spot,  
Stands another little cot.

And here the humble author keepeth domicile and  
dog,

And burns the midnight log.

And unto him there journeyed one  
Whose earthly course was nearly run :  
Whose feet were splayed and flat.

And this old man, who was so poor,  
He carried letters to my *door*,  
And touched, with crooked finger fore,  
His hat.

“ Old man, old man,” I said to him,

“ I wish you would explain this whim :

“ What kind of Postman can you be

“ Who *bring* my letters unto me ? ”

And he replied, with palate cleft :

“ The only Poskman-*Poskman* left.”

And then he got Bronchitis.

## XXXI

### Stolen Grass

---

PLEASE have the goodness to look back with me. It is August, 1912, and we are out with the pony-waggon. There are three of us—SHE and I and Three-Pun-Ten. It is our first trip and we are all, at first, a little bit uncomfortable—SHE because she mistrusts my power to drive and control a pony-waggon, I because I mistrust her power to trust me, and Three-Pun-Ten because his harness hurts. It would, the way I have fixed it.

Three-Pun-Ten, I may have already explained, is a well-bred, white cob gelding. A man of my parish—an honest sort of fellow, whom magisterial prejudice is persistently convicting of poaching—“put me on” to Three-Pun-Ten. It was a poor sort of animal to look at, he said, but looks weren't everything, and this horse had been insufficiently nourished. He would probably sell for a pund a leg, and, if I bought him at that price and then looked arter him, I should have bought a bargain. In

point of fact, I got him for seventeen and sixpence a leg and was charged nothing at all for a greasy heel. But after three months at grass, and a little veterinary attention, the old drudge was completely restored to health and cheerfulness.

And the pony-waggon! Have I forgotten to explain about that? Well, it is a sort of dwelling-house on wheels: what refined people call a caravan.

By this I do not mean to imply that our pony-waggon is an authentic caravan—a “land-yacht” or portable hotel. Ours is just a four-wheeled waggon, with a waterproof superstructure and internal conveniences. We are constructed for use, hard wear and portability, and weigh ten hundred-weight, fully loaded.

Your authentic caravan, on the other hand, weighs about two tons unladen. It has the appearance of a pantehnicon, the mobility of a cricket pavilion and the comforts of a hen-coop. It is drawn by two stout horses and is usually driven by a too stout coachman—a fine, old, crusted coachman in a cockaded hat. Another cockade precedes him, upon the head of a colleague, who rides a spare horse and wears a yellow belt. On our very first day out with the Pony-Waggon, we found a Caravan, just like this. It was pounding its way into the County Borough of Lewes, and, when it reached us, it stopped, and he in the yellow belt rode up to me and said:

“Young man, will you kindly step up to our Caravan? My mistress wishes to speak to you.”

We stepped up to the caravan, and were privileged to hold converse with a stout lady, in emeralds. She said :

“ I see you are also caravanning, and I suppose you have come through Lewes. Can you recommend me to a good hotel there, where they have got a decent, comfortable meadow, with some shade, where we can pull in, and where we can get some decent stabling for the horses and some decent chickens, and beds for the two men ? ”

I was unable to supply the Emeralds with the information which they sought. “ But,” I said, “ if you care to go on about three miles beyond Lewes and will turn off to your left in the direction of Plumpton, you will find a very decent, disused chalk-pit.”

“ Indeed ! ” said the lady. “ Tucker, drive on.” And she, and her emeralds, passed out of my life for ever.

That's what the noble and fashionable pastime of fashionable caravanning is like. The nasty smug little meadows at the back of public houses. All the discomforts of the English Inn without its one redeeming comfort—the lavendered bedroom.

Now, we, who travel with a Pony-Waggon, are free from all that is respectable and sordid. Our waggon, which is built (on Warner wheels) of the thinnest possible match-boarding, and calico, with six coats of good lead paint, possesses every reasonable interior comfort, not excluding feather beds, and yet it is *our* waggon, to take *us* where *we* want to go. *We* are not tied to the main roads ; *we*

don't have to crawl along from inn to inn, looking for chickens to eat, beds for a retinue, stabling for our three fat horses. Three-Pun-Ten would as lief steal gorse-heads out of a chalk-pit as grass from the roadside. As for stabling, Three-Pun-Ten knows which side of the van is the windy side. And Three-Pun-Ten doesn't care whether it is a high-road or a by-road or whether there is a road there at all. Wherever he can put his feet without squidging, he will pull the van.

I am scrawling this immortal document on a high point of the South Downs. I am sitting on the steps of the Pony-Waggon to write it. We have not seen a policeman for eight days. We are a long day's crawl from the King's Highway. We are a longer way still from yellow belts and emeralds and the futile dullness of conventional "caravanning."

But we did not get to the crest of the South Downs without adventures. We started out—when it was our *first* trip in the Pony-Waggon—with many theories and beliefs which we have now discarded. One of our beliefs concerned the British Farmer. The article of faith which we discarded first of all was that dry old legend of Farm-house hospitality to strangers. Having lived among Farmers for the last some years, I permitted myself from the first to entertain a few doubts about his affection for strange people in waggons; but SHE, who had been reading a polite handbook on the Art of Caravanning, cherished false hopes.

We asked for accommodation at eight different farms on the evening of the First Day. What we



asked for was permission to pull inside a field, and graze the pony, for which, of course, we offered to pay. After the eighth rebuff, we found our chalk-pit and took it, as being calculated to savé time.

I needn't describe our experiences at each of the eight farms. One experience will serve, as being typical of them all.

SHE, in a shabby frock, with poppies in her hair, sits in the forefront of the Pony-Waggon, driving Three-Pun-Ten. She orders him to "whoa" at a farm-house gate, and orders me to enter it and haggle. I creep out of the waggon, clothed in old trousers and a travel-stained sweater.

Having caught the farmer, I make my representations to that Prize Turnip with proper humility and in proper form. For a long time, he does not answer me; but stands, with a gloomy expression, gazing at my sweater. At last he speaks:

THE FARMER: "You'll be one o' these here photographers, I suppose?"

YOUR SERVANT: "No."

THE FARMER: "What be you, then?"

YOUR SERVANT: "A vendor of letterpress."

THE FARMER: "A what?"

YOUR SERVANT: "A Mental Deficient."

THE FARMER: "Ho. The jobbin' line, hey? Who's that young woman you got along with you?"

YOUR SERVANT: "My wife."

THE FARMER: "Your *what*?"

YOUR SERVANT: "My wife."

THE FARMER: "What? With them old poppies in 'er 'air!" (Laughs hoarsely).

It is in vain that we insist upon the authenticity of HER. We swear in the most solemn manner that she travels with us under government licence, properly stamped.

It is no use. The farmer looks at the poppies and shakes his head and grins. He says, shortly: "No room on *my* land. Good afternoon."

As I turn to go back to the van, he adds, in an undertone, "Yar wife, eh? That's good. Whoi, look at 'er. She's *laughin'*."

So, after experiencing this farmer, and seven more like him, we vote for the chalk-pit, and the roadside wastes and the fat of the Downs. Never again shall we seek to "pitch" in private pastures or graze the pony at our private charge. And here we are, all snug, in our Pony-Waggon, two miles from a house. We can hear the distant muttering of waves, and, close at hand, the steady systematic "crop, crop, crop" of Three-Pun-Ten. He thrives exceedingly on stolen grass.

## His Majesty's Cure

—

"THIS is the tenth day," I remarked to my wife.  
"Time's up on Monday."

"So I understand, but I asked you if you would have some more sago."

"No more sago, thank you. It's the tenth day and I—I don't feel well enough for sago."

"Then," said my wife, "as lunch is at an end, I wish you would go out into the garden and find old Roberts, and give him orders about the shrubbery. He won't listen to me at all."

"Go out into the garden and look for Roberts—now—to-day?"

"Yes," said my wife.

"But this is within three of my last day at home."

"I know that," replied my wife, sweetly, "and I thought that three days would give you nice time to walk to the end of the garden."

The whole thing seemed to me to be very heartless, but I did not argue with her, although I may have sighed a few times and looked rather hurt,

as I asked for my overcoat, my leggings, my muffler and my oilskin.

"But is it really necessary," she objected, "to put on all those things for a walk in the garden?"

"Under the circumstances, yes," was my reply. I pointed out how necessary it was for me to keep entirely well—that is to say, as well as possible—until Monday. "I should hate to have to write and put them off," I explained. "They get suspicious. It's an army tradition."

"Let's hope you won't have to go at all," said my wife. "After all," she added, with the futile optimism of her sex, "there are three days yet, and a lot can happen in three days." "And," I replied, with a bitter laugh, "there are ten days gone, and the lot which could have happened hasn't happened. How far down the garden am I likely to have to plod before finding Roberts?"

"He will probably be in the shed potting carnations. Don't take him off it please, but tell him to start on the shrubbery to-morrow. After that, I wish you would go and dig me up a few roots of celariac."

I stared at her in amazement. "Dig?" I exclaimed: "Take a fork and dig? A man of *my* category? My dear girl!"

"It wouldn't hurt you," she urged.

That after all was a matter of opinion which I did not care to discuss. I merely pointed out, with great dignity, that I did not happen to be considering myself. I was considering the British Army. It had sent me home as a Grade III man, and as a

Grade III man it would expect me back. Grade III men don't dig. "A man in my category——" I began, but Sylvia rudely interrupted me.

"It's rather urgent about the celariac, so I wish you'd hurry," she said.

"Grade III men don't hurry," I retorted.

I managed to crawl out of the house, and to get down as far as the potting shed, and to find old Roberts and give him some firm instructions about the shrubbery. I then took him off his thumb-pots to go and dig up celery roots.

While he was doing this high-category work, I managed to drag myself round the garden. On reaching the small white gate behind the rubbish heap, I thought it was time to take a rest. So I leant on the gate and scowled at the road.

While I was scowling, two men appeared at the bend of the road, and approached me, walking very slowly with evident pain and disinclination. One of these men was big Jack Anscombe, who used to be our village blacksmith, and a very strong man, but who was now a Grade III soldier, like myself. His companion was a fellow of low category, named Burtenshaw; a man who, before the era of Compulsory Service, had been champion ploughman of this village, but who now, what with his cough and his chilblains, was a wreck of a man.

On reaching my gate the two soldiers stopped and greeted me. Jack Anscombe, who was spokesman, said:

"Good arternon, sir. We 'eard as you be at 'ome. They aren't fetched ye back yet, then?"



“I go back on Monday—unless otherwise directed.”

“Them’s my orders, too, and Will’s here as well,” replied Mr. Anscombe. “Your garden looks wunnerful forward, sir. I hope you won’t get any late frostes. I *hope* you won’t,” he added significantly.

I shrugged my shoulders and curled my lip to express a suitable degree of horticultural cynicism. “Anyhow,” I remarked, “it won’t matter to me much, if I’m not here to see it. I shall probably be in Norfolk, invoicing drain-pipes. If you fellows aren’t too tired, come in and have a look round.”

Messrs. Anscombe and Burtenshaw looked at each other doubtfully. Mr. Anscombe began to cough in an enfeebled manner, and Mr. Burtenshaw dragged his right foot forward, and regarded it anxiously. “Well,” he said, after a thoughtful pause, “perhaps we could just manage to doddle round.”

The two deceit warriors came through my gate, and we tottered up the broad walk three abreast. The “look round” was a cursory affair, for our faltering footsteps brought us to a garden seat. In the pitiable state of our health, we could not resist the invitation which it offered, and we sat down heavily, and warmed our shrunken bodies in the February sunshine.

“I wonder,” said Will Burtenshaw, speaking in a weak voice, and coughing painfully, “what they’ll do with me this time. I’m Grade III already, so they can’t put me no lower; and yet they *woon’t* discharge me. I s’poose they’ll set me fillin’ palli-

asses again, same as usual. Tur'ble bad for my corf that be, rubbaging among the straw."

"I believe you," said Mr. Anscombe. "Driving those old lorries has learnt me to have a bit o' sympathy. The smell o' that petrol would break down the health of a giant. It sorfens the muscles. Look at *that*."

As he spoke, the ex-blacksmith whipped up the sleeves of his overcoat and tunic, and exhibited his forearm. To me it looked every bit good enough for Longfellow—brown, enormous, muscular. But Mr. Anscombe shook his head, and sighed, and stared down at his arm with pitying eyes. "Before the army shrunk it up like that," said Mr. Anscombe, "that was a good arm."

