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WORKS BY ALFRED E. CAREY.

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SIR WATERLOO

Fragments of the Autobiography
of a Sussex Lad

EDITED BY
ALFRED E. CAREY

LONDON:
SELWYN & BLOUNT
21, YORK BUILDINGS, ADELPHI, W.C.2
1920

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TO
EDWARD V. LUCAS

Fire shall absolve thee. Thy immense delays,
Thy silent, bleak, unmemorable days,
All thy waste words, thy passions come to naught,
The pauses and limitations of thy thought,
Shall in one blast of windy rapture, glow
Such a flame, as only those altars know
Which the very god's secret, still, silent breath
Touches and the dark ashes leap from death.
So thy feet faltering, and thy hands which long
Have vainly sought and thy heart athirst for song,
Shall meet at last in some sequestered place
Thy dream, thy dream living and face to face !
Yea, and beside thy dream no memory
Nor mark of all thy life left upon thee,
Nor proof that thou hast been save sprung from this
Dream, a new song wherein thy whole soul is ;
Wherefrom, re-born, thou shalt again arise
Swift on the track of finer ecstasies
These are thy deaths and births—this is thy life ;
All else to thee is little more than strife
Of winds, or phantoms urging their dim flight
Through the forlorn, lost solitudes of night.

LADY MARGARET SACKVILLE.

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SIR WATERLOO

CHAPTER I

I WAS the Waterloo baby. My eldest brother was Trafalgar, the brother that came "betwixt and between," as our father used to say, was Rodney and our sister, younger than all of us, was Victory Joyce. Clements, our old nurse, had one evergreen joke on the occasion of our several advents. "What I say is, mum, it's Joyce and again I say, Rejoice." We were all born in the village of Meeching, where the River Ouse glides noiselessly into the sea. The modern folk are fond of calling the place Newhaven because the river, instead of winding as of old under the low hills about the Bishopstone marshes and wandering in a vagrant fashion out to sea at Seaford, has been straitwaistcoated, so that henceforth it flows alongside Sleeper's Hole and thence under the base of the east end of the spur of the Downs into the Channel. We have a quaint old drawbridge in the heart of the village. Our world carries bravely, like a cockade in the bonnet, the flavour of forgotten days. To us, basking in the sun, the tide pulses through the veins and arteries that intersect the valley for miles northward to Lewes and beyond, eastward to Seaford.

Although they have been quoted a hundred times, I cannot forbear repeating the Pelham lines once more. Someone who reads this record may thus hap upon them for the first time, and I shall at least win a meed of thanks from him, for they are such jolly verses, so racy of the soil. They come suddenly upon one's fancy as does the tang of the taste of a foreign cigarette to the lips. Could the traveller in some sunburnt *trattoria* of the Apennines but wreathe about his *fiasco* of Chianti as he sips it the

incense of an Horatian ode, even in some such fashion rises the dim picture of the gallant feat of arms enshrined in the hero's epitaph.

“ His valours prooffe his manly vertues prayse
 Cannot be marshall'd in this narrow roome ;
 His brave exploit in great King Henry's dayes,
 Among the worthy hath a worthier Tombe.
 What time the French sought to have sack't SEA-FOORDE,
 This Pelham did RE-*pel 'em* back aboorde.”

Our father was lieutenant in His Majesty's Navy. My earliest recollection is of him seated upright as a ramrod with a churchwarden clay pipe in his hand and a glass of grog at his elbow, discoursing—whether 'twere in the golden afternoons of summer or the brief twilights of winter—of a never-failing panorama of sea vista, to the cronies who gathered about him. Rodney was his text, which never staled or paled like the inconstant moon. For “ the space of about four hundred years,” says the chronicler of that hero's family, “ they stood like *Mare Mortuum* and neither ebb'd nor flow'd in their fortunes.” Surely that sentence might be writ as the history of our village.

Many a time and oft we children listened, all eye and ear, to a thrilling story of sea power told in the nervous, quarter-deck style our father had acquired from his master in the craft. All the world knows the outline of that glorious canvas. Wrongheaded folly had led to the severance of the tie betwixt the American colonies and the Motherland. If I were a prophet I should predict that that act will yet be redeemed and reversed by the united suffrage of free peoples. The sovereignty of all that was left of the New World was being wrestled for 'twixt England and France. A vast French reinforcement had started under sail to the relief of their West Indian ports. The French Admiral Guichen was caught napping to leeward of his convoy by Kempenfelt, cruising at the mouth of the Channel. Kempenfelt forthwith swooped like a kite on a covey of partridges. Fifteen of the transports of relief were captured by him, the rest scattered as sheep on the mountains. Thus he returned flushed with triumph, shepherding a herd of captured craft laden with men and stores. Guichen drew off to Brest, whence

he threw up his command in despair. Then the English Admiralty, rising as is its wont fitfully to sound resolutions, called on Rodney to muster such fighting craft as could be assembled, to set sail to the succour of our hard-bested forces in American waters. Rodney was sixty-four years old, a martyr so racked by gout that he could not sign his name ; it was the dead of a deadly winter ; yet he fought his way by sheer ding-dong pluck out of home waters and in February of 1782 lay off Barbados.

Our father was that midgy aboard the *Formidable* the record of whose act has come down to history. The French Admiral Grasse was a master tactician. Hood was opposed to him with an inferior force. Rodney's contingent brought the mettle of the two fleets nearer equality. The manœuvres of the leaders resembled a game of hoodman blind. The game was played out on both sides to a finish in the true sporting spirit. The arena was the open water between Dominica and Guadeloupe. In this bullring of sea fighting, seamanship is the master test, for the mountains of Dominica break the force of the North-East Trades, causing patches of doldrum calm, and also channels here and there where the " true breeze " makes troubled water and strong rips. Grasse was encumbered with a convoy of trade consorts. A see-saw pageant fight followed on the shifts and tactics of the contending leaders.

The Frenchman, early in the struggle, lost his one supreme chance of dealing us a deadly blow. Our father, using an inkstand to represent the island of Dominica, anything he could lay his hand on to indicate Guadeloupe and the other islands, and bits of paper or dominoes to show the movements of the ships on both sides, waxed eloquent in his sailor fashion over the master duel. We boys followed the story breathlessly intent. Check and countercheck, the shifting of the wind, the manœuvres of each admiral to get the wind of his opponent, the patches of bad seamanship of French commanders, which brought about collision and thus confusion, the hue and cry beating through the heart of events like tempestuous music, filled the nascent imagination of us boys with turbulent delight. I was little more than a baby when I caught the savour of it. We would ply our father with entreaties to go over the ground again and yet again,

and he, nothing loath, with kindling eye would refight his battle of long ago.

In this fashion would he sing the sea saga, until the moment when Sir Charles Douglas burst into the Admiral's cabin with the words, "Sir, God hath given you our enemy on the lee bow." Then the legend grew into a veritable epic. There before us was the English squadron five miles from van to rear, sailing in line ahead, on the starboard tack, a cable's length asunder. The two fleets filed slowly and abreast, each pouring shot and shell in succession into the enemy ships. The English gunners raked their foe with deadly precision.

In the very midst of this torrent and tempest of passion occurred that little domestic incident which we boys loved to hear recounted. The Admiral called to our father to fetch him a drink of lemonade. This our father did, stirring the mixture with his middy's dirk. "Child, child," cried out Rodney, "that may do for the midshipmen's mess. Drink that lemonade yourself and send my steward here."

Rodney fought a leeward fight as was his wont. The ships were hustled each so close to its rival that a biscuit could be chucked from our decks to the Frenchman's. Now when the death-dealing procession had slowly tracked its course fore and aft, our rifles and broadsides left the Frenchman with cargoes of corpses, to scramble for which the sharks gathered in hideous expectation. Rodney, seated in the waist of the *Formidable*, watched the issue of the strife like a divinity. Captain Savage of the *Hercules* saluted the foe mockingly as his ship passed down the line. Surely 'twas a moving spectacle. Englishmen were worthily upholding the traditions of an imperial race.

Thereafter occurred that phase of the fight which has made History. A slant of wind from the south-east spun the bows of the Frenchmen round so that a gap showed in the French line astern of their flagship, the *Glorieux*. Sir Charles Douglas begged Rodney to set his course through that gap. It was a manœuvre foreign to Rodney's practice and, being sprung upon him in the heart of a fight which might alter the destiny of the world and shift the centre of gravity of nations, what wonder that he hesitated? Something like an unseemly altercation took place. In the end, as our father always said to Rodney's

eternal credit, he allowed the order to be given. The English fleet raced across the French line, throwing it into dire confusion. The fight was won, for the backbone of the enemy fleet was broken into three vertebræ, each of which we fiercely assailed.

A horrible sight followed. As the Frenchmen burnt or blew up, clouds of sharks wheeled around in attendance to gorge upon the dead and dying of a foe who had fought a sporting fight.

"That," said our father, "was a spectacle to make every English heart sick and sad, even although we knew now for sure that we were masters of the world."

Then in triumph he would pick up the bits of paper or the dominoes that had played the part of the French ships and tick them off. They had grand rolling names, which our father reeled off with gusto. This one was burnt, that hauled down her colour, the next ran away to fight another day. He said his great commander had been "rated by a crowd of old applewomen, who had never seen any floating craft bigger than a brood of ducks or maybe a Thames wherry," because he had not given instant chase "to the lees of the rum cask, the flappers that managed to scuttle out of the battue. We were hampered with our own lame ducks," he added, "and had our prizes to guard. The Admiral knew his business best."

The scale that had hung balanced so long now dipped in favour of the English. The world was saved from tyranny and anarchy, though the fight had to go on for many a weary year yet.

"'Twasn't over till our nipper here," quoth our father, clapping me on the shoulder, "showed his mettle. At Waterloo, my boys, our stern chase ended. Then the enemy spiked his guns for good and all." Who can describe the glee with which our father chuckled over the dilemmas of "the foolscap dunces in the Chattering House," as he dubbed His Majesty's ministers? The story has been laughed over a hundred times. 'Twas a bit of farce which English folk do well not to forget.

"The Whigs had captured the Treasury bench," said our father. "Hardly had the ships of Rodney's squadron sunk below the horizon before these gentry worked themselves into as big a panic as the rumpus of a gaggle of geese on a green and sent a man they called Admiral—

a chap about fit to run a Thames regatta—in pursuit. He was to order Rodney, if you please, to haul down his flag, to hand over command to himself, the landlubber. This star and garter gentleman was in his turn hardly out of sight of land before the news of our rousing victory was brought home. The Ministers sent the fleetest ship in the Service to stop the new man, so as to put the sponge over their own folly, but 'twas too late. They had to bear as best they might being rattled for a parcel of Charleys." Rodney in his turn reached England and his triumph was complete.

But the memory of my father and his yarns to us boys has caused my Pegasus to take the bit in his jaws and bolt. What is the first actual film of being I can recall? *Ego*, it is the word we all unconsciously start with. We English have coined a tiny bantam phrase—I—in its place. Does not that single letter crow defiance *contra mundum*? It unfolds a creed. 'Tis the abstract and brief chronicle of times in hope.

Once upon a time then I wore a frock with metal buttons, on every button coined the image of its special wild beast. Thus I learnt what a lion and an elephant looked like. Those buttons were the joy of my life. I have one or two of them still. Of that same period, before I grew to despise the frippery of skirts, come animals in nightly procession. Mayhap old Noah and his floating menagerie helped to furnish the key unlocking my Arabian Night palace. Silently, two by two, like a girls' school, the raree show marched through our front door, up the staircase, in at my open bedroom, then solemnly round the room and back the way it came. In response to its advent, my pulses were wont to beat faster. The first time or two it visited me, I was just a wee bit afraid. Then the supers and I grew to be old friends. I hailed the coming of their wooden impassiveness. How long these stage perambulations of my baby mind lasted each night I could never guess. The circus promenade looked neither to the right hand nor the left. It did not hurry, it did not haste. The pantomime grew a regular incident. "Here they come," I said to myself, and watched them with the bated breath of wonder. Still harping on the ways of wild beasts, of this same era was the creeping in of elder brothers on all fours in the dead of night, to the accom-

paniment of ferocious growls. Next morning no persuasion would convince me that I had not escaped by the merest shave from being gobbled up by a lion or a bear. Such fate did not seem to me very dreadful. It was all part of the game of life. If a wild beast snapped me up at a mouthful, what then? He was made that way. That was what he was for. To grumble because I happened to be the one snapped up, was merely silly.

The authority of our old Nurse Clements soon petered out. She tried soft sawder instead of vigorous measures, and we were not long in despising her accordingly. Long before I learnt to read, while the letters of the alphabet were mere ninepins to make cockshies at, I knew reams of stuff by heart. The little actor loved the incense of applause. There was Southey's "Gelert," for instance. That was one of my stock pieces. I strutted in the lime-light on the slightest provocation.

" " Hell-hound, by thee my child's devoured,
The frantic father cried,"

I screamed in tones of veritable tragedy. Clements and the washerwoman were my audience. "Lor, 'ow beautiful 'e do say the words," quoth the washerwoman, and I fully agreed with her dictum.

A faint palimpsest of death is of those callow days. An uncle came to us to die of consumption. He was a fading remembrance, paling like a star at sunrise. Our main concern was that noisy play was taboo. I was forbid to blow martial blasts on a tin trumpet or pay out a chanty at the top of my register, by injunctions as to "not disturbing poor uncle." Then when the end came, there was an unaccustomed hush in the house, and a lady visitor, whom we boys all recognized as a silly old goose, said, "I wonder whether he has gone to Heaven or Hell." Revolt against such a random creed was strong within my babyish breast. The poor man who had shaken off his mortal coil had always been the kindest soul alive to me. This labelling of his ghost struck my budding imagination as lacking in every trace of charity. The world went on, the sun rose and set as of yore. Shades of the prison house began to close in upon me, a companion had faded to nothingness. Somehow the bursting of the foliage of

Spring seemed linked with the sense of perennial life beyond the pageantry of day to day, yet was the first fine careless rapture of the metal buttons hard to recapture.

At that same period are my first voyage, my first sojourn by a "foreign" sea. The driver of the coach that carried us all to Southampton wore his half-score of capes, although 'twas summer-time. The faded scarlet jacket of the guard, his horn that roused the echoes whenever a village hove in sight, float again to my remembrance as I wake early and think of the old days that never, never come back to us. Who knows? Perhaps they will some day. Then may we see life whole, not in little bits. The delight of the child, the glow of the boy, the ardour of new worlds to conquer, that heritage of careless youth, the regrets and hopes of age, all these notes of being may be blended in one harmony in some life we can as yet but dream dreams of.

Our drive to Southampton has blent now into the mirage of the past. First we climbed over the billows of Downs until we reached the village of Brightelmstone. 'Tis amazing how the royal fiat has transformed that petty village into a maze of drives by the sea. There, close to the shore, stands the King's queer Eastern divan. Someone has said it looks as if the dome of St. Paul's had pupped. When we passed along the strand, navigators were hewing out the chalk hillside for the building of that vast pier which was planned to be carried on chains out into the sea. From this same pier, hoys afterwards started for the French coast. The next thing I recall was that we skirted a river and flat lands with hills "on the starboard hand," until we passed through Steyning, a sleepy night-mare village. The next town we came to held a sight novel to us all. 'Twas a huge castle set on a hill. Here the coach was hauled across a swift river in a punt. After that I remember we clattered through an old town with a market cross and a grand old church—Chichester cathedral, they called it. Then follows a gap, for I cannot recollect much except the excitement of our father as he caught a glimpse of Portsmouth from the top of the coach. So we stood up and, hanging tight to the rail, cheered ourselves hoarse, for Nelson's *Victory* and the cluster of warships that lay in the roadstead at anchor. Then on and on with fresh wonder till at the end of eight hours,

that seemed like eighty, we reached Southampton and so aboard our packet lying alongside a wharf.

We set forth in a rusty old packet called the *Atalanta*. Our father and the skipper had been chums at sea. We dodged out of the Solent after beating across and across a hundred times. Our clumsy old hoy was a poor sailer and the wind was "west with a dash of north in it," as our father said. Next morning we turned out at daybreak to see that amazing bit of sandwiched sand in Alum Bay, and in the afternoon of the following day dropped anchor in the roads of St. Helier. We had set forth like the Pilgrim Fathers. That we happened to land in Jersey was accidental. Our descent might have been on India's coral strand or Greenland's icy mountains, so far as I was concerned. The wonder and the dream of it all were beyond telling.

The passage made both our mother and old Clements woefully seasick, but we children were merry as crickets, and swarmed over the ship, chattering with the sailors and diving into every corner and cranny. The *Atalanta* carried tubs of sugar and bales of cotton stuff and cloth.