There was an awkward pause, during which Mr. Anscombe was seen to blink, and heard to gurgle, while we sat mute at this exhibition of a strong man's emotion. Mr. Anscombe soon recovered his habitual expression of wooden equanimity, however; and then, covering up the shrunken arm, he put it, as it were, away from him, and turned to me. "You're looking far from well yourself, sir," he said.

"So they tell me," I replied with a brave little smile of resignation; "but I daresay I shall last a long time yet."

There was another long pause, as we gazed despondently at the sunlit path. Suddenly, a shadow fell across the path, and we all looked up. Mr. Banks, the village postman, stood before us.

"Good day, sir," said Mr. Banks. "Not having

had the opportunity of seeing you since Christmas I thought I would bring the letters round this afternoon and save you a journey to the house."

I thanked Mr. Banks, and took the opportunity of persuading him to accept a belated Christmas box. Among my letters was one enclosed in an oblong buff envelope, which I opened first with hasty, nervous fingers. As I fumbled with the envelope, I heard the postman speak to Mr. Anscombe.

"There's a letter for you, Jack, and one for you, Will, too. Will you take 'em now, and save me the journey?"

I don't know what the gentlemen replied, because I was unable to give that matter my attention. I had opened my letter and its contents were of a nature to make my head swim. Then I heard a cry, and looked up to see the postman, bag and all, hooked up in the middle branches of an apple tree. The enfeebled blacksmith had evidently summoned up sufficient strength to put him there, and was dancing wildly round the tree.

"I'm to be demobbed, old blue-bottle! D' y' 'ear that?—demobbed!" This disrespectful language was addressed to Mr. Banks, who still squirmed and struggled in the apple tree.

Private William Burtenshaw, in the meantime, was standing up on the garden seat, singing a song. In a fine bass, quite unblemished by his unfortunate bronchial affection, he gave us the complete chorus of "The Farmer's Boy." I couldn't, unfortunately, give it much attention, as I was leaping over cabbage patches and jumping over rubbish heaps in order

to get to the house. Mr. Burtenshaw shouted after me :

“ If you woulden be too proud sir, and was anywheres near the Cock to-night, damned if us three woon't have a quart on this.”

I waved at him wildly, as I shouted for Sylvia, and rushed into the bicycle shed. I thought we would take a quick spin round to the Golf Club.

I forget what became of the postman.



## XXXIII

### The Tale of a Comet

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A GREAT American Editor—none less than he of the “Fostersville Comet”—had written to say that he was now in England and wished to meet me at the London office of his paper.

I went to London and to Fleet Street, and to an alley-way adjoining Fleet Street, and here I sought advice from a certain shabby man.

“The Comet”? said this man: “Why, just above you here. Go in through that little green door and go upstairs to the second floor and you’ll see the board.”

I did as he directed me to do and I saw the board, on a shadowy landing. I saw also a door, upon the glass panel of which there appeared in letters of raised porcelain, the curious word:

EN U RI S.

I opened this door, and found myself in a small and not very clean apartment, which communicated with a second and larger room by means of a torn and shabby curtain. The hole in the curtain



disclosed a view of what I supposed to be the editorial office. It was furnished with pink wall-paper, a sofa, faded velvet hangings, a piano, and several bottles of beer. Its occupants were not visible, but their voices proclaimed them to be of mixed sex.

The outer room was more simply decorated, its furniture consisting merely of a deal table, a piece of looking-glass, a roller towel, and a Gentleman. This Gentleman, of middle height, and middle age, was clean-shaven. But he wore curly eyebrows, and long hair, of an attractive aluminium colour. He was reciting dramatic poetry to the looking-glass when I entered the room, but discontinued doing so on my arrival, and bowed to me with marked solemnity. He also flourished an arm in the direction of a chair, saying, "Allow mah!"

I acknowledged this courteous speech and action, and stated the object of my call.

"You wish to see Mr. Montague?" remarked the Gentleman, applying a portion of the roller-towel to the looking-glass, which bore, as it were, a residue of the poetry which he had breathed upon it.

"I wish to see the Editor. I hear he is in London."

"The Editor?" repeated the Gentleman, looking all round him and under the table. "The—ah, yes! Of course you refer to the Editor of the dear old 'Comet.' That is Mr. Montague. Allow mah!"

The Gentleman, dexterously detaching the towel from its bearing, rushed forward and applied the damp end to the seat of the chair. I thanked him for this act of hospitality.

“ The Editor is here, then ? ” I asked

“ Undoubtedlah ! ” replied the Gentleman.

“ Will he be able to see me, do you think ? ” I continued, proffering him a card.

“ Decidedlah ! ” said the Gentleman.

“ How soon—— ” I began, but the Gentleman anticipated this enquiry. “ Mr. Montague,” he proclaimed, “ will be disengaged directlah—presentlah ; indeed almost immediatelah ! Be seated.”

I accordingly became seated, and as my chair was placed exactly opposite to the hole in the curtain I was able to obtain a preliminary view of Mr. Montague—whose name seemed strangely unfamiliar to me. But editorial signatures are frequently of a post-impressionist character, and I supposed that in the haste and urgency of our mutual transactions I had not correctly decoded the Editor of the “ Fostersville Comet.” Very likely I had read him upside down.

Still, I could have wished for a better-looking Editor than Mr. Montague.

Mr. Montague was a gentleman of distinctly Oriental features and colouring. He was appalled in a shiny black overcoat, to the cuffs and collar of which adhered particles of fur, which evidently had at one time formed part of a rabbit. He was wearing linen which had been imperfectly laundered, and he had a cold, and spoke through his nose, and required a shave. He talked with animation and gesture, and flourished a handkerchief which evidently was but the third or fourth freshest of his collection.

Mr. Montague sat at a round mahogany table, and was confronted by four empty bottles and two ladies, who were not—who, that is to say, had a less vacant look than the bottles.

.. They were brightly coloured ladies—all pale gold and pink and lavender, with complexions like warm tea-cosies. They were musical ladies. They sang. Their song impressed itself upon my memory, and I am able to repeat its remarkable chorus :

I've been knocking at every door,  
    Ringing at every bell,  
Trying to find the furnished room  
    Where I left my little Nell.  
I just stepped out for an hour  
    To see a man on biz,  
I've got a honeymoon waiting for me,  
    But I don't know where it is.

Mr. Montague joined his thick but fruity bass to the concerted voices of the ladies, and the combined effect was forceful. Yet I couldn't help wondering in what odd moments the "Fostersville Comet" got itself produced. At the same time I admired Mr. Montague. Would that all editors lived in his world of ease and harmony.

Whilst I was considering these matters the choir practice came to an end, and one of the ladies rose from her seat, uttering, by way of farewell, the words "Tootle-oo!"

As this lady walked out of the reception room two new-comers came into it, in whom I found fresh food for reverie. The new-comers were masculine, young, of simple speech and manners. They were dressed in cloth caps, "sweaters," reefer jackets, and

knickerbockers. They enquired of my friend, the Gentleman, who had returned to his mirror, whether Mr. Montague was at home. The Gentleman said, "Undoubtedlah." They asked if Mr. Montague would be shortly disengaged? The Gentleman said, "Certainlah." And if Mr. Montague would see them? The Gentleman said, "Decidedlah."

"You know 'oo we are, I expect, gov'nor?" one of the young men then hazarded.

"Unfortunately—er—no," replied the Gentleman.

"We're Bender and Binder, the ackererbats, that's 'oo we are," rejoined the spokesman. "We've both done our bit, and we've both had some gas, and we've both got our ticket. Mr. Montague wrote to us about findin' a Shop."

"Ha! Preciselah! I recollect," exclaimed the Gentleman. "Yours is a very original entertainment, I understand. Originalatah is everything in this profession."

"Well," answered Mr. Bender (or Mr. Binder), "if you want originality we're the lads to give it you. I do the straight work meself—'Orizontal Bar and Trapeze—but my mate 'ere is in the komic line. 'E wears a pair of old pants, see? And 'e's got a red nose, see? And a bit of shirt front, what keeps on pokin' out, see? And while I'm doing the straight business 'e larks abaht, see? Tries to climb up the pole of my bar, and so forth. As I come round—me doing a bit of straight work—I catches him a wollop aside of 'is 'ead with my foot, and 'e 'ollers out, same as if I'd 'urt 'im, and 'e falls down. That allus fetches 'em, that does. Oh, we're original all right."



“ Evidentlah,” said the Gentleman. “ How do you dress it ? ”

“ That,” said Mr. Binder—or Bender, as the case might be—“ is one of the most original things about our show, the way we dresses it. I’m dressed up as a middy in the Navy, with a flag on me cap and a white stripe down me trousers, and my mate ’ere, what does the komic work, ’e’s dressed up like a tramp. That Mr. Montague calling ? ”

It was Mr. Montague calling. Whilst Messrs. Bender and Binder had been describing their technique, the other lady had terminated her interview with Mr. Montague.

Messrs. Bender and Binder now explained their professional methods to Mr. Montague, who listened patiently, and then said :

“ Splendid ! Excellent ! Most original. I shan’t trouble ya for a trial show. A novelty like yours don’t call for no trial shows. It books itself, as the sayin’ goes. Just leave the usual deposit with my clurk outside—we’ll say a fi-pun’ note, as you’re beginners—and I’ll send in yare names at once to the Coliseum and Palladium.”

“ Thank ya, sir,” said Mr. Binder. “ Oh. *thanks* ! ” said Mr. Bender.

I then asked the Gentleman to lend me a match, which he very obligingly did. I went outside, into the place of shadows, and looked again more carefully at Mr. Montague’s signboard.

\* \* \*

It was as I’d begun to fear. Neither Mr. Montague nor his sign, had any connection with the “ Fosters-



ville Comet." I had been deceived by the shadows  
What Mr. Montague's signboard really said was this :

THE VAUDEVILLE COMET,  
Joe Montague, Editor.

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THE COMET VAUDEVILLE AGENCY,  
Joe Montague, Proprietor.

While I was examining this specimen of heraldic art somebody touched my arm. It was the Gentleman.

"Kindlah step this way, sir," he said. "Mr. Montague is now at libertah!"

There was obviously no avoiding the interview, so I stepped into Mr. Montague's room, and told him the simple truth.

"I want an engagement at £80 a week as an original music-hall comedian," I said. "My performance is an entirely novel one. I wear an old top-hat, and a dress suit which is several sizes too large for me, and my face is painted red, and my teeth are blacked out, and I carry a partially decayed umbrella, with which I assume to wipe my nose. And I sing a song about a weekly tenant, whom I call 'Our Lodger.' I also refer to Insect Powder."

Mr. Montague looked at me earnestly, and in silence, for some moments. At last he broke out into a passionate shout.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "First Rate. Most Original. I'll put yare name down on me books *at once*. Just leave the usual beginner's deposit (five

pound) with my man at the door, and you can consider yourself as good as engaged for a six months' tour at the principal 'ouses."

Unfortunately, however, I had forgotten to bring my note case.

## XXXIV

### A Pair of Nut-Crackers

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WHEN I walked in the High Street of Blowfield—which is a town in Arcady—at luncheon time on a recent Thursday, the only creature visible along the whole expanse of that engaging thoroughfare was an old, old man. He stood upon a doorstep, beneath some dependent garlands of fruit (in cans), and the sign of “Booker’s Universal Emporium.” He wore a willow-patterned waistcoat.

“Booker’s, at Blowfield.” Who has not heard of this far-famed establishment? Its name is a household word in this and many other parishes, and it is a well-known fact that Booker’s sheep-dip, and Booker’s weed-killer, not to mention Booker’s tinned fruits, is, and are, the best and cheapest which our civilisation can afford.

I had no sooner perceived the honoured sign of “Booker” than I recollected my need of a small article which “Booker’s” could supply, and which my housekeeper had earnestly counselled me not to

be deluded into buying elsewhere than at "Booker's."

So I climbed the steps and dodged the garlands and walked right into Booker's, the willow-patterned waistcoat following me.

My venerable friend, the sole visible representative of Booker's garrison, blinked at me apprehensively as he stroked his waistcoat.

"Good morning," I said. "Kindly show me some nut-crackers."

"Some what?" demanded Messrs. Booker's representative, bestowing more blinks upon me.

"Some nut-crackers," I repeated.

"What be they?" enquired the shy old gentleman.

"Nut-crackers? Why, *nut*-crackers," I explained.

"That's a funny set-out," observed the waistcoat.

"Be they used, then, for to crack up nuts, like?"

"Just for that purpose," I assented warmly.

"Dear me! Go' bless my soul!" exclaimed the excellent old fellow. "To save a person's teeth—hey? Well I never! What *will* they bring out next—hey?" He blinked at me with redoubled energy.