We spent the sunny days of Summer in an old manor house, with a long avenue of forest trees leading up to it. In one of those same trees was a crow's nest seat, whither it was a fearful joy to climb. We soon learnt the short cuts across meadows to the sea. "The Sea! the Sea!" sure it is the bourne of every English boy, whether he be born inlander or to the manner nurtured. Shakespeare was an inlander to the marrow of his bones. Turn up his references to the sea. The message the sea bears to him is as a lodestone to his genius. 'Tis challenge and glamour, an inspiration and a dream. There was a valley hard by, which we boys used to haunt, for in it at nightfall, thousands of glow-worms lighted their lamps, a perpetual pageant, a mystery that never staled. The fish wonders of the rambling old market-place, the daydream of the fishermen's boats shuttling in and out of harbour, the astounding fact that there were people on the earth who did not speak English, who shall unravel the marvels of these things, plucking out the heart of their genesis?

Our father called the Jersey folk "mossoos," and treated them with a sort of easy tolerance. You see, on a clear day the French coast was in sight. On the island lived

many soldier and sailor officers retired the Services, for Jersey was the cheapest place under the English flag at that time of day. The islanders paid no rates nor taxes. The island people held to the motto of "all work and no play." They worked from dawn to sunset and again on into the night. One of our father's Navy cronies, of whom we saw a lot, put down the stunted growth of both men and women to their lack of sleep. There are none very rich and no paupers among the island folk, yet are they about as exclusive as the Israelites of old.

Two parties are there, called respectively "Laurel" and "Rose." No Rose lady would dare to put a sprig of laurel in her hair, no Laurel man sport a rose in his buttonhole. The painting of the harbour buoy or the naming of a new street are of deeper interest both to Rose and Laurel men than any Franchise Bill or overseas conquest by England, for these discussions afford an arena for endless alarums and excursions, debates and wordy duels.

There was an old cowherd at the Manor House where we lived—Jean by name—whose life we boys made a burden to him. The cows are tethered in that land of milk and plenty, and willy-nilly Trafalgar would stick "the little 'un" on the back of one of these same kine—or "saddle the ass," as he put it—with the result that, unaccustomed to our horseplay, she would spin round and round like a cockchafer on a pin. Jean would rush out in time to see me pitched off her back. Then would he let off much firework Jersey French and tardily return with a whip and many threats of using it.

We hermits from overseas lived on the fat of the land. A market in which a big goose fetched half-a-crown, a brace of ducks a shilling and all other eatables proportionate prices, furnished forth a well-stocked larder that fitted our slender purse. 'Twas a land of sunshine, at first to us all a land of long unclouded days.

We boys one day watched wondering a quaint festival which surely has a pagan origin. 'Tis called *faire braire les poëles*. A brass pot is set in the midst, partly filled with water and shrouded in rushes, strings of rushes being slung about it. The country swains assemble with cowhorns, and, some blowing these horns, some drawing the reeds through their fingers to produce a whistling note, they

dance about the primitive altar to their own rough music. " 'Tis David dancing before the Ark," said our father.

Several times we boys stood to watch wretches guyed in the pillory, pelted with filth, verbal as well as material. On one occasion a miserable prisoner was publicly flogged between the Royal Court and the Prison, but we children were promptly whisked away from the nauseous sight. Dragged by a rope round his neck, with law officers holding halberds before his face to prevent his avoidance of the blows laid on his bloodstained back by the sturdy ruffian whose task it was, a surgeon walked at his side to measure the degree of brutality flesh and blood could bear. 'Twas a sickening spectacle and haunted me waking or dreaming for days.

So far our father has been to the fore, but our mother was really and truly the mainspring of the lives of all of us. She was one of that rare band of "perfect women nobly planned," whose function it is to seek life and ensue it. She was our final court of appeal, "a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat." Every age wears its own badges and shouts its own war-cries. Modern folk too often seek to belittle their forbears. In so doing they but reveal their own petty outlook. 'Tis true our philosophy in the 'twenties was rough-hewn. We lived in rough-hewn days.

This was the sort of dictum our father was wont to utter. "Don't be content to live like a weed or an alligator in captivity, lads. What says the good Book: 'The days of Methusalem were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died.' There's an epitaph for you. You would not have thought the writer had need to be so monstrous particular about a few years. If he had been in the Navy we should have said, 'The old gentleman was bored to death with about a thousand years of it, so he slung his hammock at last.'"

How well I remember one particular evening when our father was in great form over his pipe and grog. John Saumarez was with him, for they were planning a fishing excursion for the early hours next morning. Trafalgar usually went with them on these trips, but a twinge of toothache debarred his going on this occasion. Saumarez was a first-rate fisherman, but a poor talker. All he said, over and over, was, "My faith, 'twould be grandt whatever."

This was his response to some part of our father's plan for the morrow. Then came a waft in the conversation, as our mother flitted in and out. I had begged for another ten minutes before being marched off to bed. Before the ten minutes were up, our father summed up his sailor's creed on the great adventure, thus :

"What does it matter, boys, if it's nine years or ninety? Here's an apple tree, let us say, loaden with fruit, a picture to the eye and doing its little bit to make history. How does the tree do it? We talk wisely of soil and site and plume ourselves on our own cunning in giving the tree both, to have and to hold. The real reason is that the apple tree's life is at one with the intent of the Powers above, the divinity that shapes its end as well as ours. Here's a man, let us say, with all his imperfections on his head, yet through his soul flows the benediction of life. His life is at one, in will at least, with the living force that moulds. He may do a hundred things that his will does not approve, but like a real man he fights the true fight. What then? We mortals are all under sentence of death. This man knows it. A stray bullet may lay him out in a skirmish, as likely as in a first-class engagement." Our father laid down the law like one inspired and I listened with all my soul.

Just then our mother came in to say that it was really quite time for Waterloo to tumble into bed, and so I had to creep off, like snail unwillingly. My dreams that night were of rows of apple trees, with the drone of the bees in their blossom, rising and falling as an enchanted song.

Next morning was blustrous and cool. Our father had gone off fishing before we were up, and promised he would bring back a fifty-pound conger, or as near to it as the little cherub that sits up aloft would permit. I don't know how it was, but my mind was so full of the song of the bees in the apple blossom that I sat in a dream all breakfast time. Trafalgar and Rodney were racketting Victory, daring her to climb one particular elm tree in the avenue. Our mother let them have their chat, but put an end to the tree-climbing by saying that she did not want to have a broken leg to look after.

After breakfast was over I had not the heart to tease old Jean into a fit of Jersey French. To creep away by myself and listen to the bees in the limes was all I cared

to do, so I slipped off and tracked my way through the little cornfields and the patches of barley I knew of, and thence skirted the meadows, where the cows, tame as a cat asleep on a window sill, munched and munched, wandering round and round within the fairy ring of their tether. The sun came out just then and I watched a big green lizard licking up the flies and basking, even as we boys delighted to bask, in the hottest corner we could find. When the sun dodged in and the lizard vanished like a flash of light, I made my way down to the shore. The tide was out an immense way. The sea twinkled in the far distance beyond miles of rocks, ragged and twisted into uncouth shapes. Surely this fretted plain is the counterfeit presentment of the moon's surface. It is a picture of the first sketch of a world, when the earth shook with the rigors of birth not of death, and the flames leapt up and the roar of seaquakes sounded the primitive upheaval of heaven and earth.

We had been reading the story of the Revelation and its imagery laid hold of my imagination. "*And there was war in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in Heaven. And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.*"

I wondered what it all meant, but now surely I saw this same field of battle, strewn with the mighty boulders the pictured armies had hurled each at the other in their wrath. The powers of evil did not give in in a hurry. It was a close shave which should win. Here were the great pools they had left, grown all over with seaweed now. How many a time I had watched the gobies darting to and fro in them. Perhaps Michael's folk and the dragon's angels went to wash their wounds in some of these pools. Perhaps they drank at them. How did the sea get salt? Was it salt when that splendid fight was fought? I looked across the wild chaos of pinnacles and pools and couldn't make it out a bit. Then I tried to picture it all. If one could but have flitted like a seagull up in the sky and watched them pounding one another

to pieces, it would have been a grander sight than the struggle between the French and the English at Trafalgar.

There was a pool I knew well, where someone who lived hard by had gathered rare sea anemones and all sorts of quaint and lovely sea flowers. I was never tired of sitting by that pool and watching the shy creatures, as they caught the sun, open their blossoms. Sometimes a tiny shrimp or sandhopper would come too near and in a flash of light the sea flower would have him. Then the petals folded over the poor little beast and the flower didn't expand again that day. It was enjoying its breakfast. Why shouldn't it? I asked myself. We had lobsters and rockfish for breakfast ourselves. Who were we to preach to the sea flowers because they did the same sort of things as ourselves when they were hungry?

That thought reminded me of our father's fishing party. He ought to be nearly back by now. I made up my mind to go to the pier and see him land. How surprised he'd be to find me there all by myself. It would be: "Hullo! Waterloo, you young rascal, how did you get here? You'll catch it for playing truant." I got on to the pier and found a cosy corner near the place I felt sure he would come ashore. Then I fell a-dreaming. I wondered what strange sea-beast he would bring back this time—something wriggling and tossing its arms about, that would set us all delightfully in a quake for wonder, with just a little scrap of fear at the bottom of it. Now the sun burst forth again and I went afresh over the dream of the apple blossom with the bees hard at work in it.

The wind came in snatches and capfuls of gust and then died away. How long I had sat in my corner and watched I don't know, but suddenly such a vast hubbub of voices, such a clatter and clamour sprang up that I had never heard before. I could not make head or tail of the talk. 'Twas all in Jersey French. Then I caught: "*Le pauvre gent'homme. Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" and there grew loud and louder a sort of wailing lament, which sounded to my ears like the weird cry of seagulls out and away at sea, as the sun is setting. Something unusual had happened. I drew near to see.

A boat was being rowed silently alongside the pier and in that boat lay two forms covered with a sail. A great sob burst from me, as I ran to the side of the pier. A power

beyond words had whispered in my ear: "That which was once a man lying mute in the boat yonder out in the sunlight is he whom you have been wont to call father." Then I fell into a torrent of lament, such that it drew a crowd of fisher folk about me. How they cossetted me, what they said, all that happened in the next hour I never knew. I was as one lost in the mazes of a fierce magician's castle. I knew nothing save meaningless clamour, wild skirling cries of doom, a death-wail ten thousand years old, yet new upon the earth for ever and ever. No daylight dawns but it is heard afresh. It springs up clamant, shivering to the silent stars that watch over man's mortality.

Our mother was overwhelmed with our disaster. Her life was broken in twain. We laid the shell that had lodged the sturdy spirit of our father in the cold, cold earth.

"Children," cried our mother, when that vision of death and desolation was over, "we are all in all to one another now. You must each try to take your father's place. He was strong and good and battled for each of us. Now, my dears, God Himself will fight our battles."

Thus it befell that a few days later we six distraught souls embarked once more on the *Atalanta* and stood out to sea, the tears and blessings of our island friends following us. The skipper in his rough hearty way did all he could to comfort us. This time he landed us at our own haven under the hill, within a bowshot of home. The *Atalanta* made her trip in stone ballast and was to take away a cargo of malting barley.

Our mother wrapped about her widowed spirit some hidden comfort which we boys were too young to fathom, yet had we faced the ultimate mystery and looked eye to eye on the arch tragedy that haunts the souls of men and women, as surely as does the vision of the fleeting years.

CHAPTER II

ONE of the prime results of our island tragedy was that Trafalgar—who had now grown a big, clean-limbed fellow of sixteen years—was packed off to Stanmer to learn to be a farmer's boy. He often rattled about the hills on a pony from morning till night. Dodging his way up Newmarket Hill and along Kingston Down he frequently tracked his course to Newhaven. How we all envied him his pony. Tipper was the pony's name. The hero, so-called, whose bones lie mouldering on our hill-side, was a sort of tutelary saint with us. Trafalgar came upon us like a gust of the west wind. He was full of cheery gossip and had a thousand stories to tell of the old lord and the young lord, stories at which our eyes grew round with wonder. He was in almost daily intercourse with a real live lord. 'Twas too amazing to be aught save a fairy tale.

Just think of it. Here was a man, flesh and blood after all, who if he chose could go about with stars on his breast, a garter at his knee, a coronet on his head and robes that would put to shame those travelling troupes of players who sometimes took our great barn by storm for a couple of nights. When they fretted their little hour upon the stage as Prince This or Count That, these gentry always seemed to me to come very near indeed to the real thing. Surely it was strange that Trafalgar's lord didn't deck himself up like a gaudy moth, as these travelling folk did. He knocked about the home farm in tweeds and gaiters, with a rusty old Scotch cap on the back of his head. Then he talked to Trafalgar just like any one else might. The players would say :

" Thy thrice-noble cousin,
Harry Bolingbroke, doth humbly kiss thy hand."

This Stanmer lord would say: "I think 'twoll rain, Joyce. We must get the steer into the ten-acre. See that that bruttle cow don't find a gap in the hedge again, lad." Or perhaps it would be: "That pony of yours trots well, fegs."

The young lord seemed to revolve about his father, like the moon about the earth. He was just upon Trafalgar's age and they clattered over the hills together pretty often. There was a ramble I was fond of taking. It led by a path across the marsh up the Downside and from thence you could drop, almost like a kite, into the little village of Bishopstone. You went down the Shepherd's Steps to the hamlet. There were two attractions there to me. The tiny church was one. Its graveyard set me dreaming of our father left lonely and forsaken in a far-away island. This was such a toy place, so still, lapped in by the dappled sky and the round ramparts of chalk. There the bleat of sheep, the singing of myriads of larks, the murmur of the elm trees and the shout of the plough hand to his oxen, as they lazily dragged the plough through the furrows, were the only sounds that filtered through the pure air bathed in sunlight. The tiny church is Norman and over its south porch is a Saxon sundial, bearing the name of the man who carved it or had it carved. Eadric was his name, a bullet-headed, stubborn Saxon, a steady drinker of ale and mead, I doubt not, yet of the type of the builders of our English breed. He was eight hundred years old by this. I remembered what our father used to tell us about Methusalem. Eadric, though I daresay he could not write his own name, has left his mark, anyhow.

Mercy on us, what a place this little bit of sacred soil was for day dreams. Then, secondly, the name of James Hurdis was a magnet to me. He knew my father and mother and used to ride over on a white pony to see them—so I heard. Wonderful man, why, he actually wrote books and, what is more marvellous still, printed them with his own hands. His printing press was in the vicarage, yet all the time he was a quiet old gentleman, who ambled about the countryside on a white pony. He knew everything you could think of about spinning and weaving and the village arts—he was a cheery guest in cottage as in hall, chatting and chaffering with the best of them.

Some of his poetry I knew by heart. Who could beat his description of a bird's nest ?

" It was my admiration
To view the structure of that little work,
A bird's nest—mark it well, within, without."

Then he goes on to say that twenty years' apprenticeship, with all the tools and craft of human folk, could never match the beak work of a busy pair of wrens. Surely the story was wonderful beyond words. He was the soul of kindness. How many a time had the old man set the fluttering wheatear free from its turf trap on the Downside, taking care to put the penny, which was its value, in its place. A hater of fat living and luxury, a lover of simple pleasures and of the benediction of boon Nature was he who now lay under the shadow of his own church, a church that has nestled in a fold of the Downs for eight hundred years.

Now one day as I was dreaming about the angles of this petty enclosure, who should canter up but Trafalgar, and with him a tall lad. Trafalgar caught sight of me as they both tied their ponies to the outer gate.

" This is my brother Waterloo, my lord," quoth he. " My lord "—surely the earth would open and swallow me up, as it did Dathan and Abiram.

" Glad to see you, young 'un," said my lord, holding out his hand. " Your brother has told me about you." Then he did a funny thing. Everybody snuffed in those days, but this lad carried his supply loose in his waistcoat pocket. He took out a pinch with his finger and thumb and offered it to me. I can't say that I liked the stuff, for it started me off sneezing worse than a starling or a barley bird. Yet if I had had any pocket money to spare I should certainly in future have laid some of it out in rappee, for had not a real live lord offered me to sample the contents of his pocket ?

Then he talked just like anybody else might, not a bit like the players who used to visit our barn.

" You look pretty tightish, my lad," he said at length to me. I answered him that I was pretty middling. " And you are uncommonly the bly of your brother," he went on. " Now what is it brings you wambling over

here, I wonder?" I was beginning to lose my awe and talk to him just as one might to a village lad, so I told him what a favourite walk of mine this was. He listened with an odd smile on his face and then said:

"Come over to Stanmer some day. If you are fond of old churches we'll take you to Poynings. The King of the Romans has left his handiwork there."

So saying, he bade me good-day and he and Trafalgar mounted their ponies and were off. Now here was a stroke of fortune to set me pondering. I patronized Rodney and Victory "to rights," as we say in Sussex, when I got back home. As I told my tale to our mother she listened with a touch of amusement, which I did not quite care for. Surely meeting with and talking to a lord was a pretty serious affair.

The death of our father had tightened the purse-strings a lot, for a widow's pension was but a slender income to have to live on. Our mother had a tiny store of her own and everyone made things run easy for us. Our father had bought the little house we lived in from prize money which the ship he was on earned by hard fighting. The rippers, who came round from door to door with fish, somehow never tried to drive a hard bargain with our mother. Many a great keveling did we have for a few pence. So it was with ducks and chickens and rabbits. As often as not these were left at the door with a few civil words from folk we hardly knew. We had our own patch of growing stuff and eggs were in plenty, so that clothes were pretty well all we had to pay for. Of this period is one event outstanding almost as prominently as does our island voyage.

I had been struggling in the grip of whooping-cough. This cough of mine helped to increase my importance. There was something to be said for it on that score, but to fight for one's breath was a heavy weight in the other scale of the balance. Anyhow, in the dead of the winter, my mother and I went off together to a tiny cottage in a lonely village high up on the Downs. There was a delightful old gallows on the top of the hill. The owners of the place knew better than to rob the hill of its landmark. Newly furbished, the gallows stands there to this day. The snow lay thick. When I whooped till I could whoop no longer, my mother would carry me pick-a-back down

the hill and cosset me before a wood fire in the little parlour of our hermitage. After a lapse of fifty years I went to that same village again, or, rather, all that the rapacity of its present owner has left of it. The cottage we two lived in, which I had thought an imperial palace, very near to Heaven, was in ruins. The parson, an impecunious youngster as we first knew him, was parson still. Every trace of the hamlet folk, once our friends, was lost, yet I could recall the exact spot where we two used to discuss more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamt of in present-day philosophy and whence my mother would carry me pick-a-back through the healing sharpness of the Downside air.

On our return home, to keep us out of mischief, Victory and I were sent to a dame's school. In rear of our school-room was a window, from which the killing of the pigs in a neighbouring pork butcher's slaughter yard could be watched. That sight was a source of unholy curiosity to us urchins. We had a big lubberly boy amongst us, who treated the old school dame with open contempt and impudence. Although his conduct occasioned a little disgust, we watched the contests that raged between the two with bated breath. The boy used to bring a tame squirrel under his jacket and let it loose in school time. One day in the scrimmage to recapture it, the poor little beast got trodden on and died. After that the big boy disappeared from the scene. Every Saturday we read round the room the seventh chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. The whole thing conveyed no scintilla of meaning to any of us, but was supposed to afford a useful compendium of Hebrew history. It was not long before I had it all by heart, and in season and out I spouted: "Then said the High Priest, Are these things so?" and so on for a page and a half of print.

How long we spent over pothooks and hangers I cannot recall. Time ambles withal at seven years old. It gallops ever faster as the years speed on. At seven every mile of meadow is studded with a myriad wild flowers which must needs be picked. Little vagrant feet are for ever running to and fro exploring fresh worlds of wonder—in-
finitely busy. Songs of the spirit sound from every bough. As the mysterious symbols of print began to convey ideas to me, in like ratio did the faculty of memorizing

grow less active, "increasing store with loss and loss with store."

My next chapter opened a much wider vista. There was a certain Ahimelech Love, an excise officer by profession, who imparted his slender stock of knowledge by fits and starts to a few urchins, as his duties to the State permitted. He lived in Noah's Ark, an old craft high and dry on the river bank. From her build she was probably a Dutch pink, for she was almost as round as a washing tub and framed with stout oak timbers. In her heyday she must have resembled a floating castle, but that her amphibious career had ended long ago was evident from the fact that in our day she lay snugly behind the stone river wall. The tides washed up to her back door. On the carcass of the old craft rooms had been framed in timber. These rooms were dark and dim as prison cells. They resembled foc's'le quarters; their cubical content of air was, I dare say, scanty, but what then? We had five or six hours a day to fill our lungs from the oxygen-laden breezes of the Bay.

'Tis true that over the pent-up, land-locked waters of our marshes malaria perennially hovered, whence it swooped and speedily caught the unwary new-comer in its grip. We marsh folk, to the manner born, had re-adjusted our economy so as to bid it defiance.

Thus it befell that I became enrolled a disciple of him whom we all knew as 'Ciseman Love. I was not long in discovering that, even as the poacher and the gamekeeper are a Janus figure, differing only in outlook, so is it with the runner and his circumventer. I never could quite make out, before I joined up at Noah's Ark, what the mystery was when one morning I went down to our henhouse in search of eggs and came upon a tiny cask covered over with straw. I ran in and said I thought someone had dropped a butter tub over our fence by accident. I remember afterwards how our father gave a funny wink, strolled down in the dusk of the evening and later on how he rolled the keg into our cellar. Nothing was ever said about it. It was all very puzzling. Now it began to dawn upon me that when 'Ciseman Love came to have a crack with our father of an evening, they were actually sipping the contents of that mysterious cask which had fallen out of the clouds into our henhouse.

About the time I began to learn the art of script in Noah's Ark, Rodney was packed off to an apothecary's shop at Lewes, kept by one Isaac Light. Folk got plenty of "stuff" for their money in those days. Rodney let us into some of the secrets of his prison house. A man would come into the doctor's shop with, let us say, "his innards a-scrougin'," or perhaps to report "that Laurence had got holt of 'e fer sure." In either case the patient was told to drink less beer o' nights and given a half-gallon jar of bilge-water, with camomile and peppermint stirred up in it. Before the sick man had worked through the contents of his jar, he and his friends thought the nectar "wonnerful powerful," and the invalid was able to go about his day's job again with good cheer.

One of the notions Isaac publicly proclaimed was the cause of much amazed comment to the patients who flocked to his shop. He had a card hung up there in the following terms :

" Ye sons of Adam, what do you lack ?
A clean skin and less ale and sack."

The man preached the gospel of soap and water and temperance, a strange heresy enough. "I told 'un I 'adn't never washed me veet, not yetner," the country-man would say. "But 'e sez to me, 'e sez, 'Why you reads all about 'un in Scriptur', 'e sez. 'You take and do 'un,' 'e sez. 'E 'as bottles o' stuff o' all colours of the rainboo in 'is shop, but, dang me, if the cold water ain't done me a power o' good—more than what they 'as, I reckon."

Now and then my mother and I went up in the carrier's cart to Lewes and we then always stopped at Cliffe to visit Rodney, who was 'prenticed for seven years to his trade. Our mother had to find ten pound a year, which meant pinching in the house a bit. Five pound a year, too, had to go for Rodney's food. His job was to scour the marshes and woods for "yarbs," to learn how to dig and compound them into pills and potions. Then he had also to run errands for an area of five or six miles around the town.

Isaac had a dash of the cheapjack about him. A big placard hung in the shop representing the figure of a man

peering through a telescope about twice as long as himself. On the table hard by stood a mortar the size of our washing tub at home, with a pestle as big as the club of Goliath in our family Bible. Underneath was the legend, "I seek light." This was Isaac Light's rebus.

The most jolly part of Rodney's work lay in ranging the countryside for herbs. Light used to say that the country was his garden. He knew every nook and cranny of the spring woods. In the Down bottoms were wild gardens, packed with scores of precious weeds.

Just once or twice our mother and I went for a day with Rodney, who was getting into the wonder of it all. Once in especial I remember we tracked our way exulting over the Downs, and dropped thence to Glynde. It was the sweet o' the year, when coltsfoot begins to star the patches of disturbed chalky soil and in the dingles violets cluster thick as bees. Who does not know the virtues of coltsfoot tea as a spring medicine? Violets are the grand cure for shaking off a troublesome winter cough. We three revelled in a long, long happy day, and Rodney's pack was crammed like Autolykus' with wares to fit the humours of every lass and swain. Those days cannot come back. We moult the best things of life and don't recognize them for what they are till they are gone. Our mother, whose philosophy had a perpetual lining of spiritual fabrics, rarer than the gossamer web of spiders glistening in the still air of day dawn, purer than the downcast harebell's trumpet, more glowing than the blood-red poppy, chanted to us these lines :

"Some brittle sticks of Thorn or Briar
 Make me a fire,
 Close by whose living coal I sit
 And glow like it.
 Lord, I confess too, when I dine,
 The Pulse is thine,
 And all those other bits that be
 There placed by Thee.
 The Worts, the Purslane and the mess
 Of Watercress,
 Which of Thy kindness Thou hast sent.
 And my content
 Makes those and my beloved Beet
 To be more sweet."

Rodney, who was in love with this vagrant part of his job, used to tell us of the strange weeds he had to hunt.

Half of their names were linked with the Devil, as if he had the sowing of the shaws and copses. He did a lot of its digging, as the names of the dykes and knaps scattered over the Downs told us. After all, half the wild blossoms that blow in the woods are poisoned by him. That we know for a fact. Anyone who hunts at the right season and has found out where to go can pick the Devil's darning needle, Devil's bread, Devil's oatmeal, Devil's appletrees. If he wants to make himself smart, are there not Devil's posy, Devil's daisy and a host of other buttonholes for him to deck himself withal? In the hedges we see Snakes' Poison Food hanging out its tempting lure. Then in the edges of the shaws grow the simple antidotes against his wiles. Who can doubt this when he may find Selfheal and Coughwort, Poor Man's Spermaceti and a legion of kindly weeds? Then are there not Poor Man's Mustard, Poor Man's Tea and a medley of simple fare to be had for the gathering? What can be so intimate as a wild flower? Shakespeare finds magic in the juice of Love-in-idleness. It is the same flower as our folk call Meet-her-in-the-entry-kiss-her-in-the-buttery. Who could fail to fall in love with Biddy's Eyes, or Two-faces-under-the-sun? We can see the Shepherd's Weather Glass, Shivering Jenny and John-go-to-bed-at-noon within five minutes of every village door.

Rodney was like a boy possessed. When he told us of the queer rambles he took and the quaint yarns Isaac Light, when in the right humour, let fall about the meanest weed, how I envied him his job. As for me, I had to be content with Noah's Ark and Ahimelech Love. No matter, one must make the most of those things we have, so I told myself, but in sober fact I had nothing to grumble about, for I, too, was in a bower of strange lore, unexplored yet wonderful.

I soon found out that 'Ciseman Love knew far more of the tricks and dodges of the keg runners than he did of books and book learning. We would start off virtuously with a long line of script to be taken down on our slates, such as: "A tale bearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter."

"That sayin' calls me to mind," Love would say, "of a dark night in November." Down went our pencils and we were all ears. "I was watchin' the Exceat Gap that

night, as I knew a middlin' heavy load of stuff was to be worked. I had half a dozen troopers snug in a barn and lay out in the fuzz myself a-watchin'. Well, there I lay and it were main nippin'—so cold that the ice in the ponds cracked wi' it. The moon was just a naked fork and would be up about midnight, but it didn't seem as if 'twere ever goin' to rise that night. I said to myself, the moonshine, I reckon, 'ull be as teejous slow a-comin' as the moon. Howsoever, up my lady came at last, faintly glistenin', and by the light of her I watched a hare go lollopin' past. Thinks I to myself, I'll put down a bit of a snare and have you, my gentleman, to-morrow night. Well, I hadn't hardly noted the exact spot where he came along when I caught a sound so faint that you could hardly catch it. Here they come, surelye, said I to myself. I looked out to sea and thought I could make out the blur of a couple of luggers close to. The night was so still and the air so keen that you could have heard a beetle crawling through the grass, if there had been one to crawl, so I slipped over to my barn and whispered the captain that the moment was come. The troopers led out their horses and mounted, as silent as the grave, in the shadow of the barn. Now our hearts began to beat pretty fast, in spite of the raw air. Soon the steady tramp of men and horses could be heard. Would you believe it? One of the horses of the landing party neighed. Then one of our troopers' horses did the same for answer. The captain was young and heady. He said under his breath: 'There is more here than meets the eye. I am going to charge 'em, 'Ciseman.' I said: 'No, bide your time, sir.' But he wouldn't. So off they went, helter-skelter. The troopers were main glad of a bit of a spree, to prevent their blood from freezing. Now would you believe it? They nabbed five of Boney's men. These cattle were creeping ashore to burn a few farms under our noses. Well, the end of the story was that the captain got a couple of lines in the *Gazette* and was praised up to the skies. Meantime the runners we were after, in the confusion had landed their stuff close to Westdean, and had it all neatly stowed at Litlington. I got called all sorts of names for letting 'em slip through my fingers. 'Twas a bad night's work for me, for it cut me out of my promotion for a couple o' year."

One of the "warmest" spots round us for the runners' trade is Piddinghoe. It looks a sleepy little place enough, lying in a bend of the river, with a line of elm trees alongside the high road. Its church was only a mile and a half from our cottage, and had a round flint tower. The place was "like the catacombs o' Room," 'Ciseman Love used to tell us. In the churchyard were dummy graves, and there were caches hidden away in the borstals and pits sunk in out-of-the-way corners and clusters of hawth. In these traps, hard to find as a curlew's nest, the stuff was stowed until it could be spread up and down the country. Many a load of hay for Brijthelmstone or Lewes had half a dozen tubs of moonshine, as they called Schiedam, tucked away under it. The Pid'nhoo people were, Love said, a thievish, shifty lot. There was uncommon little steady work went on there. The excitement of a bit of smuggling, and the big money it brought, made the folk of the village careless of the plodding slow labour of farm hands. Round the village queer proverbs had clustered for scores of years. "Magpies is shod at Pid'nhoo," said their neighbours, as they passed through the place. "At Pid'nhoo they digs fer moonshine," was another saying that got abroad—some said, "digs fer smoke," or "digs fer deelight." Thus it was that its people hung on our borders like a hive of robber bees, ready to slip out over the hills or down the river on some thievish errand, yet always in appearance squalid and down-at-heel. The risks and fun of the thing attracted a good many of our rougher Newhaven fisher lads as well. 'Ciseman Love made a swoop now and then, and scooped up a lot of hidden spoil, perhaps nabbed three or four of the marauders red-handed. There was no mercy shown to these gentry. The runners were desperate men, and stuck at no crime. Three parts of our town-folk knew all about their movements, but durst not mix themselves up in them by informing. The stuff they landed was mostly tobacco and spirits, silk and tea.

Smuggling had been a declining business ever since the Peace, for, in the turmoil of war, men lost their sense of the proportions of lawful and unlawful acts. War was, as it were, a wild fever burning up men's blood and bones.

These harangues we had from 'Ciseman Love in the intervals of ciphering or texthand copy. In my young

days the methods of teachers were in the main brutal. For some trivial offence or lapse—often for none at all—the too frequent innate savagery of the male, who has a weaker vessel than himself in his clutch, would break forth in merciless oppression and thrashing. Children were treated like hounds or horses to be “broken.” In many cases the rough country lad emerged from the ordeal a fairly disciplined member of society. In a fearfully numerous minority, such treatment warped the child’s nature for life. Fear is the fruitful parent of lies. That was the *descensus* to which the current system tended.

Now our father, while on board his ship he upheld the sharp naval discipline of the day, was too goodhearted, as well as too sensible, to put a cruel curb chain on his children. We knew that if we wilfully strayed beyond the borderline of truth, he would lay on the cane with an unsparing hand. “Lies will be properly wallopped,” was his dictum, and he was wont to be as good as his word. On the other hand, he was our best friend and confidant. If we broke the domestic code, or gave way to passion, he brought us to by the royal law. As for our mother, perhaps she erred a little on the side of over-easiness of temperament. At the same time, on rare occasions, her wrath would blaze forth in a white flame. Against cruelty, cupidity, treachery, meanness, she waged war to the knife. For minor scrapes and peccadilloes she exerted the power of an all-conquering patience, blent sometimes with a touch of jest and irony that was far more effective than indiscriminate storming and blows.

At our dame school the fool’s cap and the ridicule of our fellow sinners were the main incentives to obedience. In Noah’s Ark we found a cane conspicuously hanging on a rusty iron nail. Now and again the ‘Ciseman would make this same cane sing in the air, or even descend with a resounding whack on the table, but I don’t ever remember his proceeding to extremities with it. As it was, we trudged willingly to school, and, provided he would give us our fair proportion of midnight adventure and breathless ‘scapes with the runners, we held loyally to our bargain to do our part with the best that was in us, in the matter of dictation and spelling.

The dress of our Sussex folk of the ‘twenties would appear grotesque to modern eyes. We boys wore nankeen

trousers carried up to our armpits, a jacket tucked inside them and no waistcoat. We had a high-peaked cap, and, in winter, overcoats going down to our heels. The old-fashioned men of the village stuck to pigtails, which had mostly gone out in towns. All soldiers and sailors, however, prided themselves on wearing these still. Our father's knee breeches, dark blue coat, with brass buttons, and light red waistcoat, are firmly fixed in my memory, as also are his stiff, upstanding collars, the mass of his frilled neckcloths, the bunch of seals and keys ever hanging from his fob.

The old dandified fashion of wearing a periwig was going out, and our father spurned it with true sailor gusto. When we walked through the High Street at Lewes, I never failed to insist on having the inscription on the sign hung out from Cooley's shop interpreted to me. Absalom was depicted as hanging to an oak bough by his hair, and a thorough-bred jackass was scornfully cantering away. Underneath were these lines :

“ O Absalom, unlucky prig,
Hadst thou but worn a periwig !
For had thy luckless head been shaved,
Thy life most surely had been saved.”

Now, I, a young, doubting Thomas, ruminated on the strength of the unfortunate young man's mane, or the lightness of his carcass. In Jersey I had seen the green lizards throw off their tails, and the lobsters their claws at a touch. I had heard of dangers and causes hanging by a hair. It was a direct miraculous intervention that Absalom's hair stood the strain. That was the only conclusion I could arrive at.