I shook my head in a gloomy manner expressive of my inability to satisfy the willow-pattern's pious wonder. "In the meantime," I suggested, "let me persuade you to exhibit some nut-crackers."

"Nut-crackers—hey?" repeated the patriarch, amid a shower of blinks. "Now, sir, can you tell me, I wonder, wheer sich manner o' tackle would be housed? In this department—hey?"

I ventured to suppose that nut-crackers would be kept in some place not inhabited by sheep-dip.



" You see, sir," explained this honourable member of Booker's executive, " I be here merely tempor'y : mindin' shop, as the sayun goo, while all the rest on 'em be gone to dinner. I be a packer, really, if you was to ask my proper qualification."

I was conscious of no curiosity concerning the patriarch's qualifications. All I wanted was a pair of inexpensive nut-crackers. I reminded him of that fact.

" Very well," responded the old gentleman, with perfect good humour and five-and-twenty blinks. " Let us goo seek them—hey ? "

He conducted me, with these words, into another and even more lofty department, filled to the lid with lace curtains, ladies' items, muslins, mattresses, and mail-carts. " This," he announced, " is the Household, Haberdashery, and—General. Will they be yere, sir ? "

" Decidedly not," I said.

We retired into the Artistic—and General: an imposing treasury of alarm clocks, all-wire bed-springs, bamboo tables, and overmantels—carved and executed after the attractive manner of Messrs Salmon & Gluckstein.

" Not here," I gasped.

The Grand Old Blinker, with a sudden quickening of interest, then led me into a mixed assembly of hams, dried onions, Canadian butter, Brazil nuts, biscuits, and—bottled beer. " What about this place ? " he wondered, hopefully.

" What is this place ? " I answered.

" This," he said, with a blink of great feeling and



unmistakable signs of the water-brash, "is the—hey—the—hey—Horf Licence—and General."

I tore him away from it with sympathetic reluctance. It is bootless to repeat the further details of our lengthy search for nut-crackers. Suffice it to say that at last we found them.

We found them in the sanctuary of the G.O.B.'s last hopes: in his Land of Promise—the Assorted—and General. Here, amid shaving glasses, more alarm clocks, more onions, air-guns, soothing syrup, and glue, they reposed, in a glass cabinet upon the peak or apex of a pyramid of dog-soap.

Perhaps you suppose that my adventures at Booker's now terminate? If you suppose a thing like that it is evident that you have never shopped in Arcady.

"Dear me! Go' bless my soul!" exclaimed the G.O.B., his willow-pattern wobbling with emotion, when I called his attention to the cabinet. "So *they* be nut-crackers! They've took the rust a bit powerful, ain't they?"

"They have," I assented. "Hardly fit for civilised employment, but—still, what is the price of them? Fourpence?"

"Not *more* than fourpence, surely!" replied the trusted salesman.

"Well, then," I responded, "let us say three-pence. Here you are."

The G.O.B. drew back, blinking rapidly. "I durs'nt sell they things without we know the price for sartin," he exclaimed. "You see," he added, leaning confidentially across the dog-soap and

favouring me with a jocose variety of blink, "there's too many eyes about the place. Booker's is a very strictly managed consarn."

"Can't you find out the price?" I said.

"They be all at dinner," replied the G.O.B.

"Don't you keep a price list?" I suggested.

"We got a bewk," replied the G.O.B. "Shall I goo and fetch it?"

Upon my assenting to this proposition, the G.O.B. departed, and after much travail in a distant part of Booker's territory, he returned with two stout volumes. One, which was bound in red, bore the inscription, "B. K. & K., Coventry"; the other, beautifully upholstered in purple, supported the armorial bearing and insignia of "T. & Co., Sheffield."

I have looked at books like these before, and I knew the rules. "There is 20 per cent. to come off these prices, as listed," I explained to the G.O.B.

"Well, I never! Be there, indeed! Go' bless my soul!" replied the stout financier.

He wetted both thumbs and began to turn over the pages of "B.K. & K." "They got it printed under 'Nuts,' sir," he said, at last, "but 'tis on'y be the gross. Look there!"

Looking there, I learned that nuts, with washers, assorted, per gross, were offered at the revolutionary price of 12s. 3d. I exhorted my guide and comforter to try again.

He accordingly side-tracked "B. K. & K.," and consulted their rivals with surprisingly quick results.

“ *Here* we be ! ” he called triumphantly, “ here we be for sartin—nut-cracks, in cases, three-pund-ten and fower guineas. Which there is two plain pictures of the very object ! ”

There they were, quite definitely—the “ nut-cracks,” so called and so spelled, in dozens, reclining upon beds of plush in cases of leather. Some were ebon-handled ; some had handles wrought of ivory ; some were “ finished in fine Sheffield plate.” I looked upon them longingly. But——

But I did not want a dozen nut-cracks. I wanted just a single pair.

“ Naarthun ain’t printed yere about no single cracks,” protested the G.O.B.

“ What is to be done, then ? ” I demanded.

“ Theer be’ant naarthun to be done—only wait,” rejoined the G.O.B. “ They be all at dinner.”

Wait ! And why not ? I had already waited, as my watch informed me, for at least three-quarters of an hour. A further sojourn in that place of solitude and calm could only bring happiness to a man of philosophic temperament. Casting away all worldly thoughts, all selfish appetite for air, wine and food, I gave myself up to the simple pleasures of the moment and exercised, in the interests of the G.O.B., my choicest gifts of raillery and harmless mirth.

Under this treatment the G.O.B. expanded wonderfully. He revived for my delectation many of the choicest *mots* of the packing shed, and his honest laughter rang among the rafters, evaporated among the hip-baths, and was echoed by the onions. Suddenly, however, a deadly calm ensued.

The G.O.B., pausing at the crucial stage of an anecdote concerning linseed, assumed an expression of awful gravity, and, walking backwards, made an obeisance before the figure of a new-comer—a young man, lanky, sombre, and solemn, dressed in sombre, solemn clothes.

“Yere be the gentleman as belongs yere,” proclaimed the G.O.B., with a break in his blink, as he vanished from sight.

The gentleman, looking down upon me with a sombre eye, demanded to know “what article he could have the hodour of subbitting.”

I answered, simply, “Nut-crackers,”

The sombre young gentleman, directing me, with a flourish to the glass-topped case, said: “Nidepeds-ha’peddy!”

“Does that include the rust?” I ventured to enquire.

“Nidepeds-ha’peddy!” repeated the young gentleman.

“Haven’t you got a *clean* pair?” I persisted.

“These,” said the young gentleman stiffly, “are the odly style id dut-cracks which we stock.”

“Won’t you,” I pleaded, “knock off the ha’penny?”

“Sir” replied the young gentleman, “if you require a *cheap* lide in dut-cracks, you will have to go elsewhere. Booker’s Sell Only The Best.”

## A Picture

—

WE went out walking yesterday, and, when we got to the top of a very long hill, the dogs were making a show of tongue. One of them opened a cottage gate of his own initiative, evidently with a view to prospecting for water.

An elderly woman, wearing a faded purple sun-bonnet, came trotting down the red-brick path to see what troop of cavalry had fallen foul of her gate-post. She blended well with the aged quince tree at her gate, and with the monkshood, larkspur, and campanula which bordered the path. Like her, these living things were rooted deeply in that soil. The little gabled house behind her had been coloured bronze and golden by experience, and was "a sight with wistaria," or (as this old lady happened to call it) the "whisper blooms."

The old lady came up to me at her gate and extended a hand—an action which surprised me, since friendship does not often offer itself in this land without extensive courtship.



"So you *be* come," said the old lady. From which I saw that she was not really a friend, though friendly.

"'Ave ye brought moi picture, then?" continued the old lady.

I looked at her blankly. She was without doubt a wholly serious old lady, and her face, though worn, looked not the least bit stupid.

"If," I said, "you will excuse me for mentioning it, we are perfect strangers to each other. I have come to beg a bowl of water for my dogs."

"But what about the picture?" enquired the old lady.

"I know nothing about any picture."

"But you *be* surely the same gentleman as come here makin' pictures when the daffodils was out?"

I refused to admit this.

"'Tis a very strange thing, then," exclaimed the old lady. "You looks exarkly similar, all bar the dogs. You got just the same politeness and the same ole squashy 'at."

I repeated my denials.

"And you talk so similar," said the old lady. "Got the same sort of stuttering speech. Don't you remember the quince bloom, what you copied down? Don't you remember the jelly? That weer the first time ever you tasted quince jelly, I mind you said. You did so enjoy the pancakes to your tea. 'These *be* pancakes,' you said."

I shook my head.

"Well, 'tis a strange thing," repeated the old lady. "'Tis so seldom as ever I sees a novel face,

I be bound to mind it when I do. You took it away to frame it."

"Oh," I responded with a rustic wit: "Did I think my face worth framing?"

"I be talkin' of the picture, sir," responded the old lady, with reproachful gravity. "It was to be a seven-and-sixpenny frame, and you took it away with the money."

"Whose money?" I demanded, sharply.

"Why, me own, to be sure," responded the old lady; "whose else should it be? And you was so good. You would not take so much as a shillin' for the picture what you made; on'y the tea; and I'm sure you was welcome to *that*. How you did relish they pancakes, to be sure. 'These *be* pancakes,' you said.

"I mind it all so well. I've wondered to myself a' many times when you'd be back agin. And here you be. 'Ave ye forgot moi picture, then?"

I said: "You have mistaken me for somebody else. I never painted any picture here. I have never seen this house before, nor you, nor the road."

"Be you *sure*?" said the old lady.

"Certain, positive-sure," I replied.

"Poor lad," said the old lady. "Then he'll have come to grief, same as I have often thought. He'll be ill or broke his leg. You are *sure* 'twas never you?"

I repeated my denials.

"Well, that makes me sorry," said the old lady. "I do so often think upon that pleasant young faller and wish he be come to no 'arm. But now 'tis getting

long since he was here, and I be pret' nigh 'fraid for 'im. He took the picture off with 'im so gay and merry. It was to be a wonderful pretty frame, from all accounts. Poor lad! I do be 'fraid he's found some harm. Poor lad!"

## XXXVI

### Cony Pit Corner

---

As our pony-waggon staggered up the long hill, July went mad. I have known July in many of her justly celebrated moods. I have known the dull mood, the sultry mood, the sunny mood, the tearful mood, and the undecided, petulant, or changeful mood. But I have never before seen the moody month turn rowdy and behave like March.

But she let it rip on this occasion, all right. And she did it best—or worst—when the old pony was floundering up the one-in-eight of God-ha'-Mercy Hill. She threw a regular fit at him then, which blew the waggon about the road as if it had been a match-box. She threw blinding, cutting rains and deafening hailstones—stones of that fine marrowfat-pea size which are proverbially compared with pigeons' eggs. She threw down swirling volumes of twigs and green leaves, and, finally, she tore great branches from oak trees and banged them down about the poor old horse's ears. It was an attack

of acute mania to which July had unexpectedly and absolutely abandoned herself, and it lasted for two hours.

When this seizure was at the height of its power, when our poor beast was butting ineffectively at the sharpest rise of God-ha'-Mercy, and the trunks were falling about him, I happened to look round—a movement which I executed with extreme difficulty—in order to see if any part of the waggon had been blown away or if any girls had been blown out of it. The waggon was intact and still contained its proper complement of giggles. But some strange object had become attached to the waggon, something which July had tossed upon the road.

On examining this accretion more closely—and that was anything but very closely, what with wind up one's trousers and hail in one's eye and oak trees in one's hair—I saw it was in the nature or after the fashion of a human being. A small, black human being, blown up balloon-shape, with a circumference of not less than twelve feet. She—for it had the uncomplaining face of the female sex—was desperately mixed up with other things: an umbrella, a bonnet, lettuces, a black bag, a green bag, a brown-paper parcel, and a morning newspaper. She was being blown about. She bounced. She rebounded. She rotated. She revolved. Theoretically, she was holding on to the back part of the waggon, where there is a rack for carrying hay and oats, and odds and ends. But, in practice, July did not often let her do so, but kept her bowling and blowing and grunting and groaning all over the road.



Seeing that there is such a thing as common decency ; seeing also that there is always room in my waggon for another girl ; and seeing, finally, that I had had enough of July and wanted to spite her, I got the waggon to one of the few flat places which exist on the bosom of God-ha' Mercy Hill, and caused my stout horse to stand at ease. I then invited the little black balloon to climb into the omnibus and have a ride, uttering a cry familiar to my waggoning acquaintances : a cry borrowed from the annals of the sea.