Once we were all smuggled by Trafalgar into the “ White Hart,” to see the Guy Fawkes bonfire. It was the time of Catholic Emancipation, and we heard thrilling fables of how no man would be safe in his bed thereafter. George Canning was Prime Minister, and also member for Seaford. He was burnt in effigy amid a cloud of Lewes rousers, missiles of the most deadly type. The horseplay was of a brutal quality, without the redemption of much wit. The countryman, whose official idea of humour was grins through a horse collar, nevertheless, was often a neat satirist in private life.

I remember that the walls of Seaford were placarded with posters, announcing that, "The Great Pope Canning is here." A couple of days after the fifth I was set by the 'Ciseman to write an account of what I had witnessed at Lewes that night. My essay began, "Lord Caneing was stuffed and burnt." Our mentor brought his cane down on the table with a stroke that set the crockery in the next room jingling, and burst into a roar of laughter.

I have not yet made record of the monster flood which swamped the entire marsh land between Newhaven and Seaford, and turned the valley of the Ouse into a vast lake. It was a datum point in local history both before and after. The crop of gossip it started lingered on for years.

Of the great festivals of Christmas and New Year's Eve, much lore could have been gathered in the 'twenties. It has mostly evaporated by now. Our "music" would have graced a band of Grecian bacchanals. We had blind Dicky and Little Steve as fiddlers. "Lord Hops and all his crew, Nimble Chops and Bustle too." The merry-makers spent weeks in practice, and laid embargo on all classes for cakes and ale, beef pudding and wine. On the great evening there was a mighty orgy of those concerned, and the surplus food was handed or lowered to expectant waiters on Providence outside the place where the roystering members met, generally the "Old Tree Inn."

This was the ditty our wandering minstrels sang on New Year's Day under all likely windows :

" I wish yew a merry Christmas,
And a happy New Year,
A pocket full o' money,
And a cellar full o' beer.
A good fat pig to sarve yew all the year.
Bud well and bear well,
I hope you will fare well ;
Every sprig and every spray,
A bushel of arples 'a New Year's Day,
Up the la-adder and down the wall,
Two or three arples 'ull sarve us all ;
One for Peter, and one for Paul,
And one for God that made us all."

I have said that the Devil was one of the most active of our country gentry. The wise women and fly-by-nights were his ministers, ever at his beck and call.

Who has not heard of that "Frenchy," who did not know his way about, and had to be "larned 'un?" He strolled beyond the village one night, when the moon were nearly at de full, and saw a trim lass as was a-gooin' his ga-ait. 'Card'nly 'e makes up to she, but 'e couldn't get not a wor-rud out on 'er. "Come," sez 'e, "doant yew goo fer to be a crosspatch," 'e sez. "See if ye can't quest a bit, same as a spannel do," 'e sez. With that 'e creeps up abouten she and starts snoozlin' 'is arm around 'er waist. But Lor'! 'is arm went clean through she, and 'twarn't till next marnin' that 'e found 'isself layin' in a maxon. She were a sperrit.

That the Devil is not always such a bad chap in his way, I soon found out. Here is a story told me almost—but not quite—at first hand:

The Devil applied to Farmer Elphick for a job. "What canst do?" sez Farmer. "Oh! anythin' about a farm," sez d'Ole Feller. "Well," sez Farmer Elphick, 'e sez, "I be wantin' to wim a mow o' whate," 'e sez. "I'm yer man," sez Mus' Devil. "Will ye pitch downen de shuvs or frail 'em?" sez Farmer Elphick. "Frail 'en," 'e sez. So Farmer Elphick 'e pitched and 'e pitched till 'is back were like a bended bow. Fast as shuvs come down they was wimmed wi' one strooke o' frail. Well, Farmer Elphick 'e mopped de sweat off 'en and 'e sez, "'Ere," 'e sez, "you take a turn pitchin', and I'll 'a a doo wimmin'," 'e sez. "Right," sez Mus' Devil, and wi' one 'op 'e were on top o' pile o' shuvs. Then 'e gives one sweep o' 'is shappick and de barn floo-er were covered wi' shuvs. "'Ullo!" sez Farmer Elphick, "there's moor 'ere," 'e sez, "than what I rackoned on," 'e sez. So next marnin' 'e goos to a wise woman. "Did ye see 'un's splay voot?" sez wise woman. "Naw," sez Farmer Elphick, "'e kep 'un 'idden in straa," 'e sez. "I rackon 'e's middlin' cute," she sez. So she sez, "You must give 'un somethin' 'e ain't not man enough to do," she sez, "or you'll 'ave 'en rappin' and runnin' about ye fer everlastin'."

So Farmer Elphick 'e went back 'ome in a twitter.

"What's nex' job?" sez Mus' Devil. "Goo and count de carn in yon 'eap," sez Farmer Elphick. Afore you could wink yer eye Mus' Devil 'e 'ad de number pat. "'Ave ye counted every carn?" sez Mas' Elphick. "Aye," sez d'Ole Feller. Then Farmer Elphick 'e

scratched 'is 'ead to rights. "Look 'ere," 'e sez, "there's the vive-acre to be mowed," 'e sez. "Right," sez the other chap. "I'll start 'en," 'e sez, "be deelight."

So Farmer Elphick 'e wa-aited till fust cock started crowin', and off 'e went and druv a 'arrer through the groun', leavin' tines be'ind 'un thick as sparrers i' barley. Well, nex' marnin' Mus' Devil's scythe went through they tines as if they'd bin ma-ade o' butter. "The burdocks," 'e sez, "is middlin' thick 'ere, Measter," 'e sez.

Now, at that Farmer Elphick were fair flummoxed. What to do 'e 'adn't no moor no-otion than a ba-abe unboorn. So 'e goos in and 'e sets 'isself downen, lookin' uncommon ampery, as ye might say.

"What is 'en ma-akes yew so shackety, 'Enery?" sez Mistus Elphick. So 'e ups and tells 'er all the constarnation from start to vinish. "Yew bring 'un to me," she sez. "I'll 'ansel 'un to rights," she sez. Then Mus' Devil comes to the wean-'us, and 'e looks teejus unked at Mistus. "I've a job fer ye," she sez. "Right, Mistus," sez d'Ole Feller. "Taake this 'ere 'air," she sez, pullin' one off 'er 'ead, "goo downen to 'Uggett's forge," she sez, "and stra-aighten 'e out on the anvil," she sez, "and bring 'en ba-ack to me." Well, Mus' Devil 'e took the 'air to the forge, and 'e banged, and 'e fidgeted and 'e swore. "This 'ere shop," 'e sez at last, "is gettin' nigh 'and as 'ot as me own quarters." So in the end 'e bounced off, and Farmer Elphick 'aven't never seen nothin' of 'un sence.

CHAPTER III

NOW I reach the watershed of my life. All the streams that up to this recorded moment of my fate had been running north to south, from henceforth begin to run south to north.

Thus it befell. I was twelve years old. The summer had been one of unusual tranquillity. We were nearing the end of September. On the particular morning that stands out as a landmark in my memory, the sea lay like a bath of oil. The air was close and tense, the wind gathering up from the west-south-west.

I went down to the pier head between seven and eight o'clock. So clear was the air that every furze bush on Seaford Head stood out sharp in outline, as if engraved on steel. Away to the west there hung in the heavens a wondrous range of hills. I could hardly believe my eyes. I was always on the look-out for miracles. They seemed but in the established order of things. This must surely be one, for the mountain range high above the contour of ocean was a new world never before vouchsafed to mortal eyes. I was looking on a phantom glory. The east end of the Isle of Wight loomed up in a wondrous mirage. I gazed and gazed, and fell a-dreaming of the portents and pageants of the Revelation. I was so fascinated by the splendour of the magic panorama that I had to run to Noah's Ark, so as to get there by eight o'clock, which was our official hour for starting the work of the day. 'Ciseman Love seemed a bit distraught too, I fancied.

"Strange morning, lads," was his salutation. "Looks like Kingdom Come a-comin'. I've never seen Lewes Jail before from Carey Bay. There 'tis, sure enough, so clear that you could pretty nigh hand watch 'em changin' guard. I have been round the Tide Mill marshes lookin' for loot. The runners have been about that quarter for the last two nights. I have heard all the bandogs yowling

and the duck have been worried in the saltpans, so that they are frettin' about. I shall nab 'em, lads. Have no fear for that."

Our lesson books were sadly neglected that morning. However, we went through the form of things, but I was not sorry when the old Dutch clock that hung over our heads ticked out five minutes to twelve. We should be free in five minutes.

Then was I ware of a racket and bruit without. As I tumbled out of Noah's Ark I was saluted by a gust of wind that made its old timbers creak again. The sea, which I left like a millpond, was in wild turmoil. A bore ran up the harbour, towering as it ran into a mighty cascade. Away to the north hung thunderclouds, black as ink. I set myself to work toward the pier, but, in truth, the wall of wind which I had to push against was more than I could stand up to. By bending down and butting into it head foremost, I found it was possible to make progress. Even so, every muscle was strained in the effort. So far I had been struggling under the shelter of the Down, but, when I began to clear the angle of its protection, and face the full onslaught of the tyrant blast, it required every ounce of power and cunning I possessed to drive through.

The waves swung along resistless, their battle roar saluting me sounded as if the old Dragon and his angels were once more let loose to work their will in wild havoc. "Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war." I had read that somewhere. That was it, sure enough. The earth was trembling, and the air writhing in the fierce embraces of the gale. My magic sky picture had disappeared. Nothing remained but a welter of wind and water. Vast masses of froth and spume came hurtling through the air like shells. Our world was in uproar. Everything was reeling under the shock. The solid earth, perhaps only in fancy, bent as a battle line bends before the assault of a foe not to be denied. The bastion of white cliffs away to the west appeared to quiver beneath the sting of hurtling shingle. Out in the offing the skyline was blurred by one immense plain of assaulting water.

The cry of the tormented wind sounded in my ears like a song of doom. "Puny creatures who traffic on my good nature, sending your petty cockboats across my

bosom, now, now, shall you learn who is master here, you or I. Come out if you dare and face my wrath." That seemed to me the message of the trampling waves. "Call on all your gods and see if they can help you when once I clear for action."

I managed to fight my way out to the pilots' shelter near the head of the pier. Then I was able to straighten my back a bit, to watch the welter, to take breath and listen to that dreadful note the gale sang, a hoarse scream of wrath and anguish, a terrible blast, trumpet-tongued.

Now on the verge of this tumult up sprang the human note. A sail hove in sight. As I watched, the pitiless, tempest-ridden waves were pounding it. Heavens! what must be the terror of those aboard that labouring craft, flogged by the merciless breakers, I thought. Yet was she not drifting quite helplessly. She was making for our harbour. The tide was running out. Wind and tide were locked in fierce conflict. This petty trafficker was being trounced by friend and foe alike.

Anon, as I scanned the blurred horizon, with every sense alert for the sequel of the unrolling drama, a storm of rain and hail, fell as swanshot, beat about my ears. The racket of the thunder amongst the hills, the blind fury of the lightning, the tortured water leaping on the land, the little patch of human struggle in the teeth of the gale, made up a wild picture, which is painted on my mind for life. Its artistry even in that terrible moment of suspense appealed to every fibre of my being.

Pilot Wilmott shouted something to me, but I could not make out a word he said. Now this tiny fighting craft was standing straight for the pier heads. In those days our two wooden piers left an entrance of only some hundred feet. If the stranger missed the entrance, her fate was sealed. If she struck either pier she must break up and founder. If she made the fairway there was the terrible risk of her broaching to. On the larboard hand ran the ragged, half-built stone causeway, behind which stood Noah's Ark. On the starboard hand lay the deadly mud flats of Carey Bay.

To try to make the entrance in such a sea as that now running was surely tempting Providence. To lie out at sea, there to stand up to their gruelling, would, I judged, have been to those aboard less like suicide than was this

mad rush for the neck of the bottle of our harbour. Still, on she came. She had been yawing like a waterlogged basket, but as if by miracle those at the wheel now managed to straighten her course as she neared the jaws of the trap.

I noted a bit of foresail had been spread, which helped the yacht—for so I deemed her—holding her nose down to her deadly task. The greatest danger of all was the rolling longshore drift, which threatened to sweep away this floating toy, like a cork, on to the lee shore to the east, where her timbers infallibly would be ground to matchwood.

In spite of the persecution of the blast which stormed about my ears, I held my breath, fascinated, as this sea bird of man's fashioning sped towards us. I had seen one of the races held near Mount Harry, and heard the roar of human voices as the runners drew near the winning post. Now the stakes were life or death. The glistening hull shot for the goal gallantly. Those at the helm were cool and unflinching. A second of panic in that quarter, and all would be lost.

In the bow stood a figure in black oilskins, smothered in spume every time the vessel dipped her nose into the breakers. The supreme moment approached. The labouring craft was but a hundred yards from the pier head. Her bows were pointed dead on for the west pier, the helmsman allowing for the scend of the rollers, which must catch her at the crisis of her fate. I hardly closed my eyes, though the hail stung me like a charge of buckshot.

'Twas just as I had foreseen. As she spun within the range of the surf-crested billows sweeping crosswise athwart the harbour mouth, she began to yaw fatally to leeward, the ebb tide catching her bows. In another minute she would be swung round broadside to the seas, her fate sealed. Then I rushed into the pilots' shelter, tore from its hook the throw line hanging there, and, in the fashion I had watched the old hands do, cast it down with all my might to the lookout man in the bows, at the same time cunningly whipping my own end of the line about a bollard on the pier. The lookout man, who had seen the fatal issue pending, deftly caught the line and made fast.

The whole incident was over in a second of time. The

strain on the line kept the yacht's head fair to the entrance till she had rolled behind the shelter of the west pier. Ere the line could part, I had let go my end round the bollard. Then I started off at full speed with the wind abaft, making for the Customs Watch House.

The stranger craft was not yet out of danger, for within the piers she was cruelly buffeted. She pitched like a kicking horse. The bore caught her in its grip, but those at the wheel grimly held her to the fairway, and so she won through at last.

Meantime I raced my hardest around Sleeper's Hole, and, as the yacht staggered up abreast of the Customs Watch House, shouted in great excitement to her deck hand to make fast to the landing place there. I deftly caught their rope, and in five minutes the yacht lay snugly up to the jetty head. How she had managed to blunder through the perils of the last few hours Heaven alone knew.

And now comes the sequel of this amazing morning's work. The folk battered down below were speedily released. They proved to be a lady and gentleman, whose ages I judged at about thirty to forty years. The yacht carried four hands. She had put out for a run early in the day from Littlehampton, and, on pleasure bent, had been caught napping by a cyclone which proved to be historic. Blown up-Channel, her sails soon ripped away, and, almost under bare sticks, she drifted a sport to wind and wave. Her sailors were seasoned salts, whose advice not to venture to sea had been ridiculed by their employers. When they had measured the imminent danger to all aboard, they managed to rig up enough canvas to give the *Mallard*, for that was the name the yacht bore, at least a sporting chance of making Newhaven. The odds were perhaps three to one against their success. It was a neck and neck race, but they won.

The gentleman was the first to come on deck, and he called cheerily to "Maria" to follow him. When the lady at length crept forth, timorously as a mouse, her prime glance around appeared to be to seek some spot whereon to subside gracefully in hysterics. Finding nothing available, save the sea-swept decks of the *Mallard*, she postponed this becoming sequel of the morning's adventure until a more convenient season. A ladder was

thereupon run outboard from the pier. The lady, after volubly protesting that it was a physical impossibility, as well as a grave impropriety, eventually screwed her courage to the sticking place and scrambled up the ladder to the platform of the jetty. No suitable accommodation being even there forthcoming, she evidently made up her mind, perforce, to defer indefinitely the attack of nerves. Meantime, glowing with the exertion and excitement of the last half-hour, glistening with the salt spray through the gauntlet of which I had run, I stood in mute astonishment, watching the proceedings of those whom I had helped to save.

The lookout man at length came ashore, and, clapping me on the shoulder, said to his master, "This is the lad who saved us all from Davy Jones's locker, sir." The lady's presence, at those words of his, seemed to surround me. I really thought she meant to give me a hug, and was preparing to protect myself from so obvious an outrage to my sense of budding importance, when the gentleman demanded of me my name. He then asked me to conduct him and the lady to a decent inn, and also asked me where I lived. I convoyed them to the Bridge Inn, and, bidding them good-day, trudged off home to tell the story of my adventure.

While we were at dinner, and Victory, who had now grown a tall, wistful-eyed girl, was listening rapt to my recital, who should knock at our door but the gentleman of the yacht? He asked our mother for a few words in private, and they went together into our little parlour. The door was shut upon them, and their "few words" took so long to utter that I was beginning to think I should have to make my way back to Noah's Ark without my curiosity being satisfied, when the parlour door was opened and I bidden to go in.

"I have been speaking to your mother, Waterloo," quoth the gentleman, "about your coming to live with us. Do you think you could be happy if you gave up Noah's Ark, and spent your life in Fullerton Park? We are Mr. and Mrs. Fullerton."