“ Wa-a-y ho, me hearties ! Show a leg, show a leg, or a purser's stocking ! ”

The front door of the waggon was then opened, and two perfectly collected young women presented themselves, with dry faces and tidy hair, and they said, in one calm voice : “ Oh, bother ! What's the matter now ? ”

“ Boat alongside ! ” I bellowed through the gale. “ Passenger coming aboard. Stand by to throw a line ! ”

The ladies stepped on to the little foredeck of the waggon and looked down at the near-side front wheel, and there they saw the little old black thing, at which, I blush to say, they uttered hilarious noises, which, I rejoice to say, got mixed up with the wind.

That little wet balloon took some getting aboard, what with the strength of the wind, the height of the waggon, and the shortness of her little black legs. Not to mention a fine sense of courtesy which impelled her to break her upward journey at fre-

quent stages in order to utter thanks and perform obeisance. But at last, the ladies pulling and I pushing, we got her aboard the waggon, at the far end of which she found a little stool, sat down on it, and curtsied to right and left.

“If you be gooun straight ahead,” she then said, “you’ll be gooun to Cony Pit Corner, where the old oak tree standeth. Please be so good, sir, and set me down there. That’s where I be gooun: to the old oak tree at Cony Pit Corner. I are gone theer every second Wednesday for four and forty year.”

Having said this, the little black, wet person said no more; but she gave us a wet paper, containing the morning’s news in wet, black, blotchy pictures, with questions underneath them.

Then I stepped out into July again and wondered about the old oak tree at Cony Pit Corner. I wondered why anybody should want to go to an old oak tree, at Cony Pit Corner, once every fortnight for forty-four years. Forty-four years is such a long time. Forty-four years ago there were no aeroplanes and no streptococci. There was no Mr. Pemberton Billing. Just *think* how things have changed in forty-four years. But during all that time the old wet lady has not changed, and the old oak tree has not changed. They have been meeting every fortnight.

After travelling boisterously for three miles, we came to the oak tree, and then the old lady permitted herself to be lowered out of the van, and toddled to her tree and stood beneath its dripping branches, while July made balloons of her.

There she stood, all blown about, all wet ; uncomplaining, imperturbable, polite, bobbing at us gravely till we drove away. In forty-four years' time I hope to be that way again, and I shall look out for her.

## XXXVII

### Tibsey

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My introduction to Tibsey arose out of a sort of accident.

The accident originated on the Marine Parade, the Esplanade, or, as it might be, the Promenade of Somewhere-on-Sea.

In this place I happened to be occupied with what is called the pastime of motoring. I happened to be driving a vehicle (now for sale), in which is embodied many new and original ideas. One of these consisted in a powerful hub-brake, so constructed as to apply itself automatically, thus locking your back wheels without warning, and pitching you over the wind-screen. It struck me, then and there, that I am not the right sort of person to mix himself up with new and progressive ideas in motoring. I will stick, for the future, to old-fashioned, uneventful, ordinary buzz-waggon, and attend to my own brake effects in the ordinary humdrum, old-fashioned way.

Well, the genius who had devised this automatic scheme for slamming on the brake had omitted to incorporate any device, automatic or otherwise, for slamming it off again. Two taxi-drivers couldn't do it, nor could a soldier with a mallet. So we were slowly and ignominiously towed unto a garage, our back wheels, which were so newly and originally locked, digging appreciable ruts in the newly tarred surface of the Par-, the Promen-, or, as it might be, the Esplan-ADE.

They made me very welcome at the garage. I am known at the garage. I enjoy at this garage the reputation, which I cannot disclaim having earned, of being a valued customer. They gave me a chair, a newspaper, and a cigar. I took them all. They gave me a mechanic and a hammer. For two hours or so I sat on my chair and listened with pleasure to the mechanic while he struck and cursed that brake-hub.

There then entered unto me one of the proprietors of the garage—the commercial, book-keeping, un-mechanical proprietor, such as all garages always keep to help their customers out of mechanical difficulties. He said how extremely unfortunate it was that the mechanical partner should happen to be out. He explained that the mechanical partner was collecting accounts. He remarked that William seemed to be having no luck with the brake, and hinted at a conviction that, in the absence of a mechanical partner to advise him, William would continue to have no luck. He then mentioned, in a gossipy sort of way, that William happened to be



the only mechanic then in stock, and then he added—slowly, significantly—that an urgent S.O.S. call had reached the garage from the Portsmouth Road, that some man would have to be sent, and that the only man he had to send was William.

I then understood what it was that the commercial, unmechanical, book-keeping partner really wished to suggest. I dealt with the suggestion.

“ You don’t take William off my hub, Mr. Peak,” I said, “ not even to carry a spare belt-fastener to a Rolls-Royce : not even to dig a Baby-Peugeot out of a rabbit-hole. William has got to go on hitting that brake until it lets go.”

Mr. Peak looked thoughtful. “ It isn’t a digging-out,” he muttered gravely, “ it’s merely to take out a gaiter to a burst tyre. But if I don’t send William I cannot send at all . . . . unless . . . .”

“ Unless what ? ”

“ Unless it would amuse you to take some bus of ours—say the little green one—and run out with the gaiter. It might amuse you, I thought. It would oblige me. And then, of course, William could get on with *your* little job.”

“ Give William two more hammers,” I replied. “ I will take out your little green bus. I will convey your gaiter to the Portsmouth Road.”

\* \* \* \*

Thus it was that I experienced the inexpressible pleasure of meeting Tibsey.

I found Tibsey soon : I found him on the Portsmouth road, awaiting gaiters. He belonged to a minute, saffron-coloured motor car, and to a very

impatient, scornful lady, and a black, barky Pomeranian lap-dog. He also, in a manner, cohered with three hat-boxes, a portmanteau, and several dozen golf-clubs, which, by some act of wizardry, had been affixed to outstanding parts of the pocket motor-car.

I drew up beside the little car and smiled benignly at them. The scornful lady greeted me :

“Are you the man from the garage?” she demanded. “Why have you been so long? Have you brought a gaiter?”

“From the garage, madame,” I replied, touching my cap, “with seven gaiters.”

“Seven? I only ordered one.”

“We have seven sizes, madame,” I replied. “Your messenger was unable to tell us which size would be required.”

“Tibsey,” exclaimed the lady, brusquely, “why didn’t you tell the boy what size we wanted?”

Tibsey turned round. He was a human being, of the male gender, six feet two inches high, in brown boots, pressed trousers and perfectly fitting otherwisés. He wore a brown Tyrol hat, with a wing portion of partridge attached to its ribbon. He wore a fixed stare and a grave, aloof expression. He also wore the baby brother of a moustache: a terse little thing, strictly confined to the sub-nasal area of his upper lip.

Holding his head very high and his back very straight, Tibsey blinked at the impatient, scornful lady, who repeated her question :

“Why didn’t you tell the boy what size they were to bring?”

"I didn't know the size," said Tibsey.

"You don't know *anything*, Tibsey," said the scornful lady. Tibsey continued to blink, twitching his moustache a little as he did so.

"Now watch this man, Tibsey," continued his fair companion. "See how he puts on this gaiter and then, perhaps, you'll be able to be of some use, sometimes. Mind the dog." Tibsey, in the act of twitching his moustache at her, arrested that action and rapidly moved his feet about. The dog barked at his feet.

Of course, I had not arranged with Mr. Peak to put on any gaiters. I had merely contracted to deliver a gaiter. But Tibsey's nervous smile decided me to fit the gaiter.

I selected a gaiter of the proper size, and then I looked for the damaged tyre. I found it.

"Is it a big burst," asked the lady.

"Is which a big burst?" I rejoined.

"Is there more than one?"

"There are fifteen" I replied. "But which is the one you call IT? IT ought to have the gaiter."

"There was only one burst when we left Portsmouth," asserted the lady.

"Have you travelled from Portsmouth on this flat tyre?"

"Yes," said the lady. "Does it matter?"

I suggested that it mattered to the extent of about three guineas.

"But Tibsey said it wouldn't matter!" exclaimed the lady.

"Tibsey: why did you say it wouldn't matter?"

Tibsey twitched his moustache at us and blinked. He looked first to one side of his nose, then to the other. Then, blowing hard, he said :

“ I, ah, didn't think it *would* mattah ! ”

“ But *why* didn't you think it would matter ? What *right* had you to think such a thing ? ”

Tibsey blinked and twitched again. “ I thought it wouldn't mattah,” he said, at last, “ because I, ah, somehow didn't think it *would* mattah.” He then trod on the dog.

Having been well and truly bitten and thoroughly scolded, he was then ordered to stand by my side and watch me execute the feat of affixing one gaiter to fifteen bursts. He watched me as directed, blinking and twitching steadfastly.

“ Now,” said the lady, when I had finished, and was hastening to my car to get away before the tube blew through, “ Now Tibsey, you have seen all about this gaiter business. Do you think you can manage the next one yourself ? ”

“ Undoubtedlah ! ” said Tibsey.

“ Then pay the man,” rejoined the lady, seating herself at the driving wheel of the car. And give me the dog and start the engine and then jump in.”

Tibsey gave me a shilling for myself, for which I thanked him. He seemed surprised at the warmth of my thanks, not knowing that I had to thank him for rather more than a shilling. Then, coming close to me and blinking hurriedly and whispering, Tibsey begged a little favour :

“ Be a friend,” he said, “ be a friend, old lad, and wind that beastly winch for me.”

So I started up the engine for him. Then I jumped into my own car, and gave them a brilliant demonstration of the art of "getting away." But I did it only just in time. A second later there was a loud report. Tibsey was in trouble again.

In climbing into their car, the unfortunate gentleman must have brushed against the gaitered tyre.



## XXXVIII

### Granfer Haffenden's Sunday

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GRANFER HAFFENDEN is what they call a "help" at Hollow Place Farm, where they grow marsh marigolds and mosquitoes.

It is Granfer Haffenden's function to mind the cows and mend the gates and dam the marshes and keep the hedges and clean the ditches and thatch the ricks and cut the chaff and bank the roots and drive the plough and wield the scythe and clean the milk pails and churn the butter, and to take it into market and sell same and keep account of same, even unto the odd farthing, and it is likewise Mr. Haffenden's duty to hew wood and draw water for Mrs. Pink, his master's wife, and to escort that lady to and from Blowfield in the pony chaise, and to take care of her afflicted mother and her sister's baby while she and her sister walk up Blowfield High Street to look at lace curtains. It is a further obligation of the venerable Haffenden to act as veterinary and obstetric adviser to the entire animal population of Hollow Place Farm, and to attend

the Plough Inn at closing time on Saturdays in the ophthalmic interests of Mr. Pink, his master.

All these varied tasks are dutifully performed by Mr. Haffenden, who takes a pride and pleasure in his work, particularly in damming the marshes.

“ ’Taint s’if the pasture be bad in itself,” Mr. Haffenden explained to me one morning, in the dreadfully uncongenial month of March, when he had been damming the marshes with hand and tongue since daybreak. “ ’Taint s’if the pasture be bad in itself. That’s good pasture in itself; *so long as it be above water*. On’y that be such wonderful porous land. That let in the wet so, winter times. But that’s good pasture, whenever ’tis up above the water level. The cattle thrive on it wonderful, in August and September. You get the benefit of it then; partikerly in a dry season, same as we ’ad las’ year. Same time, I grant you, that be ’ard on the cattle times such as this, when they got to paddle in it, as you might say. ’Taint as if there was any nourishment in this a-here duckweed; not to say *nourishment*.”

I will say this for Granfer Haffenden, that he dams the marshes with all his heart and soul. I believe he loves the work. He certainly sticks to it. The only times when he leaves it alone are times when he is minding the cows or mending the gates or keeping the hedges or cleaning the ditches or thatching the ricks or cutting the chaff or banking the roots or driving the plough or wielding the scythe or cleaning the milk-pails or churning the butter or going to market or adding up farthings or

hewing wood or drawing water or driving his mistress to Blowfield or nursing his mistress's mother or practising the arts of bovine midwifery or leading his master home from the Plough.

Yes : Granfer Haffenden is certainly a help to the Pinks. I shouldn't be surprised if, supposing he ever should yield to some wild impulse and determine to leave the marshes, Farmer Pink gave him a satisfactory character. On the other hand, I wouldn't bet even on this event, for we live in a righteous age, and it is an undoubted fact that Granfer Haffenden does not attend either church or chapel. I know he doesn't, for I myself have vainly sought him in these places.