Now, Fullerton Park is one of the show places of up-country Sussex. The palings that enring it run across hill and dale for eight miles or so. The pedestrian, tramping across the ridge of Hangleton Hill, catches glimpses

of an old house embowered in immemorial woodland of oak and beech.

Once, in our father's lifetime, we had all driven over to the park in a bunch. The pony trap was put up at the "Fullerton Arms." The inn sign represented a big sheaf of teasels, and it had evidently been painted by some village artist. The signboard had creaked on its hinges across Fullerton Green from time immemorial. Its counterpart was the mellow bidding bell of the parish church, which has knolled the knell, and taken its share in ringing the chimes of the village folk for wellnigh three hundred years. One of my recollections of that pleasure day of ours was of the ostler, who, in the intervals of hissing over his job in the stableyard, gave us children the essence of his philosophy. In a nutshell, it was as follows: "How I dew wish I were a genelman. Then fer sure I'd jest set under a tree and drink beer all day."

In after life I ran against a dictum of Blackstone's which, in essentials, is curiously the twin of the countryman's. "He who can live idly and without manual labour and will bear the port, charge and countenance of a gentleman shall be called Master and shall be taken for a gentleman."

While Mr. Fullerton was dazzling my eyes with his amazing proposal, I was reliving our far-away day in Fullerton Park and spurning with all my might the ostler's ideal. In fact, my thoughts were wool-gathering to such a degree that, when Mr. Fullerton had finished, I was silent so long our mother had to say: "What have you to say to Mr. Fullerton's question, Waterloo?"

What could I say? "If I give you a sack of sovereigns, will you carry it home?" That was my answer.

"Aye," said Mr. Fullerton, "but you wouldn't have to carry it home, my boy. You'd be our boy in future, you know. Fullerton Park would be your home. You wouldn't have the chance of carrying your sack of sovereigns away."

"But then," I queried, "what of mother and Trafalgar and Rodney and Victory?"

"Oh, they'll be just the same to you as ever," he said. "But you yourself will be our boy in especial."

I turned to our mother. "What do you say, Mother?" I asked.

“What can I say, my dear?” she replied. “You know I wish every blessing to be yours. Money may be curse or blessing, just as we each one make it. ‘The mon’s the gowd,’ my dear, as the Scotch song says.”

Well, in the end, although we took a few hours to make up our minds, it was agreed that I should accept the offer Mr. Fullerton laid on our home altar. In the elation of the first days with my foster parents I was tempted to dream dreams of Joseph and his brethren, but that sort of nonsense soon evaporated, under a realization of the fact of my position at Fullerton Park.

Though Mrs. Fullerton was a bit inclined to fancy herself as one belonging to a special caste, her husband yielded to no such delusion. The silk purse and the sow’s ear are first cousins, and no cobweb of philosophy can alter the bedrock of human existence.

The Fullertons, though their forbears claimed to have followed the mailed fist of the Norman Conqueror, unless History lied had piled up their fortune by peddling petty ironwork about the county of Sussex on donkey-back. Their family motto, *Carbone et forcipibus*, gave colour to the legend. Mr. Fullerton pointed this out to me himself.

“As for blue blood,” he would say, “the names and bearing of half the shepherds and petty farmers in the parish proclaim that such blood runs in their veins too. What is blue blood anyway?” he went on. “Listen to this.” He took down a book from a shelf close to his hand and read as follows: “‘Gentlemen have their beginning either of blood—as that they are born of worshipful parents—or that they have done something worthy in peace or war whereby they deserve to be accounted gentlemen.’ Those are the words of an authority high in heraldic law, who wrote in 1679. And again he says: ‘A gentleman of what estate so ever he be, although he go to plough and common labour for his maintenance, yet he is a gentleman.’ There you have the sum of the whole art and science of gentle birth.”

And now that I had emerged like a butterfly from the chrysalis, honesty demands me to say that many a time and oft my thoughts strayed back with regret to the free and careless days of Noah’s Ark and the Bishopstone sundial. If I had not possessed the power of imagining

myself again in those happiest moments of life, I should sometimes have voted my new existence deadly dull.

As usual, I am going too fast. I must hark back. Let me begin by describing the atmosphere of my new existence. I passed many hours every week under the tuition of a tutor, whose name was the Rev. Simon Pooss. If I had had any boy friend to crack jokes with, we should have called him Mr. Poossy, and that name would have fitted his qualities like a glove. He purred over our lessons. On Sundays he preached to us in the little parish church in the wood. Every morning the household assembled in the hall and he read the prayers, in a voice of the quality of that of a bluebottle in a pickle jar.

At Newhaven, the padre we mostly affected lived hard by our home. His boys were our chosen friends or sworn foes as the incidents of the moment dictated. We used to march down to the little chapel to which he was attached and there was always the savour of the Revelation language or of the wind blowing where it listed in our week-day friend's discourses. At Fullerton the padre's task rather resembled the unearthing and restoration of a Roman tessellated pavement. His was a piecing together of texts and formulæ, sometimes ingeniously enough. When the old-world picture was reconstructed it was interesting as a bit of renovation. A dozen bars of grand music or a stanza of noble poetry would have eclipsed and routed it in my imagination. To have hinted such heresy would have brought down upon oneself fresh purrings from the Rev. Simon Pooss.

The influence of the National Church on the life of our village was a thing apart, for the Oxford Movement had not as yet brought about its subtle standardisation of method and economy. The countryman was in the fields by five o'clock in the morning and worked long hours. As soon as he had seated himself at a Sunday service there came upon him the difficulty of keeping his eyes open and his attention alert. In belief he was, as were his spiritual guides, a medievalist. Anyone who hinted a doubt as to the world having suddenly sprung into being in the period of six statutory days would have been banned as a heretic.

In the village we had a Methodist tailor—Bill Burt by name—who luridly described our parish as "a va-alley o' dry bo'anes." As, however, his wife was a poor hunted

creature and rumour had it that her husband beat her, his strictures on the inner life of our community fell on deaf ears.

The musical side of our worship was achieved by the aid of a barrel organ. This machine ground out long or short metre to order. We likewise had sackbut and psaltery and, in combination, the growling voices of the men and the shrill tones of the womenfolk in unison. A few miles away from us was a village which had acquired for its church a musical box, the repertoire of which consisted of hymn tunes and secular ditties of the day. On the first occasion of its use a large congregation assembled. The mechanism was set in motion and duly panted out the accompaniment to a hymn, but when the parson's daughter, who had the thing in hand, sought to dam the flood of melody, her efforts were in vain. The concern simply would not stop, let her charm it never so wisely. The service could not proceed and finally the organ, frantically protesting, had to be carried into the churchyard. There its dying ditties, defiant to the last, were "Drops of brandy" and "Go to the Devil and shake yourself."

Under the Pooss handicap I learnt to dissemble my true sentiments. The breezy talk of our father was as stepping stones leading upward. He had many a time told us that Brahmin and Mahomedan folk regarded every creed save their own as the invention of the Devil. Thus was it also, he used to say, with our home-bred Brahmins and Mahomedans. Thus, too, I said to myself, was it with my pastor and master. When he started a disquisition in church, my thoughts were wont to wander away into a wonderland of my own creating. The cloud-capped mirage I had watched from Newhaven pier, sunset across the miles of Jersey rock, the mysterious passing of our father and my own part in that tragedy, fell upon me with far more reality than the dramas at secondhand of Mr. Pooss.

I was shepherded from Monday morning till Saturday night. True, I had a pony of my own, and on rare occasions scampered off for an hour at home. There my good luck did not lose in my descant about it. Victory listened all eyes and ears as to a fable of romance.

Like other folk of imagination—especially such of

childish years—I longed for spells of solitude, to escape the stir unprofitable. Mr. and Mrs. Fullerton were “Uncle John” and “Aunt Maria” to me now. They did everything in their power to spoil me, and yet through it all ran such good heart and intent that even their foibles left a flavour of well-wishing. I could not help feeling myself imperceptibly losing some of the hardihood and self-reliance of old days. Our existence savoured of the hot-house. Every now and then, when a gale was blowing, I would jump on Reform’s back and gallop across Fullerton Heath at top speed.

“Bless the boy,” Aunt Maria would say, on my return, “why, my dear, one would think you were a wild boy and had been riding in a steeplechase.”

Her own days were spent in tepid and placid fashion and she measured my corn by her own bushel. Uncle John had levelled down to her ideals and, between them, I stood a good chance of settling into a confirmed milksop and mollicoddle for life.

There was a butcher boy on Fullerton Green who used to be sent his rounds on a pony with a dash of blood in him. On the heath we boys not seldom met and ran races, putting our nags at any grip or bit of hawth that came in our way. These exploits were not reported when I got home. How Tom Gripps explained the blown state of Bruiser when he reached his master’s shop again I don’t know. It was, in my estimation, rare sport. Aunt Maria’s dictum about steeplechasing was nearer the mark than she guessed.

Mr. Pooss and I ambled in a mild way through the borderland of the classics. I can never thank him enough for his assiduity in tracking our course through much good English literature, especially back and forth through Shakespeare’s plays. These he taught me to read aloud somewhat in the manner of the stage. Under his tuition I soon learned to formulate my own nascent efforts in literary style. CIPHERING and fluent handwriting came to me almost imperceptibly. Unconsciously I was being founded in the bare rudiments of an English education. That, surely, is the greatest gift to any child of normal intelligence. It is as the legacy of the talents, wherein whoso will must minister unto himself.

Uncle John was not a scholar. He was just a plain

English gentleman, to whom the nearest-to-hand service to his neighbour and homespun duties were the horizon bounding every day. His little essay as a sportsman in purchasing the *Mallard* was rather frowned upon by Aunt Maria after the hairbreadth 'scape at Newhaven, which had brought me within the ring fence of their regard.

It is strange that with every "blessing," with every whim and fancy catered for, I had sometimes to whip up my affection for my self-appointed guardians, truly the kindest and most indulgent mentors and friends a rough country lad ever fell amongst. Had they presided over my destiny, coming on the scene a few years earlier, they would infallibly have spoilt me utterly. I should have grown up soft and emasculate. As it was, I had seen the rude, rough turmoil underlying the issues of life of all English folk, save that of the so-called "favoured few." I perceived that such favour was often of an inverted type. Easy-going luxury could never breed the strain of hard-hitting Britons, who had wrestled and thrown the world when Boney well-nigh downed us all.

I have said that my pony's name was Reform. When the mad old King died miserably and his son reigned in his stead, there were heaps of our Sussexers who acclaimed the new man a hero. In truth he was more than half as mad as his father. He had persuaded himself that he commanded a troop of cavalry at Waterloo, as all the world knows. True, he had done his best to break his worthless neck by driving a coach-and-four for a wager down Keere Hill at Lewes. That was probably his most heroic exploit, his *summum bonum*. However, his follies had become history. The man had passed to his account. Now we were ruled over by a breezy sailor king.

Four years had crept away like a dial hand since that morning looming up in my memory like ancient history, when the *Mallard* ran for safety to Newhaven, and I had entered into my kindgom at Fullerton Park. I was "rising" seventeen. Uncle John, although one of the class whom the mob orators denounced—a landowner—nevertheless was an ardent advocate of reasonable reform.

"They rage furiously against us, Waterloo," he was wont to say. "'Tis the yeoman blood that has saved England in the past. The world was built by the World-Builder for the many, not for the few. Feudalism is

dying, not as great Cæsar fell, wrapping the mantle of Imperial tradition about him, for each of its units is squabbling to get a bigger slice of plunder than his neighbour."

Uncle John was rather given to this declamatory method of statement. Now for myself, my upbringing had given me the priceless possession of knowing the true annals of the poor. Their un murmuring patriotism had been proved on a hundred battlefields, in deathless sea-struggles, but I had looked more intimately into the sad patient eyes of workers, the toilers stubbornly facing the forlorn hopes of daily hardship. War had been like a towering wave, lifting the life of our people under one supreme impulse. We could never, as a race, be as we were in the pre-war twilight of our fate. A new world was dawning for all men, and to the worker was due his share in fashioning it.

In our ordered economy at Fullerton, I found my day's garments spread ready to my hand, meals appeared as if brought by magic at the hands of beneficent genii. In the gardens, which were laid out in the formal pattern of carpet gardening and shrubbery, were three gardeners, whose duty it was to tie up and clip and water and wait generally on Providence. In the house, from the butler, who might have been a dignitary in the Church or sat on the Treasury Bench, so awe-inspiring was he, and so through all the gamut of maids down to those in scullery and still-room, apparent tranquillity reigned. The lads, who hissed at the horses and brought our harness to the state of a polished mirror, were ready for "a bit o' pross," as they say in Yorkshire. Our state coach might have taken its place in a Roman triumph, judging by its majestic movements. The coachman's cheeks had the bloom of a ripe plum. The footman was magnificent. "Powder-yedded" and in the radiance of pink calves he shone resplendent on the box seat, as Aunt Maria made her stately procession through our country lanes.

Sometimes I went with her on visits of state. Thus it befell that on one occasion we drove over to Stanmer. No sooner had we been ushered into the house than the young lord came forward to greet us. He exhibited as of yore no assumption of the war-paint and trappings in which he might have revelled. He recognized me at once and in a few minutes made an excuse to show me the

stables, while his mother entertained Aunt Maria. There we ran into Trafalgar. It must have been six months since we two had met. How glad I was to see him again. I would have gone to the world's end for Trafalgar in the old days.

"Why, you young popinjay," was his salutation. "He's like a doctored sparrow in a canary's suit, my lord." His lordship grinned and so, in truth, did I. Although I would not have admitted it, even to Trafalgar, it was pretty near the mark. One of the stable lads brought out and cantered a nag offered my lord for purchase by Farmer Weller, of Kingston. My sharp young eyes caught a blemish which neither the groom nor my lord had noticed.

"Take back your rash judgment, Trafalgar," quoth my lord, indulgently, "this lad will do."

I was more proud of myself after this dictum than if I had stumbled, with broken knees, through half a page of Cicero under the eyes of Mr. Pooss. Sooth to say I promptly assumed an air of bucolic knowingness which speedily brought about my undoing. I forget the exact incident, but I followed up my late critical success by some cocksure comment, which drew forth a rattling laugh from my lord.

"Come on," he sang out, "let's get back to the talk of village fêtes on the green."

I was thus a bit crestfallen when we made our reappearance in the drawing-room. Aunt Maria was discussing *in extenso* some provident scheme of good-hearted intent of hers for the villagers. There was no end to her desire to benefit the poor folk about her. The merits and methods of this particular bit of philanthropic endeavour were amplified between the two ladies over "a dish of tay water." My lord and I partook of the social rite, although adventuring little or no part in the talk of social betterment. My lord at last said truly: "When corn rules high and wages are good, there is plenty of cabbage and bacon on the labourer's table. That's the best gift that can be given him, always provided he is taught to read, write and cipher. Britons never shall be slaves. We have no right to treat our hinds as if they were such."

This he said, diving into his waistcoat pocket for a pinch of rappee. It seemed to me to clinch the argument. When Aunt Maria rose to take her leave, "What is to be

done with young Waterloo, Madam?" asked my lord, genially.

"College comes next," replied Aunt Maria, with determination. "My husband and I hope he will be a comfort to us both in years to come."

"Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old enough sit under the branches thereof," quoth my lord, laughingly.

Aunt Maria received this sally with her frosty smile, in which yet lay the soul of kindness. My lord escorted us to the carriage and we drove solemnly away behind the backs of our superlative lackeys.

CHAPTER IV

THE talk of College for me had of late grown more insistent. It was at first but nebulous, mere misty possibility, but as the months slipped away Mr. Pooss referred to it with growing frequency. I could not help noticing that Uncle John looked a bit apprehensive when the subject came up for debate. Also, I noted a general embarrassment in his manner now and again. He appeared absorbed and anxious, and from time to time spent a few days away from Fullerton on the affairs of the estate. Aunt Maria was too much engrossed in chronicling the small beer of existence to pay much heed to the subtle change which I observed creeping over the master of Fullerton.

After our visit to Stanmer a few months sped noiselessly away, each member of our household shuttling through his or her daily task as of yore.

One morning Mr. Pooss came quietly into my bedroom. Uncle John had left for London two days before. It was glorious July weather and the time must have been four or five o'clock. He had never done such a thing before and I started up in bed a bit scared.

"What is it, sir?" I asked.

"Waterloo," he began, and then he paused so long that real alarm took possession of me. "Be brave, my boy," he said. "I have news which will shock you."

"Tell me, sir, quickly, please," I said.

"Slip on your clothes and come with me," he answered. "My tidings will distress you. I hope you will not forget all our lessons of courage and fortitude."

Again he paused and looked at me, with sad pathos in his glance.

"Your Aunt Maria," he said at length, "has died in

her sleep. For her, my boy, it is the crown, for us the cross."

This bewildering drama fell upon me like a tropic tempest. Our father's death had been as the pageant of a dream. True, we no longer saw him, but at every hour of the day, even while the tooth of our bereavement was keen, his presence seemed with us still. He was at my side in the watches of the night. I heard him speak a score of times each day. But this blow fell like the shooting of the bolt of the guillotine. The ordered sequence of Nature was as it were shattered at its base; the drama of life had suffered eclipse; the times were out of joint. I stared at Mr. Pooss dry-eyed. When my father died, the geyser of my pent-up affection burst forth in lamentation and despair. Now I was as one stunned. Aunt Maria had grown with the years closer to my heart, but our intercourse had been so ordered and formal that it must perforce take time to realize all she had become to me.

I could but utter a few incoherent words and then in silence and tears follow Mr. Pooss to the opposite wing of the house. There Aunt Maria lay in the simple majesty of death, every hard line in her face relaxed. Mr. Pooss and I knelt and offered heartfelt supplications for the peace-parted soul. Without, the thrushes whistled on the lawn, the larks poured forth a wave of rippling melody. There swept over me a torrent of comfort, of unfathomed meaning in the issues of being. "She is made one with Nature," I said to myself. I rose in an atmosphere of fresh resolve. It did not seem to me then that the shocks of chance could vitally touch us mortal folk. The *Ultima Thule* of our souls lay like an undiscovered country spread before the ken of an earth-wanderer. True, men's bodies might be shattered in world strife, but their souls must go marching on. Whither? I asked myself. I passed into the seclusion of the rose garden to wrestle it out, between hope and fear. Our head gardener, who had been twenty years at Fullerton, drew near as I sat in this strange mood of introspection.

"'Tis a bad job, this, sir," he said. "The best mistress ever man had, sir."

I could but make some conventional reply and drop back into mute self-questioning. 'Twas only yesterday

that with Mr. Pooss I had read the noble scene of Queen Katherine's approaching end—

“ Cause the musicians play me that sad note
I named my knell, while I sit meditating
On that celestial harmony I go to.”

Then, as the master-magician draws the scene, the dream fades, the Queen awakes once more to earth. How heart-wrung is her cry :

“ Spirits of peace, where are ye ? Are ye all gone ?
And leave me here in wretchedness behind ye ? ”

The tragedy of the great prelate's fall hung too like a pillar of cloud and fire about my imagination. How long I mused in this maze of old forgotten things and new insistent problems I cannot tell. The day was so supremely fair that it robbed the visit of Death's angel of horror. Darkness could not co-exist with the balmy breath of summer, when day and night, twin sisters of the light, kiss each other.

In the days I write of the forms of law curtseyed to county magnates. The troublesome business of a crowner's quest was held to be unnecessary. Swift messengers a-horseback were dispatched to summon Mr. Fullerton home. In his absence Mr. Pooss assumed the direction of affairs. A cousin of Aunt Maria—Horatio Hardy by name—was apprised of our calamity and he arrived from his Kentish village on the following day, before we had tidings of Mr. Fullerton.

Mr. Hardy was a tall man, the brightness of whose eyes denoted an ardent disposition. He fell into his place in the household unobtrusively, in that effortless communion of sympathy which is the gift of rare souls. His name was a name to conjure with in England at that day. The halo of glory still illumined the memory of our national hero and of his immortal ending. Our Mr. Hardy was in some way related to Lord Nelson's chosen friend. I instantly recognized that he and I would be “ kind,” as the Elizabethans would have phrased it. The subtle incommunicable charm which hangs for us about companion intelligences attracted me from the moment I first clapped eyes on him. He was perhaps twenty-five years my senior.

The weather still lapped us in measureless animal content. The funeral was fixed three days ahead, but I heard merely distant murmurs and hints of it. Nearly five years had sped away since the morning when the *Mallard* had run for dear life to Newhaven. Throughout all those years Aunt Maria had spread around me the continual presence of her loving care.

As I dreamed and mused upon this history, so strange and eventful in its coming, wrapped in such halcyon calm during its continuance, I seemed to look down into the bed of a trackless ocean pellucid and unsullied, from which sprang a magic castle. White fairy sails flecked the bosom of the deep, whole argosies of wondrous glamour. He who wrought the splendour of their warp and woof dwelt beyond mortal ken, in the light which no man can approach unto. The marvel and the mystery of all His unintelligible world was an absorbing presence, an enigma passing knowledge. Human puppets as we are, who play our little parts upon the stage of life and then are heard no more, do we but move in a vain shadow?

The Hebrew has enriched the world with a supreme literature. What has he to say of the untutored aspirations of men's natures?

"Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead? Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark? The living, the living shall praise Thee."

That is his message. The dropped curtain is the end.

Now as I thus wandered in mazes of my own imagining, in worlds not realized, the golden sunlight was fading in the west. I paced our velvet lawn. The scent of the roses and the hum of the bees filled the background of the picture. Surely this world was so fair that it could not be mere phantom. "It is so beautiful that it must be true." I had read that saying somewhere. Was it not the profoundest of all utterances? What, then, is beauty, what truth? Under the ban of the arch foe of every son of Adam must we not use Hamlet's dictum, "Words, words, words?"

At that moment a hand was clapped on my shoulder. Mr. Hardy walked at my side. As we strolled in a sympathy too deep for mere talk, a thrush in a laburnum hard by burst into her evensong of ripe flutage.

"They heard the voice of the Lord God, walking in the

garden in the cool of the day,'” quoth Mr. Hardy quietly.

“Yes, sir,” I made answer. “But what does He say?”

“Life and breath and all things,” was his reply.

“Isn't that a bit vague?” I asked him.

“Look here, Waterloo,” said Mr. Hardy. “There was once an old man chained in Nero's prison awaiting his execution. Within a few days or weeks of that same execution, he wrote to an ardent boy, whom he called his own son in the faith. He made the tremendous assertion that the Christ had abolished death.”

“Would not Socrates have said very much the same thing in different words, sir, on the eve of his martyrdom?” I questioned.

“No doubt he would,” replied Mr. Hardy. “Does that make Paul's statement any the weaker? Surely not. Creeds and formularies may vary as do the fashions of men's hats, the ultimate word endures.”

As we paced on, the dusk drew us. We twain were haloed about by forces before which the dark shadow of death paled like a guilty thing surprised.

“Sons and daughters of light there are, Waterloo,” Mr. Hardy resumed. “In a lifetime one may meet two or three. Yet even the *beati* are apt to fall by pride or lack of sympathy. They grow too good for this wicked world, as we say. I need not remind a classical scholar like Waterloo,” he added, with a smile, “of the old Greek legend and of how its hero was almost but not quite immortal. ‘Not to have been dipped in Lethe's stream could save the son of Thetis from to die.’ Those friends in homespun in whom the divine spark glows are the salt of the earth, my lad. Their friendship does not keep one eye on the weathercock. For the most part they have learnt obedience through suffering. Suffering—obedience—perfection—those are the links in the chain. The vast majority of human folk, in order to reach redemption, have to descend into hell and rise again from the dead.”

A little later Mr. Pooss came out to bid us in to supper. In spite of his good intent his words were as the darkening of counsel. Next morning Uncle John arrived and the keenness of his bereavement brought our loss afresh upon us all.

The following day was fixed for the funeral. What unreal mockery a good deal of it seemed. All our villagers were present, my mother too was there. It was a season of real distress to me. The trappings and wrappages of custom struck me as mere heathenry.

On our return to the Manor, the family lawyer—Mr. Rohu was his name—read Aunt Maria's will. It filled me with amazement and took every one else present utterly by surprise, for thus it ran :

“ I will and devise all that I die possessed of to my dear adopted son, Waterloo Joyce.”

It had been written only a fortnight before and witnessed by two of the maids.

Mr. Rohu actually came up a few minutes later, shook me by the hand and congratulated me. His congratulations filled me with indignation. They implied that a possible change of fortune could compensate me for the passing of a dear friend. Such an idea struck me as merely horrible.

I took an early opportunity to draw Uncle John into his special little sanctum, in order to assure him that no testamentary change could alter our domestic arrangements as they then stood. A tear glistened in his eye as he thanked me. He then imparted to me the cause of that alteration in mien which I had noted to be creeping over him for weeks past. He had not revealed his anxiety to Aunt Maria, knowing how apt she was to worry over trifles, guessing the effect upon her of a cardinal reversal of fortune. That such reversal was conceivable his story plainly indicated.

“ This house and estate and all their contents are now yours, Waterloo,” he said. “ As for me, if the threatened lawsuit succeeds, my subsistence will vanish like a cloud. I shall have to come to you for a job on the estate ”—he wanly smiled as he said it—“ or take my fortunes in my hands and venture forth into the wilds as many a better man has had to do before me.”

I reiterated that nothing Aunt Maria had written before her death could alter the relations between him and me, yet even as I spoke there appeared to rise a phantom of distrust and estrangement, marring the easy confidence of other days. I spurned the idea, but nevertheless it lurked in the background of my imagination.

“Ah, Waterloo,” quoth Uncle John, “how many a career has been blighted by the caprice of fortune. In a hundred households to-day she resembles the witch who casts her spell on young and old alike. The apple of discord is as Dead Sea fruit, poisoning, filling with rank speculation, misinterpreting. From it spring feuds, lack of charity, harsh judgments, silences, vain regret.”

I pressed his hand. “Dear Uncle John,” I said, “tell me the whole story and then forget it.”

From his narrative it appeared that matters stood thus. A rival claimant had sprung up to that portion of the Fullerton estate over which Uncle John had hitherto exercised undisputed sway. The ground of the rival's claim was that Uncle John's grandfather, who had been a soldier of fortune under Clive in India, was not married to his grandmother at the time of his father's birth. The grandfather, Harry Fullerton, had been a bit of a Mohock in his day. He had fallen desperately in love with a reigning toast of the roaring blades about town—“Brown Bess,” of Drury Lane. Bess was a Scotch lass, Malcolm by name. There was no doubt a marriage had taken place. It was the date of that marriage which was in doubt. Shortly after the knot was tied, Harry Fullerton sailed for India, and from that time all trace of him was lost. A deed giving the age of Uncle John's father as seven months existed. The evidence of the date of this deed and the presumptive evidence of the date of Harry Fullerton's departure for India furnished the ground of a claim to the estate by a distant cousin.

The threatened action was, said Uncle John's London lawyer, a bit of impudent blackmail. The claimant was hoping to mulct the property of a big sum, in order to secure a settlement out of Court. From Uncle John's point of view, the other side doubtless argued, it might be policy for him to pay heavy blood money, in order to retain the estates undisturbed. The London lawyer opposed any compromise on these lines.

“London lawyers always do,” quoth Uncle John. “‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians.’ As my man probably says, there is plenty of fat in this case for everybody, and the estate can't run away. This remote cousin of mine, from all I can hear, is a man of straw. There is someone behind him pulling the strings.”

The day of the funeral, with its distressing enigmas, had come and gone. I was at leisure to probe matters more closely with Uncle John and Horatio Hardy, who stayed on at Fullerton Park at my earnest desire. It began to dawn upon me that all the servants in the house and gardens, were now my servants. I should have to pay them. In spite of the wildness of the idea I could not escape the obligations thrust upon me.

"Look here, Waterloo," said Mr. Hardy, "you must either renounce all claim on the property left you or assume the duties of ownership. In view of the tangle in your Uncle John's affairs, I advise you to take your place as owner here. If the case against Mr. Fullerton is pushed successfully, your property would then be as it were, the citadel in a siege after the town had fallen."

The dual ownership of Fullerton Park had arisen from the fact that Uncle John and Aunt Maria had been cousins. No attempt was made to dispute the proprietorship of Aunt Maria to the mansion, park and home farm. Her estate had descended from another branch of the family.

"You now own the kernel of the nut, Waterloo," quoth Uncle John. The fact that he did not resent the intrusion of a young cuckoo into his domestic nest touched me greatly. How many men, I said to myself, would have likened me to the fabled snake, torpid from frost but restored to vitality within the jacket of the passing countryman? We all know how the wayfarer was stung by the brute, his kindness of heart notwithstanding. I was, as I have said, in a strait as to whether I ought not to renounce my inheritance. In the end, Uncle John urged me to follow Mr. Hardy's advice, giving the same reason for my so doing as our new-found friend.

So at last it was agreed that I, a poor village lad, with no claim to aught save the toil of my own hands, should become a landed proprietor with a stake in the county. What was to be done now—presently? We took the bailiff into council. It appeared that Aunt Maria's rent-roll had for many years stood at about £3,500 a year, Uncle John's at rather less. There was of course no partition of income, the combined resources flowed into one common coffer, which was drawn upon without a suggestion of any boundary line between its double source. The bruit of law proceedings came upon us as might the

threat of war to a state. Again Mr. Hardy advised that the twin streams of Pactolus should be treated as separate accounts, that Uncle John's income should be kept distinct from mine, in order that any reversal of fortune on his side might not imperil the support of the home.

Thus we decided. The peculiar and abrupt terms of Aunt Maria's demise, evidently made without legal advice, had placed the control of all her wealth in my hands without let. I was under no direction from trustees or guardians, save such as the Law Courts might determine. Her resources were all mine own and unfettered. I should surely have been less than human if this strange throw of Fortune's dice had not elated me. It was not as if I had been born in the purple. Under the old régime, had I toiled by hard-wrought endeavour to the command at the age of fifty of a tea clipper, such a climax would have been the acme of my life's success. I hardly dared lift my eyes so high as that pinnacle of authority. Now Dame Fortune had tossed me Joseph's portion in mere light-hearted gaiety.

There was small wonder that I had to find my way down to the lake in the park, to row out into the midst of the water lilies, and that there, with the coots watching and diving, and chuckling about me mate to mate, I dreamt dreams and saw visions. One thing grew insistent. I must review the situation and act. The lake, I mused, was not a stream bearing me unheeding on my way. Even thus was my destiny. The servants had to be paid, household affairs to be kept in motion. The machine would not run without guidance.

In order to make the modern reader understand the cauldron of my thoughts and the direction in which my resolutions shaped themselves, it is necessary that I should throw a side light on the current complexion of national affairs. It is easy enough now to say that the locomotive had just arrived to the stimulus of civilization. To-day that statement reads like a triviality, but in the early thirties the advent of that *monstrum horrendum* was a portent that eclipsed all else. "Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing," loomed to one set of folks so menacing as it, to the rest of our people of such vital potentiality. England and the world had been slumbering as if drugged by the spirit of medievalism. Now there

arose a mechanic named George Stephenson, whose mission it was to overthrow kings and principalities and powers. The Norse legend of Asgaard was being re-enacted in sober verity before our eyes.

Half of the folk of England denounced the innovator as a crazy maniac,—nevertheless all recognized that inevitable revolution was in the air. We had it dinned into our ears that the railway would mean the extinction of the horse, that hay and oats would go out of cultivation. Cattle, so it was said, would stampede at the sight of these snorting inventions of the Devil. Birds flying across the track would be poisoned, foxes and pheasants would disappear for ever. The Cassandras, big and little, were having the time of their lives. One of these ventured to assert that hens would be too much perturbed in the future to lay eggs. The destruction and ruin of the countryside by agencies worse than would have been an invasion of Boney's legions were the least of the evils predicted. All the world now knows that when Stephenson proposed to state in evidence before a Parliamentary Committee his opinion that trains would one day attain a speed of twenty miles an hour, his counsel rebuked him for his folly, saying that such a statement would infallibly damn the whole project in hand, that its author would be regarded as a Bedlam visionary. Every upholder of the established order was up in arms against this innovator and uprooter of tradition. What of our coaches, which were the first in the world in comfort as in speed? What of our inns, crusted with centuries of tradition of cosiness? Henceforth the hapless traveller would be in worse plight than are calves being carted to the butcher.

A review that had uniformly championed lost causes cast unmeasured contempt on the bare suggestion of locomotives travelling twice as fast as the stage coach. The poor fools who were deluded by such specious nonsense were advised to suffer themselves to be fired off upon one of Congreve's ricochet rockets, rather than to trust their necks to a machine moving at such a pace.

It is necessary for me to tell the story of this amazing struggle, as my own future was bound up with it. The sturdy figure of Stephenson facing the trained antagonism of advocates, who represented three-fourths of the wealth and vested interests of England, appealed to me as that

of a gladiator in the arena, matched against net and sword. He has himself said: "I was subjected to the cross-examination of eight or ten barristers, purposely, as far as possible, to bewilder me. Some member of the Committee asked if I was a foreigner and another hinted that I was mad, but I put up with every rebuff and went on with my plan, determined not to be put down."

All this had taken place but a few years before. Now the pendulum had swung over. Mad speculation was the order of the day. The objectors of a year or two back had been snowed under ridicule and contempt,—“first-class asses” was the popular verdict of them. England was in the throes of the Railway Mania. Schemes sprang up like mushrooms in the night. Sane criticism was routed as a return to the follies of the Dark Ages, to which investors had said good-bye for ever. Of this wave of speculative energy we in our quiet Sussex homestead, felt the impulse. Those on its crest came among us as evangels, and dull indeed must be the muddy rascal in whom its stir did not raise expectation.

So far our county had been inviolate, but sharp-witted and light-fingered gentry were busy exploiting the potentiality of a London-on-Sea at Brighton, as Brighthelmstone had now come to be called. In that day the wearied cit was wont to drive for recreation to the pretty villages of Norwood or Croydon. The beautiful woods lying between these hamlets were a favourite jaunt for those to whom the sylvan charm of Greenwich Park or the breezy heights of Hampstead had grown conventional. The rural approaches to the great city had become comparatively safe, so that the tonic of a brace of blunderbusses thrust in at the window of the traveller's carriage, and the hoarse voices of masked ruffians demanding toll were pretty well out of date.