For a long time I wondered where Mr. Haffenden hid himself on Sundays. Being abandoned, he didn't go to any place of worship ; being a grandfather, he didn't frequent any known place of tryst, and, being an eccentric he didn't go to the Plough.

I could account for his Sunday mornings all right—the early mornings—for public sentiment indulges his known tastes to the extent of allowing cattle to be fed and cows to be milked and water to be drawn even on a Sunday, so long as these things are done before the hour appointed for public worship ; but Sabbath sentiment draws the line at mending gates, damming marshes, clipping hedges, cleaning ditches, thatching ricks, cutting chaff, banking roots, scouring pails, churning butter, marketing butter, adding up farthings, hewing wood, and leading your master home from the Plough.

It was from eleven o'clock onwards that Mr.

Haffenden's Sunday occupations became mysterious. What *can* a man be doing with his Sunday if he doesn't go to divine worship, or go courting, or get drunk?

Well, one day, which was the Lord's Day, I solved this mystery. I happened to be taken with the whim or fancy to go to the marshes, which I did, and there found Granfer Haffenden. He was leaning on a gate of his own mending, watching the cows of his own minding, calling to the calves of his own rearing and damming the dams of his own doing. I watched him acting thus from four o'clock until six o'clock, and he never moved, except to change elbows and spit.

On the following Sunday, I went again to the same place and again found Granfer Haffenden doing the same thing. I found him at three and left him at six, and during those three hours he did not move, except to change elbows and scratch the back of his ear.

On the third Sunday, I got to the place of Granfer Haffenden's devotions by two o'clock, and, having watched his silent musings for more than an hour, I ventured to discover myself and to enquire after his health. "How are you?" I said.

"We be pratty middlin', thank ye, sir," responded Granfer Haffenden. "That there oold mottled cow don't thrive no better nor what she ought to do, but the calf's grooun fine."

"Do you always spend your Sundays in this place, Mr. Haffenden?" I asked.

"Well, yes," assented Mr. Haffenden. "I gen'ly

comes around yere and 'aves a look at me week's work.

"They land drains," he continued, "they wants a bit o' watchin'. I'd bank up that cross-dick now, on'y there'd be such a lot to say about it. Folks has got to be so partickler about 'ow a man behave 'isself on a Sunday. There's a wonderful lot want doin' about the place, if on'y a man dare do it. I've milked and tended the cattle and I've drawn some water and cut some chaff. But there's this here dick want banking bad, it do, and there's gates want mendin' and wood want cuttin' and thizzle want clearin' and ricks want tidyin' and—all the rest of it."

I suggested to Mr. Haffenden that it was good for him to rest.

"Well, that's what I be doin', beant I?" he demanded, with some show of impatience. "I aren't moved away from this gate since dinner-time, nor I shan't move till tea-time. If that beant restin' what *be* restin'? After tea, I shall feed the beasts, and arter that I shall stand up agin the other gate there and rest till supper-time. That's a pratty calf, that little 'un—what?"

Mr. Haffenden changed elbows and yawned. "Bless ye," he remarked, "'tis slow work—restin'."



## XXXIX

### The Naval Wife

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THE characters which figure in the following narrative are :—

- (a) A vendor of literature (hereinafter called "The Author");
- (b) A married woman of complete respectability (hereinafter called "The Author's Wife");
- (c) A vulgar man in a green baize apron (hereinafter called "The Porter").

The incident took place in the early spring of the year 1916. Our Author had returned from France, where he had spent four months in the dual capacities (both entirely new to him) of Press Correspondent and Christian. He reached Waterloo Station at two o'clock of a March afternoon, and was received with demonstrations of affection by his strictly authentic wife. She had a taxi-cab in waiting for him, and a box of his favourite cigarettes, and they drove at once to a large hotel in the West End of London, which we will call the Hotel Talbot.

The Author was very glad to reach this place, for

he had had a very sick crossing, and was cold, tired, and dirty. His wife prepared a sumptuous bath for him, scented with a mysterious white powder, which looked like sherbet, fizzed like sherbet, smelt like sherbet, but was not sherbet. He put on clean linen and a new suit, and felt much better. He then descended, still accompanied by his faithful wife, into the lounge of the hotel, where he partook of tea.

This repast was rendered memorable by the unexpected intervention of a number of quite extraneous persons, dressed as Shepherdesses, and Pierrots, and Fauns, and Elves, with painted faces and bared shoulders, who bounded in among the tea tables and jiggled about, and upset a plate of hot muffins all over the Author's new suit.

The Author, having been absent from England for four months, was unfamiliar with its latest social customs. He wanted muffins, hot scones, tea, or, alternatively, a small whisky and soda, and the substitution of a small Russian Ballet, for these comestibles did not satisfy him. So he commanded the faithful wife to put on her hat, and they got a cab and drove to Fleet Street, where a plain tea *is* plain, even unto ugliness. Subsequently they dined in a severely English manner at a severely English eating-house, and then they visited a severely English theatre, returned to their hotel and went to bed. It had been a quiet evening. It would have been a gay one had not the hired Philomels and mercenary Chloes who broke out at tea-time arrested their taste for fashionable excitement.

The Author had traversed the English Channel by what is called the Long Passage, and he had been rocked and banged about for fourteen hours. So he did not have to court the Goddess of Slumber that night in the hotel. He was fast asleep within three minutes of reaching the bedroom, and he slept so soundly that he was even unconscious of the surprising intrusion which later took place. His attention was directed to this by the activities of his wife, who shook and pounded him into consciousness. He then sat up in bed and, blinking awkwardly, perceived that the bedroom was flooded with light, and that he and his wife were no longer alone.

A man was in the room—a gross man, with many chins, a full stomach, a bunch of keys, and a green baize apron. He gazed at the Author and his wife, lying side by side in their matrimonial bed, with an expression of grim disapproval. He held a pink envelope in his hand, and brought it solemnly to the bedside, with a heavy, flat-footed walk, and a brief: "For you, sir."

The Author, still blinking, took the envelope, wondering, in a confused kind of way, why the War Cabinet should wish to communicate with him at that hour in the morning. He knew that no private individual could have persuaded the Postmaster-General to deliver a telegram at 2 a.m. He blinked at the writing on the envelope and then saw it was addressed to Lieut. Jenkins, R.N., whereupon, with a sigh of relief, he returned the missive to the Porter, remarking that it was evidently not intended for him.

The Porter withdrew his hand from contact with

the flame-coloured packet. He pursed his lips in the determined, yet knowing, manner of a man who had been burnt or stung before. "That won't do," said the Porter, "that's too old a tale, sir. You open the tallergram, sir."

"But," protested the Author, "the telegram is addressed to somebody else. I've no right to open it."

The Porter drew back his upper lip and exhibited two teeth and a void, in the dry smile of incredulity. "What's the good of carryin' on with me, sir?" he remarked: "*I* never wrote the tallergram. You'd better open it."

Again the Author expostulated, but the Porter adhered firmly to the attitude which he had taken up of not caring to notice such expostulations. "You open the tallergram, sir," he kept on repeating, and, at last, in a state of confusion and despair, the Author *did* open the telegram.

It was a message signed by the Lords of the Admiralty, or by some person representing that august body. The Author cannot, at this distance of time, remember the exact wording, but it amounted to this: "You are to rejoin your ship at Tilbury without fail before 7 a.m."

"I told you this message was not for me," explained the Author in a faintly reproachful voice, as he showed the message to the Porter. That individual read it carefully two or three times, and then said:

"Well, sir: there it is. I think you'd better get up."

“Get up! Why?” demanded the Author.

The Porter did not exactly shrug his shoulders, but he made a noise like it. He then said: “Well, sir, you’ve got their Lordships’ orders plain enough.” His eye, moist with reproach, travelled from the Author to the Author’s companion.

The Porter’s eye settled down, so to speak, on this lady, who was attired in a little French cap of crêpe de chine and the least Nonconformist of night robes. Suddenly the Porter averted his head, with what may be described as a toss of the chins, and he said, with an air of giving utterance to a general reflection: “Seein’ life’s all very well, sir, but, dash it all, there *is* a War on!”

The Author agreed; but he pointed out that his name happened to be anything but Jenkins, and his habits anything but nautical.

“Oh, sir, what *is* the good?” replied the Porter. “You’d better get up. I’ve got my duties to attend to,” he added. A remark which, in the manner of its delivery, carried with it the threat of a dogged determination to neglect even duty rather than leave this matter unsettled.

The Author became indignant. He refused to get up, and ordered the Porter to get out. He recommended that gentleman to keep his arguments for the real Lieut. Jenkins, and to observe, in the meanwhile, that he, the Author, whose name was anything but Jenkins, had paid for the exclusive occupation of that bedroom, and wanted to go to sleep.

It was obvious that no language at the Author’s



command could convince the Porter that he had brought his telegram to the wrong room, or to the wrong man. But, by dint of persistence and an apt choice of adjectives, he was at last made to realise that the Author did not intend to get up, and was prepared to accept any consequences which might arise from his failure to do so. At last the Porter went unwillingly to the door, jingling his keys and shaking his chins.

At the threshold he turned, and again directed a severe and uncharitable glance at the Author's Wife. Then, with the air of a man who had tried to do his duty, and whose conscience was accordingly at ease, he lifted his bunch of keys above his head in a final gesture of reproof and excommunication, slapped to the door behind him and slapped off along the corridor.

The Author then looked at his wife, and tried to express the resentment which he felt at the insinuations conveyed by the Porter's look and manner. To the Author's surprise, however, the lady smiled, as she patted her little cap.

He indignantly turned out the light.

Then the Author went to sleep again and dreamed he was Lieut. Jenkins, R.N., and had arrived in London with Prize Money, and the wish to qualify for an Admiralty reprimand.

On the following day, the Author made it his particular pleasure and duty to circulate some enquiries about the Night Porter. He was informed that that individual could only be interviewed after 11 p.m. The Author therefore caused some news-

papers and drinks to be brought to him after dinner ; and, although he was feeling tired, as the result of not having enjoyed uninterrupted sleep during the preceding night, he sat in a corner of the lounge and waited and waited until the Night Porter could be interviewed.

But the interview was, in some respects, a failure

The Night Porter disarmed hostility at the outset of the conference by admitting that he had committed a technical *faux pas*. The little misunderstanding which had taken place he attributed to the carelessness of a reception clerk, who had omitted to amend the entries respecting Room 139 in the hotel register.

“ You see, sir,” explained the Porter, “ this here Lieut. Jenkins, he has left the hotel, and that’s why I couldn’t find him.” The Night Porter made a backward step, as if to intimate that the interview was at an end ; but, being seized with an after-thought, he then took a step forward, and added the following remarks :

“ Of course, sir, if I’d seen you standing *up*, as you are now, I should have known at once that you was not a naval gentleman. Even as you lay in bed I had my doubts. ‘ This is a funny looking matelot,’ I said to myself. But then, sir, I looked at the lady, and the lady deceived me. The lady, sir, looked *very* naval.”

## XL

# Just Ginger

—

THERE is just one soldier of the Royal Howevah Regiment, whom I should like to meet again in the romantic sphere of civil life. This is a cross-eyed Sergeant, named Ginger. I don't know the man's other name ; but he himself assured me that Ginger was enough.

" Just say Ginger sent you," he said. " That's all you got to say, Corporal : Just Ginger. *She'll* know."

So just Ginger let it be, hoping that this will meet the eye of that pie can. If it should do so, let Ginger be assured that this means *him*, and no other Ginger, and that from the day he takes his stripes off, the wind will blow East.

Let me suggest to Ginger some of the common incidents and possibilities of civil life. Among civilians, Ginger, it is customary to invalidate a man's beer. By means of quiet stratagem, you intercept that beverage during its journey from cask to consumer, and then you " doctor " it. The substances used for this purpose vary in kind (according to the imagination of the user) from ordinary blackbeetles to ordinary rat poison. Personally, I always add red ants. These combine extreme deadliness with the quality of briskness and, when absorbed into the human system, they

become exceedingly active, and claw the coatings of the stomach, and bite the vermiform appendix.

Ginger, after the incredulous habit of all Sergeants, may disbelieve this statement, but the time will come, if my wishes are fulfilled, when he will wonder that he ever doubted it. On that welcome occasion, he will be observed, with quiet amusement, to be running round and round Trafalgar Square with his large tongue hanging out, screaming for water.

Of course that disorderly state of existence which soldiers call "civil life" gives one opportunities of inconveniencing a man otherwise than by having his intestines gnawed. For example, there are nearly four hundred different ways by which an ex-sergeant can be hounded into bankruptcy, and more ways than that of getting him certified as a lunatic, and locked up for life in a padded room. I am not exactly threatening these things. I just throw out ideas, as it were. All I mean to suggest is that brute strength, three stripes, and lungs of brass, will be worth less to a man than an agile mind, once he is demobilized.