Still the predatory instinct flourished exceedingly. It must not be forgotten that in Surrey, on our borders, were laid the first railway lines in the world. These were called the Surrey Iron Railway, and the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Railway. The first ran from the Thames at Wandsworth, thence by Merton and Mitcham to Croydon. The other carried this same line on alongside the high road to the lime works at Merstham, where it ended at the "Joliffe Arms." Of about the same date as these

railways is their twin undertaking, the Croydon Canal, starting from the Grand Surrey Canal at Deptford. This waterway ran through Sydenham and Norwood to Croydon. The lack of a sufficient water supply to its summit section at Forest Hill brought about its ignominious collapse as a waterway.

It is true that the pioneers lost the money they embarked in these concerns. Such is ever the fate of the pioneer. His rôle is to fight his way through dismal swamps or over snow-besieged passes, in order that the prudent, profiting by his folly, may pass along his track dryshod. But railways had come to stay. No one can gainsay the argument of fact. Thirty years ago a single horse had dragged twelve wagonloads of stuff from Merstham to Croydon in a little over an hour and a half. Now in our day had sprung up Trevithick, the annihilator of time and distance, and, on his heels, came George Stephenson, with his rough Northumbrian brogue, his shrewd mother wit. Here was a new St. George fighting for England. Stupidity in high places had already felt the strength of his arm. He had grown in popular esteem into a champion before whose lance old shibboleths melted away. Men spoke of him as if he were destined to bourgeon forth as herald of the dawn. Millennium would surely follow in the wake of the miracles he had wrought. The success of the Stockton and Darlington Railway had turned folks' wits. England and the world would be thereafter transformed. The Black Death of War would vanish from the earth.

Thus was it that, even in our little backwater of Fullerton, we felt the impulse of the mighty tidal beat, silently traversing the ocean of humanity's imagination. All these fancied gifts lying in the lap of the Gods, which were destined to overcome us like a summer's cloud, lay in the background of men's consciousness. We heard of them as of tidings of revolution in remote lands. Their tales of wonder came to us by hearsay. They were not of our village world.

Meantime the inner working of the estate had to be kept in motion. It was decided that Mr. Rohu and I must perforce visit London to regularize my position as owner of Fullerton. Uncle John was to accompany us and at my special request Mr. Hardy agreed to go too. Thus

was I for the first time to see the giant city of the world with my own eyes. Could there be a bigger event than for me, a country lad, a few days ago dependent on others for the supply of every want, to enter London as a landed proprietor? I confess the prospect brought about by the turn of Fortune's wheel, started brain fireworks within. I began to see myself as a mighty fine fellow. The news of my sudden access of importance had spread like wildfire through the household and village. Now wherever I turned, were adulation and a desire to forestall my every wish.

We had decided to drive across to Brighton and thence pick up the Red Rover coach. This coach made one of the most famous drives in England. All the world to-day knows the road between the twin capitals. Few can realize what it then was—a hamlet here and there, parks, woodland and farmsteads, tilled to the acme of perfection and rolling up to the very gates of the parent city. The Red Rover's magical run was made in four hours and twenty minutes. The relays of horses, each fidgeting to do its galloping stage, the smartness of the lads who trotted them out, threw off cloths and led away the smoking beasts, the bustle, the cheeriness, the cockney catch words and greetings, the hasty snatches of food and drink, the lore of the road, still in its heyday and prime, the gruffness of the confirmed coachgoer, the ecstasy of the novice, all the wonder and rattle and stir of the hour fell upon me as a revelation. According to the evangels of the new gospel of the iron horse, this marvellous picture of supreme ease in travel was destined to pass away and evaporate like an exhalation. In spite of the abounding energy the vitality of our day's coach ride, I could not help moralizing that we were listening to the death song of an institution doomed to extinction. To my imagination, the dead hand was visibly creeping over it all.

CHAPTER V

LONDON! That word had often stirred my pulses like the sound of a trumpet. Now and then one of our village folk had made his pilgrimage thither. For the rest of his days a halo rested round his brow. He loomed up much as to the Mahomedan is he who, having braved the perils of the road to Mecca, has returned to his tribe with a whole skin. That I should ever visit the great city, save perhaps as a waif of the road, or afloat at the end of a voyage, had hardly entered my head. Now I was advancing toward it as a conqueror, with my body-guard about me. Putting matters bluntly, my sudden accession of fortune had just a wee bit gone to my head. I was a trifle intoxicated with success and inclined to attribute the changes of my lot to some inherent super-merit of my own. 'Tis a heady wine we quaff when that fickle jade Fortune bids us drink to our next merry meeting. The sparkling nectar sends up sky rockets within. To outward seeming I was rather in a pondering frame of mind, but the hubbub of my senses went racketting on nevertheless.

On the box seat beside the driver sat a big man, loud of tongue, who saw humour in all the little incidents of the drive. He had a heavy jowl and a lowering glance, but his sallies and impromptus started an undercurrent of mirth rippling amongst us outside passengers. We had no dull moments. The man was not a wit, but his cheeriness, real or assumed, grew infectious. How with such a glorious sky overhead, the kind of cattle they drove in the Red Rover clattering merrily along the grand highway that led to the fairyland of London, any son of man could be dull it would surely pass human wit to divine.

The guard roused the echoes in every town and village we passed through. Almost before we appeared to have got into our stride after the last change of horses, the box seat man sang out, "Old Father Paul is looking down

upon ye on the starboard hand." I glanced about me and saw gleaming in the enchanting glamour of its mist, a mighty dome and a cross of gold pointing to the stilly heavens. The big man beamed upon me. He held out his hand, which I could not but grasp. He fervently wrung my hand as if he had been a lifelong friend. Then he burst into a rollicking ditty :

“ Couronné par Janneton
D'un simple bonnet de coton,
Dit-on.
Oh ! oh ! oh ! oh ! ah ! ah ! ah ! ah !
Quel petit roi c'était là !
La ! la ! ”

Then he gripped my hand afresh and laughed aloud. His laugh started us all off and we were a boisterous crew as we clattered between the Southwark meadows. The farmsteads were giving place now to the mansions of the London cits, each with its neat patch of garden and a field or two about it for cattle and geese. There were big marshes here and there, which reminded me of Newhaven, and brought back to my imagination a strange longing for the old dim days of happy penury. Now the driver whipped up his team and folk flocked to their doors to huzza as we dashed past, the foam-flecked horses panting yet eager to show their mettle.

Soon we sped past the parish church of the hamlet of Southwark. Hard by it was the Marshalsea, at which our big friend in front wagged a warning finger at me, bidding me beware of entering in. “ Janneton is a hard mistress,” quoth he. Mr. Hardy then pointed out the spot whereon the wooden O of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre used to stand ; also on the opposite side of the way the quaint old hostelries, one of which has been rendered immortal by Chaucer, for the Canterbury Pilgrims were wont to set out from it. By and by we came to the mighty church where Shakespeare's brother, “ a player,” lies buried. How near that little touch brings us to the glory that once haloed our Muse of Fire.

Anon we reached the river and crossed the wonderful bridge Rennie had just finished. “ New bridges for old,” said our talkative friend in front. Every stone, every shop on the old landmark of London had, ten years ago, been lichened over with history, Uncle John told us.

Over the bridge, across the water, on our left hand was the majestic pile of Fishmongers' Hall, having its painted wooden statue of Sir William Walworth, the man whose dagger stabbed Wat Tyler. Now we entered into the very heart of the swarming hive of London. Lord! what a clatter we made as we went spanking through the narrow streets. The roadways were paved with stone blocks, the paths with cobbles, and the roar of the traffic was deafening, but I was all eyes for the wonders among which we lived and moved. Every nook and corner was thronged with surging crowds of busy folk. Every man seemed too intent on his own affairs to turn his head to watch us pass. How our driver threaded his way through the throng of loaded wains and carts, and avoided the foot passengers who dodged under the horses' noses, I don't know.

Anon we passed the grim dungeon of Newgate. There people stood about in knots, as if their curiosity was a bit aroused. For the most part the Londoner appears to make it a point of honour to take all things for granted. You cannot surprise him. He is like the Moor, who professes at least to regard all things in Heaven and earth as not worthy a second glance. Our talkative friend by shouting and gesture, gave us to understand that on the morrow there was to be a big hanging and it was this fact that drew the curious to the spot opposite the prison. The exit of the hapless wretches who suffered the last penalty of the law was, he said, "always a draw."

We left on the right the famous church where the bell tolls for that gloomy tragedy, and then made a deep descent. After shuttling our way through more winding streets packed with busy citizens, we finally were brought up, after a gallant canter, at the "Golden Cross." This was to be our inn for the time we spent in London. Hard by stood the noble mansion of the Duke of Northumberland, with the lion on its roof, printed on the skyline. You cannot fail to recognize that sign, for the brute's tail stands straight out like a pump handle.

Just round the corner is the grand statue of King Charles in bronze. I afterwards heard the story of this same statue—of how the Commonwealth men made it over to a rogue to be broken up. He, like the wily rascal he was, buried it and set about to do a roaring trade in relics,

purporting to have fabricated them from the bronze of the statue of the martyred king. The Royalists flocked to buy mementoes of their dead master; the Roundheads bought because they were glad to have a visible reminder of the King's end. When the whirligig of time brought about the Restoration, our crafty knave unearthed his hidden treasure and reaped a fresh harvest of guineas.

As to the "Golden Cross" itself, it was a stately redbrick hostelry, picked out with stone facings. It reminded me of some of our old Lewes mansions on School Hill on a larger scale.

When we had shaken down and our valises were stowed in their several quarters, we all rendezvoused in the parlour behind the bar, where Mr. Rohu called for a brace of bottles of the special port for which the house was famed. He insisted on Jerry, the coachman, joining us in a glass. Although it was sultry summer weather, our Jehu was muffled in half a dozen coats. Betty, who presided in this sanctum and was known to half London, sang out to him to shed these garments, otherwise the gents would have to set to to skin him like an eel. In a blundering fashion Jerry divested himself of a couple of coats, remarking as he did so, "Mrs. Betty 'as the box seat, gents, and that's nigh 'and to holdin' the ribbons to every mother's son of us on this road." All his masterful ménage of the journey seemed to have deserted him. So we all stood in a circle to drink Betty's health, and she, I suppose according to precedent, added a codicil to the toast, saying, "and confusion to Old Nick's coaches." Then we clinked glasses and swallowed their contents at a gulp.

So far as I was concerned, I already felt myself several inches taller. While Mr. Rohu was refilling our glasses, who should wander in but our talkative friend of the coach?

"Have I your permission, my dear?" he asked, turning to Mistress Betty. She looked uncommonly tart, but said nothing.

"Will you join us in a glass, sir?" quoth Mr. Rohu.

"No reasonable offer refused," replied the stranger. "This reminds me, gents, of the old days when His late Majesty used to stroll into the 'Ship' at Brighton. 'Ashburnham,' he'd say, or 'Tom,' he'd say, 'give me a man that can take his toothful without flinching.'"

Then the company launched into the normal wine bibber's talk of the day. I noted that Uncle John and Mr. Hardy held aloof, although they did not enter any protest. The fact of the matter was that at that time, if a man did not hold his peace when sentiments such as these were being aired, he was put down as a Methodist or a milksop. Meantime I was fidgeting to have a ramble in the great unknown city. The wine had made things spin a bit in my brain.

"Our young friend's noddle is not cast iron, I perceive," said the talkative man. "Many a time and oft have His late Majesty and I joined hands and chanted :

" 'And that I think's a reason fair to fill and drink again.'"

Tommy Moore and Jack Jackson and Dutch Sam, Lord ! how often we've sung the old song together at Carlton House. But I see the captain here is thirsting to be up and out on the warpath. He doesn't forget his classics. What say Bob Logic and Corinthian Tom ? 'Is it to be a turn or two in Bond Street, a strut on the Corinthian Path, a stroll through Piccadilly, or a look in at Tattersall's ?' If our young master will honour me, I'll be his guide, philosopher and friend. *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.*"

I was all on fire to be off. Mr. Hardy drew our new acquaintance aside, and whispered to him : "Assuredly, my dear sir, assuredly," he answered aloud. "I have not moved amongst the first in the land for nothing. I will guard him as the apple of my eye."

Accordingly we two clapped on our hats, left the assembled company to enjoy their port and sallied forth. Just to the west of the hotel a force of navigators was at work.

"'Twill be a place fifty years hence," quoth Ashburnham. "'Tis to be laid out in honour of my Lord Nelson. They already call it Trafalgar Square. Yonder facing us are the King's Mews. There some day, when you and I are dust, will be housed the nation's pictures."

The whole quarter looked squalid enough as we saw it. The workmen were demolishing slums and courts.

"The Caribbee Islands, Porridge Island and Bermudas re swept into the limbo," my companion told me. "Many a time have I feasted at the jolly cookshops in this quarter."

We wandered up a dim alley, past a noble church with a Greek front—St. Martin's, my cicerone said it was.

"Call me Tom," quoth he. "I know your name already. We'll be just Waterloo and Tom to each other for the future."

That seemed all as it should be and we shook hands upon it. We tracked our way through grimy alleys, many of the houses having little gardens in front, with a few mangy shrubs struggling for life in them.

At length we emerged into a wide street. A figure which seemed familiar somehow came along on a bay horse. He was a little man, straight as a ramrod, his coat tight buttoned. From his tall hat to his boots he was spick and span. As he passed along he was saluted by nearly all. He himself in response lifted his hand every few moments, almost like a clockwork figure, looking straight ahead and not turning to right or left.

"The Duke's ageing," said Tom Ashburnham.

The Duke? That, then, was the hero of Waterloo. I felt almost inclined to run after him and tell him that I was the namesake of his great victory.

"Many a time he's said to me," my companion remarked, "'Tom, we wanted men like you when Boney broke loose.'"

So then he had actually talked like a familiar, not only with the late King, but with the Iron Duke. It was evident he was someone pretty important. Before I could shake all these new impressions down into their true perspective, we "struck," as he put it, "Jack Nash's new Rome in London." This was called Regent Street. The foot-ways were spanned over by a roof carried on a grand line of Corinthian columns, along the edge of the curb. The new street's Italian arcade formed a splendid vista.

"Yonder," quoth Tom, jerking his thumb over his left shoulder, "lie the Park and Piccadilly. The 'White Horse Cellar' is alive with coaches from every quarter, but we'll wheel about and follow the Duke," he added.

Now we struck off into a labyrinth of narrower streets and our way zigzagged in and out. Still, I had sharp eyes and noted landmarks here and there. As we threaded our way through a dim alley, I remarked that we seemed getting away from the show parts of the city.

"Aye," replied Tom, "so we seem to be, but London is a strange place, my boy. Palaces are cheek by jowl with hovels. This region is the haunt of the wits and the Muses and, unless I am mistaken, that's more in tune with Waterloo's ideas than scenes of giddy pleasure. We are going now to a club house, where many a time I have cracked a bottle with Byron and the Wizard. Tommy Moore will be there, I don't mind wagering. This is about his usual hour for dropping in."

As he said this, we ourselves dropped in to a grimy little shop, where broadsheets and pamphlets lay about.

"Hullo! Jack," shouted Tom Ashburnham. "Yoicks forrard, my lad."

As he called, there came forth one in a skull cap from the inner parlour, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. I didn't altogether like the look of this new-comer. He was undersized, blear-eyed and his eyes had a furtive cast.

"Now, you Jack Bracebridge," cried Tom gaily, "put your best foot foremost. Has Tommy Moore arrived? I've told my friend here we may meet him about this time. Are any of the boys come? Brougham is not out of Court yet, I daresay. What about Maginn and Grantley Berkeley? Are they sparring still? Has Tom Carlyle dropped in lately, or Hook, has he been?"

"You are a bit early, gents, for the bigwigs," replied the new-comer with a grin. "Step this way and you'll be ready for 'em when they do come. I was just a-goin' to put together the makin' of as pretty a bowl of punch as any of 'em ever sipped."

So saying, he led us along a gloomy passage and into a sunless and frowsy apartment. The chairs were rickety, the ceiling black with the grime of years.

"A dull little room," said Tom, as I glanced about me a bit apprehensively, "but so was the Mermaid's best parlour, I'll wager. Lord! when the wits start off this place is like the arena of Parnassus. It was here that Campbell made his well-known sally. Do ye know it? Scott called here and Campbell shot out this impromptu, as he left the room:

"Quoth the South to the North, 'In your comfortless sky
Not a nightingale sings.' 'True,' the North made reply;
'But your nightingale's warblings I envy them not,
When I think of the strains of my Burns and my Scott.'"