Ginger first rose into view, large and inevitable, at the Depot Gate. He looked like the red sun at the Gate of the Desert. I was just edging coyly in with an odd following of recruits when— But let me explain about myself first.

I was what is called a Conducting N.C.O. I don't know whether any reader who, like myself, is middle-aged and sedentary, and of a mild and melancholy temperament, has shared with me the experience of being suddenly and strangely transformed into a dapper N.C.O.—(hobnailed

boots, and a boy's size service jacket) ? If so, the reader will probably agree with me that it is a queer and surprising sensation, particularly when one is entrusted with the delicate task of taking recruits from place to place. Particularly, also, when the recruits have not yet learnt to follow, and some want to stay behind, and a few to go elsewhere, and others are not quite sober. Among the last named there is always an "old soldier," who is always surprised at your appearance and manner, but is particularly surprised by your stripe. "You a Corporal!" he says repeatedly. "*You!* Well I'll be soused!"

I had to shepherd my mixed and straggling flock across the streets of a big town, and then get them into a railway carriage, or carriages; count them at every stop in a journey which lasted over two hours, and then coax them along the High Street of a bold, cathedral city, and up a hill, some mile and a half in length or height, to the gate of the Depot. Here it was customary for us to halt, and assume some sort of military formation before shuffling shyly through the archway. And here, as I have said, we encountered Ginger.

I don't know where Ginger came from, or where he went to, or where he has gone to (not that that question interests me). I had never seen him before that one particular morning of the hottest day in July, and I have never seen him since. I suppose he was put at the Barrack Gate to do what he did to me, and, having done it, was given a month's leave on full pay and allowances, and then put at some other gate to do it to somebody else.



"All right," I answered: "Thirteen—of the worst."

"Put that down, Charlie!" exclaimed Ginger, shouting to somebody inside the Guard Room: "Thirteen of the bluggy worst."

"Righto, Sergeant!" an agreeable voice replied from the depths of that retreat. "Right ho! Thirteen 'I don't thinks' from Sub-Area J."

Ginger then drew closer, and addressed me in an undertone. "Are you the Jack I have heard about that has the taxi-cab?"

I confessed that I was that animal.

"All right!" said Ginger, "Then I'll 'phone for it."

I thanked him, sighing deeply. For it costs a lot of money when a Sergeant uses the telephone.

This taxi-cab has to be explained. It ate up about four days' pay, but it got you to the railway station in time to catch the 4.12, which enabled you to report at your Head-quarters at 6.20, and, all being well, to go off duty with a late pass at 6.30. But if you walked to the railway station, you missed the 4.12, and then there was nothing to do but walk about the least amusing cathedral city in the world, for four hours, and catch a train at 8.30, and reach your destination at half-past ten, when you were lucky if the Military Police did not insist on putting you up for the night.

When I had taken my *debutantes* to the Posting Room, and had duly obtained a receipt for them, there was nothing more to do but call at the office of the Area Head-quarters for letters or parcels, and then, as Lord Curzon would say, "hop it." On

this particular day I was particularly lucky in receiving nothing from Area Headquarters except a sack of briquettes (a patent carboniferous fuel) to take back to that place whence I came, for the use of the wife of Staff-Sergeant Bodie.

I stumbled across the Barrack Square—Phew! It was hot—holding the sack of briquettes at a convenient distance from the tailor-made slacks, which one wears for “conducting” purposes. When I reached the gate, the taxi-cab had arrived, and Ginger was close at hand. In point of fact, he was holding the door open. This is a statement which soldiers of an older generation will have difficulty in believing. I thanked Sergeant Ginger for his attention, and he then did that unto me of which I am now complaining, and in recognition of which I hope, as I have hinted, to live long enough to repay him.

Ginger began by making a mere comment. “A hot day, Corporal,” he remarked, taking the bag of briquettes from me, and carefully placing it on the seat of my conveyance. I did not dispute Ginger’s statement. “The sort of day,” he then continued, “when a soldier could be tempted to interfere with a pot of ale. I envy you, going down into the city.”

I pointed out to Ginger that the Liquor Control Board had got into touch with the cathedral city, and that nothing of that at all could feasibly be arranged there. Ginger pretended to be amused at what he called my innocence.

“Why, bless my soul, Corporal!” he exclaimed, “you don’t mean to tell me you’re new to the

Army? If you hadn't ha' opened yar mouth, I should ha' took you for a regular Sir Garnet man. Why, Corporal, if they've made a soldier of you, you *be* a soldier, and, if you want a drink, you *have* a drink."

I thanked Ginger for his encouraging advice, but ventured to wonder how I was going to practise it. I again called his attention to the existence of a Liquor Control Board.

"Corpora! Corporal!" said Ginger. "You make a soldier laugh. A man o' your rank ought to consider himself above Control Boards. Seeing as how you seem to need a hint, I'll give it you. You tell your driver to put you down at the 'Good Intent.' It's not above a hand's throw from the railway station."

"Does the driver know the 'Good Intent'?" I asked.

The man Ginger, who had evidently studied Scripture, answered with another question. "Does a kitten know its own milk queue?" he said. "You trust your driver," continued Ginger. "Tell him 'somewhere near the Railway Station.' That's all you got to tell him—'somewhere near the Railway Station.' He will know. You just nip out of the cab and pay him off, and take your parcel there into the 'Good Intent' and—good luck to you."

"Thanks," I said, as I climbed into the cab. Then a thought struck me, and I put my head out of the window, and asked the Sergeant a further question. "Is there any signal required by the way? Any ring to show, or sign to make, or pass-word to utter?"

“R!” replied the Sergeant. “There’ll be that of course. You just mention my name.”

“Oh, do you know?” I began politely; “I didn’t quite—that is, I mean to say, what *is* your—”

“Ginger!” said the Sergeant. “Just say Ginger. That’s all you got to say, Corporal. Just Ginger. *She’ll* know.”

“Who is she?” I enquired, as my vehicle moved off

Ginger jumped on to the footboard, and shouted through the window: “Mrs. Pugpitt. A *nice* lady. Just Ginger. *She’ll* know.”

Ginger’s face disappeared from the window, and his voice died away, and I thought he had stepped out of the picture. But presently, amid the noise connected with my driver’s cathedral city style of changing gear, another noise became audible, and the face of Ginger appeared at the other window.

“Hi!” he exclaimed, shouting very loudly to drown the gear-box, “You go right through the four-ale bar, and along a passage, and there is a pantry hatch in the wall, and you shove your head through that, and tell her ‘Ginger.’ *She’ll* know.”

Again Ginger removed his face from the window, and, so far as I know, he did not again replace it there.

When, with several hiccups and severe intestinal convulsions, the car at last pulled up, I did in fact find myself at the front door of a hostelry, which was in fact called the “Good Intent.” Paying off the cabman, as directed by Ginger, and taking my bag of coal-dust, but holding it at a convenient distance from my conducting slacks, I entered the—ah—hotel.

I went right through the four-ale bar as I was



directed to do, and as I should in any case have considered it hygienically wise to do. And I walked along a dark and narrow passage, at the end of which, as prophesied, I found a pantry hatch, through which I put my head. I saw a small, dark, damp room, containing beers in barrel, a corrupt smell, and Mrs. Pugpitt.

Mrs. Pugpitt, as Ginger truly said, was a nice lady. She was also a large lady—an exceptionally large lady—having three chins and a terraced abdomen. She greeted me civilly, but without an ostentatious display of cordiality, and asked what I required. My reply was to wink at Mrs. Pugpitt, and to gesticulate significantly with elbow and eyebrow, while I uttered the word “Ginger.” Mrs. Pugpitt looked surprised.

I made further gestures, and repeated the word. Mrs. Pugpitt, giving me what appeared to be a confidential look, put the question: “How much?” I said “About a quart.” Mrs. Pugpitt then nodded briskly, and, removing a large, cool mug from its shelf, disappeared into an inner room.

Very soon she returned, bringing with her the same mug, now beautified with a crown of white froth. “That,” she said, “will be 1/8.” I paid the money gladly.

On putting my lips to the mug, the thought which first struck me was that Mrs. Pugpitt did not know her own barrels. It then, however, occurred to me that perhaps she had misunderstood my signals. For the mug contained not beer, but some other liquid to which I hesitate to give a name. Certain



friends, to whom I have described it, say that it must have been ginger-beer. In any case, it was a composition which looked like somebody's bath water, and tasted unnatural.

I thought it inadvisable to perturb a woman of Mrs. Puggitt's figure by argument, and so I carried the peculiar beverage away from her pantry hatch. While I was spreading it thoughtfully about the floor of the passage, the sound of a distant railway whistle struck my ear, which reminded me that it was high time I looked at my watch. Three minutes past four! That would be the London Express rushing through. As the station was only a "hand's throw" from Mrs. Puggitt's hospitable house, I would have ample time to try the password again. I did so.

This time, I flattered myself, my gesticulations were very elaborate indeed, and I pronounced the word "Ginger" four times in a loud and distinct voice. My insistence was not lost upon Mrs. Puggitt, who smiled at me archly.

"How much?" she said.

"A quart," I replied.

Again Mrs. Puggitt disappeared with an empty mug, and again she reappeared with a full and foaming one. Again she asked for  $1/8$ , and again I gladly paid it. One look was enough.

"But I said 'Ginger'!" was my reproachful comment.

"Well, what of it?" responded Mrs. Puggitt. "You *said* Ginger, and you *got* Ginger."

"No, no," I protested: "Not *Ginger*—GINGER!"

"I don't follow you," said Mrs. Pugpitt, "with yar Ginger! Ginger! And I'm not the sort of lady to stand no impidence from soldiers."

It didn't seem worth while to argue the matter, It was all so complicated and abstract. Besides, I had a train to catch. So I wearily picked up my bag of coals, and dragged it after me into the blinding glare of the July sun, and the heartless High Street of the cathedral city. And I thought incredulously of those far-off and uneventful days when one sat about on chairs, writing short poems for the religious press, and being paid for doing so. Then I looked at my watch again. Eight minutes past four. Then I looked about me.

It at once became evident that Ginger was one of those irresponsible liars, the sort of man who lies by instinct, about everything.

The Railway Station was at least half a mile away, and I had missed my train.

So, regardless of my conducting slacks and of the curious glances of passing Prebendaries, I dumped my sack of soot on the cathedral city pavement, and sat on it. I sat there for about four hours, waiting for my next train, and thinking about Ginger. It took me a long time to think out the ant idea, but, when it at last presented itself, I knew that my afternoon had not been wasted.

Yes. Looking back on that afternoon, and recalling the evil face of Ginger, I feel that one can't go far wrong with ants. They claw the coatings of your stomach, and bite your vermiform appendix.

## XLI

# Houp La !

---

It began with my pretty cousin Gillian presenting me with a small gift.

This pretty cousin, whose plain husband is making a stay of indefinite length in the Rhine provinces of Germany, hurled herself at my door in a small two-seated motor car. The vehicle jazzed rather freely when her brakes were applied, and did not do a lot of good to the early spearheads of my early tulips ; but, in the pleasure and surprise of seeing my pretty cousin, I hardly so much as swore at her.

After mutual salutations had been exchanged, I was endowed with the present. This consisted of a minute silk cushion, smelling faintly of decayed lavender, and embroidered with coloured silk, with a representation of the German Imperial Ensign, and the inscription "Gott mit uns."

"This is a thing which is quite unsuitable for our bazaar," said my cousin, Gillian, "so I am giving it to you."

I might have pointed out that a perfume of such

palpably Prussian origin was equally unfitted to associate with my British-born handkerchiefs. But this cheap German smell-bag seemed to constitute an inadequate subject on which to wrangle with anyone so pretty as Gillian. I merely asked her where she found the thing.

"I can't imagine," said Gillian. "You see I am running a bran-tub at this bazaar, and people have been sending me things—stacks of things. Some of them are perfectly good, but, somehow, unsuitable. That scent-satchet for instance is a perfectly good German scent-satchet, but somehow—well, I thought I had better give it to you. And now, having given you something, of course I want something in return. I want you to arrange not to be busy on Thursday week, and to come with me to Pucklefield—to the Corn Exchange—and help with my bran-tub. I thought you could stand beside me and stir the bran about.

I intimated to my cousin Gillian that she was asking rather much.

"I know," said Gillian. "It's very hard on you Powerful Thinkers to have to mix with common curates, but they're perfectly good curates, and it's a perfectly good Corn Exchange, and, if it raises the £500 we *must* have, it will be a perfectly good bazaar. I shall call for you at nine a.m. on Thursday week."

As the object of the proposed bran-tub appeared to be a worthy one, I was unable to contradict her. She then tripped brightly to her little car, started the engine, jumped inside, and jazzed off. This

time she did not jazz into my tulips, but ploughed up my *Limnanthus Douglasii* instead.

I made a note of the appointment for Thursday week, and, on the morning indicated, I timed my arrangements so well that I was dressed and shaved and breakfasted by a quarter to nine. I was, therefore, quite ready for cousin Gillian when her car jazzed up to the door at twenty minutes to eleven.

"I expect I am rather late," said cousin Gillian, very briskly, "so you mustn't keep me waiting. Unfortunately the bran-tub burst. They always do, and I had to take it home again. Jump in now, and mind where you put your feet. There's bran and teddy bears everywhere."

We arrived at the Pucklefield Corn Exchange very quickly, and there the bazaar spirit at once manifested itself in the form of a brief dispute about money. Old Sir Bellamy Button, K.C.B., was standing at the door, and there he stopped us and demanded five shillings. Why? As my cousin said "*Why?*"

Sir Bellamy was very firm about it, and pointed to the bills and posters with which the façade of the hall was covered.

Gillian argued thus with the door-keeper. "Look here, Sir Bellamy, your reasoning's all wonky. It is one thing to expect *people* to pay for admission to the Corn Exchange, but it's quite another to expect the bazaar to pay. We *are* the bazaar."

"Of course, of course, dear lady." Sir Bellamy freely admitted the truth of the statement. "But, don't you see," he added, "there are about 300



other girls who *are* the bazaar. So we're chargin' 'em all for admission. Helps the fund, don't you see."

As there was no getting past the General without payment, we paid.

Our entrance into the Corn Exchange gave much relief to the principal organizer of the bazaar. This lady, Mrs. Loosestrife-Pimm, by name, a portly person encased in beadwork, had almost despaired of our arrival. "I have been distracted, my dear, *distracted!*" she exclaimed, with a tragic gesture. First your bran-tub *nevah* came, and then the fish-pond broke."

The principal organizer frowned deeply on my being presented to her, not, as I subsequently found out, because my appearance was so distasteful, but because it connoted a gastric problem.

"The question is, Mr. Smith ——"

"Not Mr. Smith," interposed my cousin Gillian.

"I *said* Mr. Smith," insisted the Principal Organizer. "The question is, Mr. Smith, when you are to get out to your lunch. I think one-thirty would be convenient. After Miss Brownlow, of Leeds, has spoken."

I bowed.

"Miss Brownlow, of Leeds," continued the Principal Organiser, addressing Gillian, "is going to give us a perfectly fascinating lecture on paper d'oyley making."

The Principal Organiser then resumed her frown on suddenly reflecting that Gillian also had her physiological needs. "Oh, but there's *your* lunch,"

she cried dramatically, pressing a hand to her forehead. "How about two o'clock for your lunch?"

On receiving Gillian's assurance that "any old time" would do, Mrs. Loosestrife-Pimm was restored to calm, and left us, exulting, to receive a new fish-pond which three strong young women were carrying in from the milliner's shop in the High Street.

I have to state, since truth is all important, even at the risk of appearing conceited, that our bran-tub was enormously successful. From the moment we got it going, it established itself as the most popular thing in the Corn Exchange. Not children only, but those of larger growth and girth, surrounded us continuously, clamouring for an opportunity to plunge their eager hands into the tub of miller's offal in search of reward for the rashly ventured sixpence. The prizes varied in kind, from articles of mere vanity to those, like wooden cooking spoons, of sheer necessity. I need hardly say that penwipers and pincushions predominated.

Not even the fascinating lecture on paper d'oyleys, delivered by Miss Brownlow, of Leeds, stayed the appetite for speculation, and Miss Brownlow's most exquisite designs were entirely disregarded by the throng of venturers around our stand.

It was nearly two o'clock before Miss Brownlow concluded her address, and still the investing public surged about us. Then Mrs. Loosestrife-Pimm reappeared and frowned at us. "Do you know, Mr. Smith," she said, "I have been thinking about your lunch, and I daresay you are getting hungry. Would

three o'clock be too late for you?" I assured the Principal Organiser that three o'clock was my favourite hour for lunching.

By a quarter past three, when Mrs. Loosetrife-Pimm reappeared, remarking that she had been wondering if I wasn't hungry, and asking whether four o'clock would suit me, the "prizes" in our tub were all exhausted, and we had no more to offer. There then arose the problem of "lucky numbers." These were held by lucky dipsters to the extent of nearly a hundred. The lucky holders presented themselves at half-past three, which was the hour appointed for the distribution of our "lucky" prizes. As not one single prize was then extant, we recommended the prize-winners to return at half-past four, and in the meantime to hasten to the end of the hall where the eloquent Miss Brownlow was again about to lecture, her subject this time being the home manufacture of cardboard hats.

Having by this means relieved the pressure surrounding our bran-tub, and having covered that receptacle, because bran is bran, and my cousin keeps a goat, we hurried off in search of the Principal Organiser, in order to discuss with that lady this perplexing matter of the prizes which did not exist. Mrs. Loosetrife-Pimm was glad to see us, because, as she explained with a frown, she had just been wondering whether we had had any lunch, and whether five o'clock would suit us. We replied that five o'clock would suit us admirably for the midday meal, but that, in the meantime, we were seeking one hundred small prizes for distribution to one hundred

earnest prize-winners. This matter, it appeared, was one outside the Principal Organiser's province, and she referred us to Miss Smee, the Assistant Organiser.

Miss Smee didn't happen to possess such a thing as one hundred prizes, nor had she seen any anywhere. She referred us to Sir Bellamy Button.

Sir Bellamy's solution of the problem was that we should offer the prizewinners a conjuring entertainment, in lieu of prizes. He himself, he said, could do a rather clever trick with an orange and a candle, and his son from Uppingham, he said, could do several others. The conjuring solution did not commend itself to us, but, in default of any other, we were tempted to accept it. Fortunately, however, before committing ourselves to this acceptance, we looked about us, and thus we were guided by a kindly Fate to the true solution of the problem.

It was a very simple solution: namely the Houp-la stall.

This was a perfectly good Houp-la stall, replete with pincushions of every kind. But nobody seemed to be using them or minding them.

To remove one hundred articles, comprising pincushions, candlesticks, scent-bottles, and boot-brushes, from the Houp-la stall and store to the bran-tub stand and store, was the work of two brisk minutes. We completed the work of transfer at half-past four exactly, and, by five o'clock, every lucky holder had been allotted an appropriate and useful prize.

At that moment the lady who was supposed to be

in charge of the Houp-la stall, but who had so patently neglected it, was seen to return from a prolonged attendance upon the eloquent and instructive Miss Brownlow, and to stare with astonished eyes at her empty stall. A small boy who had been at the bazaar since daybreak, and had dipped in our tub eight times but had failed to obtain one lucky number, and had accordingly become soured, was seen to address the neglectful guardian of the Houp-la stall. This lady was then seen to glance in our direction and to take a brisk step forward.

“What about lunch?” I said to cousin Gillian. “It’s five minutes to five.”

“We’ll go at once,” responded Gillian. “If we leave it any later the soup may be cold.”



## Mr. Rummery's Celebration

—

I WILL own that our village lost no time in putting out its Union Jacks: though most of them were hanging upside down. But, like every other village in the Kingdom, we have our *doctrinaires*, and these hung out arguments—and hung them upside down. The name of *our* abstractionist is Rummery.

“I hear they've declared Peace,” said old Mr. Rummery, wiping his swab-hook with a piece of red flannel which was a very obvious discard of old Mrs. Rummery's. Mr. Rummery stood in the ditch, averting his gaze from the tangled hedge which awaited his hook.

Mr. Rummery, who is a dessicated little man of spidery formation, was habited as usual in a black hat and a black suit, and in a starched collar which had achieved synthetically a hue in harmony with the rest of his apparel. These garments impart an air of monotony to Mr. Rummery's appearance, which is, however, to some extent, relieved by the iridescent sparkle of a minute globe like a very small

diamond which he always wears at the tip of his nose. Mr. Rummery was contemplating this jewel now with every appearance of satisfaction ; for it is Mr. Rummery's custom, when mentally exercised, to close his eyelids with a flickering movement and gaze entranced at the tip of his nose. This mesmeric action, which he executes with profound deliberation, is a certain indication of Mr. Rummery's intention to form and utter an idea, just as the gradual re-opening of his eyes presages action with the swab-hook.

" 'Tis a wonder to me," continued Mr. Rummery, gazing steadfastly down his nose with the eyelids flickering powerfully, "'tis a wonder to me that they should have *declared* peace. I can't see that at all. Stake my waistcoat if I can! And so I told her this afternoon, but she wouldn't agree to it. Stubborn as ever she be."

Mr. Rummery's "she" is a celebrated person ; though her fame is confined to this village and to the personal annals of Mr. Rummery. The Lady Elizabeth Pengelly—for it is thus that this great person is called by people other than Mr. Rummery—is an aged resident of the village who inhabits alternately a stucco mansion or a wicker bath-chair. Mr. Rummery has been pulling this bath-chair around the landscape (on fine afternoons) for fifteen years. As drawing a bath-chair is not an act which precludes Mr. Rummery from squinting steadfastly at the glittering pendant already described, he is able to talk as he goes. The subject of his talk and the nature of "her" replies are faithfully

recorded on subsequent occasions when he attends with his swab-hook upon those who still retain faith in his powers of husbandry.

"She says to me," pursued Mr. Rummery, "as she can't see no wrong in them declaring Peace. It's their place to declare Peace, she says.

"Now," continued Mr. Rummery, "I don't care the value of a turnip if 'tis their place or if 'tisn't; and so I told her. They harn't got no right to declare Peace at all, and that's flat. They ought to proclaim it. Declare War: proclaim Peace. That is the professed way of it according to all the regulations. But she, she won't have this at all. She says she never heard such ungovernable rubbish.

"'You stop your drivel, Rummery,' she says to me—what's that mean, sir, 'drivel'?"

"It's another word for argument," I replied.

Mr. Rummery nodded in acceptance of this definition. "'You stop your argument, Rummery,' she says to me, 'and pull me up the hill and stop at Mrs. Scrubsole's cottage.'"

"'Mrs. Scrubsole's?' I answered back. 'What you want with *her* then? You ain't never going to try and overcome a poor old widow like that with your "declarations"?' I know more about Mrs. Scrubsole than what you do,' I says, 'and if that ain't proclaimed the old lady won't have it.'

"'You shut up,' says Lady Elizabeth, 'and get me up the hill.'"

Mr. Rummery discontinued his narrative at this point in order to threaten the hedge with his swab-hook. He resisted this destructive impulse, however,

and went on with his memoirs instead—at eightpence an hour.

“ I hoisted her a few yards up,” he said, “ and then the fancy took me for to try her with another. “ ‘ If they don’t *proclaim* it, where’s the guarantee come in ? ’ I says.

“ ‘ I don’t foller you, Rummery,’ says she.

“ I puts it straight to her. ‘ Unless ’tis proclaimed, ’tisen lawful. Do you foller that ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Oh, pull the dam chair,’ says ’er ladyship, ‘ an then per’aps I *can* foller.’ ”

“ So I hoisted her up a few yards more,” continued Mr. Rummery ; “ but then a fresh idea come over me—to change the subject an’ give ’er one she *couldn’t* answer. ‘ How will you goo an ? ’ I says, ‘ the day you urges me up this hill a time too many, and I drops dead ? ’

“ ‘ Sit still and holler till somebody alive turns up,’ says Lady Elizabeth.

“ You see,” explained Mr. Rummery, looking very surprised, “ I reckoned that I had give her one that time as she *couldn’t* answer. But she could. A cantankerous old lady, that. She got a answer ready every time.”

“ ‘ Hollering,’ I says, ‘ won’t help you to pay for my funeral, nor yet the insurance. You will have to pay my burial expenses, and you will have to keep my wife. That is the law, that is : if anybody drops dead through pulling their heart out in anybody else’s service, then that person got to keep their wife. You remember that,’ I says ‘ for what I be telling you is *law*.’ ”

“ She couldn’t answer me that time because she darsen’t; for she come on coughing with the asthma, and I had to slug her in the back the same as usual.

“ She gives me credit for that, I’ll own. She always confesses as she harn’t never experienced neer a chairman to hit the cough out of her as quick as me. Then I had to go and fetch a drop of water for the old girl, for ’tis a pity to see her ladyship suffer, if she do bring it on herself with so much argument. And then I straightened up the cushions, and held the old girl’s head up till her breath come back. And, when her bellows was working again, she patted my hand for a signal, and I danced she up the hill.

“ Old Mrs. Scrubsole, she see us hotcherling up, and come to her gate : and Lady Elizabeth, she looks at me sideways, and then speaks to her.

“ ‘ Have you heard the news, Mrs. Scrubsole ? ’ says she : ‘ they talks about proclaiming Peace.’

“ So you see,” said Mr. Rummery, “ she give in to my argument after all.”



## XLIII

### The Psetonian

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PSETON is a school in Sussex. Of course, Pseton is not the real name of the school. Pseton is a word which I have myself composed, forming it from a combination of the word "Eton" and the prefix "Pseudo." Pseton is, in other words, a would-be public school, and as it typifies a whole class of schools which have recently sprung into existence in every part of England, I think it is worth a few minutes' consideration.

Pseton somehow reminds me of that American coffee substitute which was so much advertised a few years ago. Of "Kaffko," or whatever it was called, its proprietors very frankly said: "It looks like coffee, smells like coffee, tastes like coffee, but is not coffee." With equal justice it may be said of Pseton that it talks like Eton, thinks like Eton, acts like Eton, but is not Eton. Pseton is, in fact, an Eton substitute. While costing much less than the genuine article, it is claimed by those who ought to know to be virtually the same thing.

I do not know exactly how many Psetons there may be in England; but I do know that there are five or six of them in the county of Sussex alone,

and that other counties which I have visited seem to be equally well endowed. The Sussex Psetons each accommodate about three hundred boys. They have no particular traditions of their own, the oldest of them being about thirty years of age, but this does not mean that they have no traditions to offer. They claim to have selected and assimilated all the best traditions of all the older schools, and are able therefore to offer your son a very strong extract of tradition, and to do so on very favourable terms, their fees being considerably less than half those charged at any one old school for one old tradition. You can send your son to Pseton for £80 a year or even less, and for this ridiculous sum you can buy him not merely an Eton manner, but a Marlborough walk and a Winchester stutter as well. The combined prejudices of all three schools, and of all the others also, accompany these physical accessions.

The consequences of this favourable state of our educational affairs are many. We are producing a rapidly growing race of stiff Psetonians. We produce them in almost the same quantity, and quite with the same facility with which California produces plums. At the same time, however, our stock of what I may call humdrum workers seems to be diminishing.

There is hardly a farmer in Sussex who is not financially able to send his son to Pseton, and those who avail themselves of the educational opportunities thus offered are rewarded by being able to behold in their sons a gradual but complete improvement, or at any rate enlargement, of style and thought.

A Pseton mind is naturally elevated above manure and mangels. There is scarcely a bank clerk in the county who is not now able to secure for his son a mental outlook which is extremely antipathetic to the idea of commerce.

I do not say that this state of affairs is bad ; I merely state the undoubted fact of its existence. The small manager of a small bank in a small town who sends his son to Pseton to acquire the Pseton manner and the Pseton prejudices may be right in thinking that the boy has benefited by acquiring those commodities at the expense of his power to earn a plain living in a plain way. I must confess, too, that there is something irresistibly attractive about that *dégagé* Pseton manner, so reminiscent of the old-established manner from which it is copied.

It is only fair, however, to point out that there is a material difference in the respective bases of the Pseton manner and that adhering to Eton. If a young gentleman from Eton has a *dégagé* air, it is usually because it expresses a *dégagé* state of life. But a Pseton young gentleman on leaving Pseton College at the age of seventeen, and being paid a weekly wage by the directors of a commercial undertaking to write numerals in a ledger, can scarcely be said to be either spiritually or physically disengaged.

If it be found, as it usually is, that his Pseton training has rendered a youth unable to take his work of ledger-clerking at all seriously, then his directors have a reasonable right to dismiss him, which they usually do. But a farmer, having deliberately and of set purpose put his own son to

Pseton, has no right to complain, though he usually does so, if his son displays aloofness of interest when confronted with a pig pound and a pitchfork.

I have myself had recent experience of the results of a Pseton College training. A neighbour of mine, the widow of an engineer, holds frequent consultation with me about the disappointing experiences of her only son, who is a typical Pseton product.

By dint of much self-sacrifice she kept this boy at Pseton until he was seventeen years of age. He achieved considerable eminence at that school, being a member of the First Eleven and a Prefect, with the captaincy of his house in prospect. He left Pseton with few doubts about himself or his future, and entered the employment of an uncle who manufactured cardboard. The uncle paid him 35s. a week—a “hopeless screw” as the young gentleman himself confessed—and in return for this wage he was expected to keep an account of the costs pertaining to the gum department.

My young friend explained to me that keeping the accounts presented no difficulty to him, as he had always been “good at maths,” but that he did find it difficult to keep company with his uncle’s other employees. “They were cads,” he said, “and I told them they were cads.” His uncle dismissed him after some six or eight weeks, and he came home to his widowed mother full of amused contempt for all the arts of manufacture.

After a period of prolonged hesitation in his mother’s cottage, where his Pseton manner was much admired by the visitors, he adopted a means of

livelihood which seems to be taken up by many Psetonians—that of going back to school again. Packing up his presentation cricket bat and several pairs of white trousers, together with two volumes of letterpress, entitled respectively "The Last Days of Pompeii" and "The Student's Guide to English Literature," he went mysteriously away to be something called an "English Master" in a small school in an obscure place. About a month later he returned, saying shortly that the proprietor of this small school was a fool and no Sahib, and that he expected much too much of Pseton cricket.

There then took place this war they talk about. My young friend was for a short while very happy, holding an officer's commission in a Kitchener regiment, and wearing a well-fitting uniform, riding a motor-bicycle, with side-car, and eventually getting, like everybody else, engaged to be married. He described her to me as the best-looking girl in Broadstairs. I cannot confirm this statement, as I never saw the lady and never shall, the engagement having lapsed when my young friend retired from the Army. He did this in about a year's time, as a result of wounds and gas honourably received in action. His commanding officer stated in writing that he was a brave and efficient soldier, and a credit to his old school, though to what extent Pseton College is entitled to claim special credit for the natural bravery of an Englishman it is not for me to judge.

On leaving the Army, with the usual gratuity and a small pension, my young friend went to Florida for the dual purpose of growing fruit and



forgetting Broadstairs. He has just returned to England destitute of money. He says that Florida was all right, but that the people were "impossible," and he is now advertising for lucrative employment suitable to the requirements of "Discharged Officer, Public School Man."

I have been asked to assist in this matter, but am at a loss to know how to do so. I could think of lots of jobs which I think would be suited to the natural abilities of my young friend, but none of them would conform with his Pseton opinions—those artificial prejudices and unnatural disabilities which his poor little mother sacrificed so much to secure for him.

The final feeling which I have about the whole matter is this: So long as the public schools were inaccessible to the children of ordinary people they formed a subject which ordinary people might be pardoned for neglecting. But, now that, with the advent of Pseton College, the sort of nonsense for which it stands is placed within monetary reach of half the dotting parents in the land, it is time that somebody got up and protested. I hereby do so.

## XLIV

# The Degenerate

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YOUNG MR. COBBY, carrying carelessly a hundred-weight or so of matter in two dusty bags, drew up at my door and asked for water. On being offered beer he signified his readiness to accept that substitute, and drank two glasses of it very quickly. He then sat down on the larger and dustier of his two bags and entered into talk.

He told me that his bags contained respectively, lime and sand, that he had carried them from the builder's shop, a mile distant by field-path, and that he was taking them home (another mile) for the purpose of making some cement with which to repair a "pig-pound," his old woman being of the opinion that the old lady (*Anglice*, sow) did not lie dry enough in winter time. Mr. Cobby added that that day was his birthday, and that he was eighty-seven years of age.

"We don't seem to be gettin' on none too fast with this here war," said Mr. Cobby.

I submitted that we were getting on at least as fast as anybody else.

"Mebbe we are," assented young Mr. Cobby. "I wont say naarthun about that. But that don't say as we couldn't get on faster."

Being an optimist by instinct and a debater by calling, I disagreed with young Mr. Cobby. I wanted to argue with Mr. Cobby, or, rather I wanted Mr. Cobby to argue with me. I therefore challenged Mr. Cobby to state by what, if any, means the process of securing victory could be expedited.

“Call in some more blacks,” said Mr. Cobby.

This answer surprised me. It was not the answer which I had expected to receive. Most people who are in a hurry for victory want to coerce other people, or to tax or shoot or hang them. Young Mr. Cobby wanted merely to “call in” more blacks.

“Why blacks?” I asked.

“Men—good men,” answered Mr. Cobby.

Now, we all know that our black brother is none the less a man for all that, and . . . all that. And we know that by the term “black men,” Mr. Cobby referred to certain military representatives of ancient peoples who are not black, and do not like to be called black. But we waived these and other considerations which rapidly suggested themselves to us, and we said:

“But if whites are handier, why call in blacks?”

“Because they blacks be sich oncommon fellars,” answered Mr. Cobby. “They bean’t deggeneratted.”

“And is anybody else deg-gen-e-ratted?” I asked, adopting, out of courtesy, Mr. Cobby’s own pronunciation of that word.

“Well, I don’t know naarthun about nobody else,” answered Mr. Cobby, “but I knows as us English be deggeneratted.”

“ How do you know that ? ”

“ I reads it in moi noospaper,” replied Mr. Cobby.

“ What do you read in your newspaper ? ”

“ I reads what the Germans says. They says our day have passed. They say 'tis only the black men, the Belgese, the French, and so forth, have kept old England out of trouble all the time. They say there areun't no good nor courage left in England. They say we be deggeneratted. They say the men are lorst their strength an' power an' decency. They say we got no pluck, no will, no dogged left in us. And I believe it, too.”

“ Why do you believe it ? ”

“ Because I see it in the papers.”

“ But what you see in the papers is only what the Germans say. You don't believe everything that the Germans say, do you ? ”

“ Yus, I do,” answered young Mr. Cobby. “ Yus I do, when they says it big in those black squares what they put up top o' the tales in the papers. And when you reads the tales, 'tis all the same. They says the same. The English writers, they tal you the same as what the German writers do: ' We be fair rotten. We be wore out with laziness and luxury and oidleness and games and football. We don't think naarthun about nobody no more: on'y gooun' to the Pictures, and so forth.' ”

“ What paper says that ? ”

Young Mr. Cobby mentioned the name of the paper which had said that.

“ And do you believe it, Mr. Cobby ? ”

Certainly Mr. Cobby believed it. He had seen it in the paper.

"But are you worn out with idleness and games, Mr. Cobby?"

"Well," said Mr. Cobby, slowly, with a blush, "I doos ushershally go see the Junior Cup Final at Haywards Heath."

"But are you degenerate, slothful, luxurious, soft—even at your age, even at eighty-seven?"

"I dunno," said Mr. Cobby. "They says so in the papers. They say as these black men are got a better nerve."

"But if a German came to your cottage and frightened your old woman, what would you do?"

"I'd break the bagger's neck," said Mr. Cobby.

"And if he took your pig?"

"Be Christ, I'd shoot him," said Mr. Cobby.

"Oold as Oi be, sir," said Mr. Cobby, "if any fellar, German or otherwise, was to come to moi place and stairrt to interfere with moi oold sow, be Christ, sir, Oi would shove a charge o' lead into him, and moi oold missus, she would shove another. Moi oold missus, she be a gentle woman and she'll put up wi' pratty noigh anythink; but woe betide the fellar, German or otherwise, as come ankin' about wi' our oold sow!"

"But how about the black men?"

"Black men?" echoed Mr. Cobby. "Whoi, from what I onnerstand about it, sir, the black men, they be *for* us: not agin us. But I'll bet money as moi oold woman 'd lay out any black man as come messin' round our sow. She's Sussex born, is moi oold woman."

"Then what's the matter with Sussex-born to fight the Germans?" I demanded.



“ Well, sir,” answered Mr. Cobby, “ accordin’ to moi paper they aren’t got no stamina. They aren’t got no will, no power. They be deggeneratted. And now I got to leave. I got to carry these here fixin’s home. And then I got to walk to Burgess Hill.”

“ That’s a long walk—for eighty-seven,” I suggested. “ Burgess Hill must be at least four miles from where you live.”

“ I often walks there,” answered The Degenerate. . . . “ I got moi poor oold mother livin’ there.”













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