Ashburnham cast a humorous glance at me as he chanted these lines. Then he sang out to the custodian of the premises, who was going out of the room, to hustle along with the liquor, as he and I were a brace of young dogs bent on a frolic about the town. The janitor promptly returned with a bowl of cold punch. He poured out a glass and after adding, as he said, a pinch of bitters, handed it to me. I politely insisted on Ashburnham taking the first glass, but he resolutely refused, saying that I was the guest of the day and, moreover, he added, "bitters never lay easy on my soul." The attendant cut the knot by pouring him out another glass and thereon he promptly lifted this and challenged me to a toast—"The Fair."

I blushed a little. To be candid, the subject of the toast had hitherto been mute to me—a *terra incognita* outside my world.

"Never can you and I believe," quoth Ashburnham, turning to the tapster, "that our young friend here has broken no hearts, has scored no triumphs."

I, like the young booby I was, thereupon assumed an air of killing assurance and gulped down the contents of my glass. In truth the perpetual references to "the flowing bowl" and the habit of indiscriminate tipping, whether the drinkers were thirsty or no, which appeared to be the order of polite society in London, began to pall upon me as a mere nuisance. Hitherto a glass of home-brewed ale, following upon a hard ride, and very rarely a thimbleful of after-dinner port, were my limitations as a toper. Sage reflections such as these on the manners and customs of the day gradually drifted away like a cloud across the horizon of my mind, blotting out all landscape or the sense of proportion in things.

I made an effort to shake off the gathering mist and then a strange sensation ensued. I was on the pier at Newhaven once again and there hung before me Seaford Head, every furze bush upon it clear cut as in a steel engraving, as it had been on the day of the storm, when the *Mallard* ran for shelter or destruction to our harbour. To me, gazing, this headland steadily advanced, growing more and more distinct in outline, then it receded and a second time came forward like a column of dancers, but less vigorously. Again and yet again the phantasm waxed and waned,

and finally the cliff and everything else went out, as does a firework on a dark night. Blackness and a pall of nothingness swept down upon me; consciousness and volition vanished; I was as a dead corse; the light of life had fled; I hung suspended, like the coffin of Mahomet, betwixt Heaven and earth.

Dawn came, with a rough hand upon my shoulder administering a vigorous shake. My wits seemed as it were to have to be hauled out of the well of forgetfulness. I caught a glimpse of the upper air. It was dusk. Two figures in uniform stood about me and shouted in my ear: "Where do you belong, young 'un?" I had just enough vitality left to murmur, "Golen Crosh," and instantly dropped down the well again, relapsing into stupor. Anon I felt the tug of the chain on the bucket and obscurely opened my eyes for a second time. The two men in uniform had reared me on to my feet. "Try and walk, sir," one of them said. "Tight as Julius Cæsar's drum," said the other.

I felt myself toppling and tottering helplessly, but with a strong hand under each armpit managed somehow to shuffle along.

My wits now came back in fugitive spurts. I saw that I had been seated on a stone in the dark corner of a yard and had there reclined against a recess in the brick wall, which recess afforded me a sort of chair back. In another fitful glimmer of intelligence I perceived that we soon reached a swarming thoroughfare. The headlong traffic of a London street surged about us. The folk we encountered cast some amused, some contemptuous, glances in our direction. A roaring blade shouted: "'Ere's a good-plucked 'un, mates. Never say die, my young cockalorum. Push along the bottle, boys." My guides hailed a hackney coach. I saw the jarvey lean over the side of his box. I thought even the very horse turned his head round to stare at me. "Here's a hoary young sinner, gents," sang out the jarvey gaily. "Drunk as the devil, 'pon me soul and body."

Meantime, I was unceremoniously thrust into the vehicle and thereafter we jolted and rumbled away over the London stones. I had sunk below the horizon once more into a world of nothingness, but was brought to by the sudden pulling up of the coach. I saw the great

porter of the "Golden Cross," a big soldierly man with a pewter badge on his breast.

"Egad, 'tis a brace of runners," he remarked, *sotto voce*, "with our young hopeful in tow. He hasn't lost much time getting into the grip of the Egyptians." Then aloud he called to the boots to assist the gentleman to alight. Between the four of them I was towed into the entrance of the "Golden Cross," and it really seemed to me that the whole world, from the Jehu on the coach box down to the pretty chambermaid and the commercial gents who hung about the hall, was grinning. In my imbecile dotage I was a supreme jest to gods and men alike.

A moment or two later, Uncle John, Mr. Hardy and Mr. Rohu all bustled out. I heard expressions of amazement. Now I was beginning to regain my strayed wits a bit. "He's been hocused and robbed," said Mr. Rohu. I feebly felt in my pockets and fell into maudlin tears. It was all dawning upon me at last. I had fifteen guineas in my pocket when I set forth. Every doit was gone. A rare old family chronometer which I somewhat blatantly elected to wear ever since Aunt Maria's death was missing. The rascals had plucked me bare as a pigeon. The diamond neckpin I wore in the morning I wore no longer. They had even picked my pockets of the little nicknacks I prided myself on assuming. I was surely in a pitiable plight. Uncle John described Tom Ashburnham to the officers.

"'Tis the Regent, I'll wager," chuckled the merrier of them, "one of the smartest rooks in the town, gents." We had quite a crowd about us by now. Uncle John promptly haled me off to bed. Stupor had left me utterly by the time I got between the sheets. I tossed and groaned and called myself all the names of folly in my petty vocabulary. I was alternately burning hot and shivering cold. Then came a merciful bout of sickness and Uncle John insisted on my swallowing a wineglassful of some nauseous abomination. I hated the very sight of a wineglass now, and called for "water—water." Moreover, I bethought me of Rodney and his herbs.

However, youth conquered in the end and I sank at last into restful slumber, without the disturbance of ill dreams this time. The grinning gargoyles of self-contempt had taken flight, like bats of the night. In the morning I awoke with a splitting headache, 'tis true, but sane. I

don't know how to express it, but that unbidden debauch had robbed me of part of my own self. The bloom upon the peach was gone. I felt within that I had lost the key of the treasure house of the imagination.

In those guileless days of old, when life was unclouded and serene in heart, each morning brought the glamour of God afresh upon me. I seemed to have come into a new inheritance with every sunrise. Now, though I knew it not, surely the shadows of the prison house were creeping around me. My artless gaiety of bygone years was eclipsed. It is terrible to reflect how the act of another may thus bring mildew on a budding soul. The powers of darkness, which the boy looks upon with curious eyes unknowing, may enter in, spies and traitors ever ready to open the gate of the soul to evil. This experience had sobered me and clipped the wings of soaring phantasy. There fell upon me in the grey dawn a deeper sense of that knife-edge upon which youth, in every age of humankind, must needs balance. I recalled the soul-satisfying assurance of Juliet :

“ My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep ; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite.”

And yet upon her and Romeo, the reckless boy, alike came chaos and disaster. In verity, the careless security of the life of a lad country-bred was giving place in me to a sense of the inevitable, the immutable. I was passing out of the child and taking up the man's task. Perhaps—who knows?—had I gone forward exulting in my own strength I should have striven to build upon the sand, my nascent dreams would have tumbled like a house of cards ; destiny, a will o' the wisp, would have led me on and mocked when I sought to cross her deadly swamps. The clumsy trickster, who had drawn me with his *ignis fatuus* into folly and disgrace, according to that view had been a friend in disguise. He had shown me how the ice-bridge may land the unwary in a crevasse. At any rate, for better or worse, I was no longer the confident novice.

A day or two later I was to make my *début* in the Courts of Law at Westminster. I must confess I felt no little trepidation in the prospect of so doing. I was so pitifully young, a mere country lad to boot. However, Mr. Hardy

rallied me as we sat at breakfast on the day I had to appear. "Don't forget the words of the old play, Waterloo," quoth he. "'A man without money needs no more fear a crowd of lawyers than a crowd of pickpockets.'" Mr. Rohu smiled somewhat grimly at this sally. My exploit with the Regent was still fresh in the memory of us all.

In order to cheer us for the coming ordeal, as he said, Mr. Hardy proceeded to repeat the saying of Peter the Great, after having visited our Courts. These, now as then, swarmed with periwig-pated fellows, even as does a warren with rabbits. The saying was: "I have but two lawyers in my country, and one of those I mean to hang after I get home."

As so often happens when our apprehension is strung taut as the string of a bow, the actual experience came somewhat as anti-climax. It was the Long Vacation. Beyond a few disconsolate figures—and these in mufti—flitting about, the Courts and passages were almost void. One's footfall raised an echo. The solicitor, unlike the rest of mortals, pays his client's money for a dog to bark for him. We met a long and melancholy individual, named Percival, whose function it was to explain the facts of my case to the Judge. The theory was that his lordship would act as ultimate watchdog of my interests. The rest of the Judge's fraternity were, Mr. Percival explained, tramping the turnip fields after partridges.

In due course we were ushered into a dingy apartment, along the walls of which ran ranges of solemn books in law calf. There sat a cheery old gentleman who, in acknowledgment of our salutation—perhaps from habit—bobbed at us as we entered the room. He grasped the whole of my story in a flash, and rather astonished me by the easy familiarity with which he immediately talked over our intimate affairs. It was as if he had known us and our names and histories all his life. Then he delivered a homily to me, bidding me, in effect, to be a good boy and walk in the laws set before me. I bowed and threw in an interjection now and then. Finally this most formidable looking judge said he had nominated Mr. Clutterbuck to act as my administrator. He sketched this gentleman's qualities in a flowing freehand of language, and wound up by expressing the wish that we should all thereafter prove a happy family.

“The less you come near this Court the wiser you will all be and the better I shall like it,” he concluded. Then he rang a handbell. In response entered one in a black gown, whom he bade to ask Mr. Clutterbuck to step that way.

While the apparitor was gone to seek this fresh limb of the law, my lord improved the occasion by saying that it was lucky for me the Star Chamber had paled its ineffectual fires. The rôle of that authority was, he intimated, one with the rôle of the highwayman. The viator in its precincts was treated as a gift of the gods, to be plundered and peeled for the enrichment of the State. The litigant was happy who escaped the loss of his ears as well as of his purse.

“That was the Court,” quoth my lord, “which fined a certain Bishop of Lincoln five thousand pounds for calling Laud ‘the great Leviathan.’ What so easy as to trump up a case against any man, when professional witnesses, ready to swear to anything in the heavens above or the earth beneath, perambulated Westminster Hall, having a straw in their boot as the badge of their calling?”

The awe that hedges about civic authority was thawing fast in the presence of this genial, talkative old gentleman, when the usher returned and, in his wake, Mr. Clutterbuck, alert and ruddy countenanced, tall as a camel. His face was illumined with merry, roving eyes. He seemed alive in every fibre to the fingertips. The judge briefly introduced us, told Mr. Clutterbuck his duties and gave us his benediction.

On that we all withdrew in a body to a neighbouring coffee house. By day or night every act and deed consummated in London seemed automatically to raise the black spectre of port wine. Mr. Rohu called, in his happiest vein, for a brace of bottles. As we sipped our wine, Mr. Clutterbuck cheerily put me through my paces as to the future. Was I going to farm the unpaternal acres, to kill the ancestral fox? If not, what was my ambition? Was it for the Talking-Shop next door?

“We’ve just opened the sluice-gates,” he added. “This new-fangled Franchise Act will prove pretty much like harnessing a zebra to a cart. Will the beast smash the machine to pieces with his heels, or pitch us all over the cliff together? ’Pon my soul, no man can say. ’Tis the

new wine in the old skins. If the wine bursts the skins, who can marvel? Mark my words, the next twenty years will show up the seams in every country in Europe. We shall have wars and rumours of wars—wars from within, mind you. What some folks call freedom and the emancipation of the white slave is like the act of one dancing on a bladder. Squeeze the thing here, it bulges there. One trait of our folk may prove our national salvation. We English are fairly thick-skulled. It takes a good many jabs of the stick of authority to goad us into action. Across the water, in France or Ireland, revolution is a fine art. The people begin the game early. Here we munch our apples. We don't shoot them off other fellows' heads."

I told him that Aunt Maria had intended me to go to College. With all that he said about the ferment in our body politic, I was in agreement. I thought the wise leader would not bet on the curb, but give the new forces their heads, setting them together to pull the coach out of the mire. It was the railways, I said, which I thought would be our best Reform Act. My inclination was to throw in my part and lot with them. If we could, who would go back to Stuart or Tudor to-day? To run big risks we must be free.

"Aye," he answered, "I am glad to have your ideas, Waterloo, my boy. When the cockerel begins to crow he is coming into his own. Start the avalanche, but be sure first you have someone on the box seat to guide it, someone on the guard's perch to clap on the skid. That's your creed. Well, it's a good, wholesome young creed, and let's shake hands upon it."

This we did heartily, and Mr. Rohu having called for one more bottle, and this having been consumed to the accompaniment of growing gossip and chatter, mingled with many wise saws and modern instances, the rest of us took leave of Mr. Clutterbuck and strolled down Whitehall in a bunch.

Mr. Hardy pointed out as we went the route Queen Elizabeth took to see the bear-baiting. He showed us, also, the notches in the window of the Chapel Royal where the scaffold was reared for Charles I.'s execution. He pointed out Inigo Jones's work at the Horse Guards.

"And who do you think this same Clutterbuck is?" then demanded Mr. Rohu. "By the Gemini Twins, he

is my lord's son-in-law. I think I shall make up to some female limb of the law next. All you have to do then is to shake the tree and down comes the fruit."

"Oh, come now," retorted Mr. Hardy, "this pose of yours will not quite do, you know. My cousin dies and leaves her property to our young friend here. That's a simple enough transaction in all conscience. Nevertheless, to give the thing effect what happens? Our country attorney brings us all to the great Babylon, where we fall amongst thieves, who strip us and leave us by the roadside. Then he engages a couple of yards of the Chancery Bar to unlock the door of justice. Justice appoints a new governor—also yards long—to watch over our going out and coming in. Four folk are necessary to tell us what to do with our own."

"I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity," quoth Mr. Rohu with a grin. "Why, my dear sir, what is it marks the barrier between civilization and savagery? The Law. How can one operate the Law save by individuals? Instead of hailing the blessing of this our State—which may be summed up in one word, the lawyer—you are hankering after the fleshpots of the Egyptians, the chaos that reigns where lawyers are lacking. If there is one perfect institution in this our benighted land, sure-lie it is that centred yonder." He jerked his hand in the direction from whence we came. "The aura of the ideal hangs about it,

' As doth the blushing discontented sun
From out the fiery portal of the east,'

as Shakespeare and Waterloo would put it."

We trooped into the "Golden Cross" in great content and merriment at last. A couple of days later our mission was ended and the Red Rover carried us along the road we had traversed a week earlier, but with how different eyes. There was no Tom Ashburnham on the box seat this time to beguile the journey. Perchance we should meet again, I reflected. To me at least the account was not closed. I determined on a return match some day.

CHAPTER VI

FULLERTON MANOR once again, with our mother and Victory to keep house. What a supremely jolly place it was. I was young Prince Fortunatus, free-handed, roaming whither I would, without let. The cottage folk bobbed to "the young squire." Mr. Pooss, who still officiated in hall and church, guided my tuition with deference. I was no longer a "foreign" lad, whom he was paid to teach, but the head of the clan.

Our mother, under her fresh environment, blossomed into new joys and beauties. She retained the naïve simplicity of our ancient economy, but tacitly and imperceptibly acquired that flavour of convention which the patrician looks upon as his special badge. I could not but muse how skin deep that convention lies. The dames of high degree who now and then called upon us, perchance with a soupçon of condescension in so doing, how shallow and anæmic was their hold on life compared with that of our mother. She held the key to thoughts too deep for tears. Her nature was the melody that's sweetly played in tune. The hard divorce betwixt things natural and divine had for her no sanction, for she symbolized their at-one-ment.

Victory had grown to be a remarkably beautiful girl, tall and lithe, graceful as a faun. She was one of those thousands in each generation who have helped to redeem England, whose presence is a perennial benediction. Her soul was loyal to the core, her eyes had caught the blue of the woodland world, her ears drunk in the splendour of its myriad tones. True, on occasion, Victory could use the spoken word as a dart. Hence now and then sprang up tiffs and passages of arms. Their intent was always good, and they generally culminated in mirth and laughter.

Eve could not long be absent from an Eden such as ours. When we speak thus slightly of the primeval Mother, we profess to regard her as a designing minx, whereas she is in very truth a parable of the eternal

feminine, ever ready to take her fate in her hands, ever sampling and sipping the forbidden nectar of the gods.

Broadmays was a Tudor house, refashioned to meet our more fastidious notions of comfort. There for a few months in the year lived the Molonys, a family come of an old Irish stock, retaining the zest and bonhomie of their forbears, but none the less plain south-country English folk. They were father and mother, two sons and a daughter. Victory and Kate Molony struck up a great friendship, the boys and I knocked about the countryside together on horseback. Our sports and pastimes ran in similar grooves, save that I never took kindly to shooting. The fact is, my musing tramps over the hills and in the woods had converted the wild bird into a companion soul, and therefore I could not muster heart to enjoy the battues which delighted men and boys—aye, and women too—about us.

One day Victory and I, after a hillside ramble, called in at Broadmays what time the dish of tea was wont to circulate. As we sat in their best parlour and the usual chaff and badinage went round, who should trip into the room but a stranger girl? She was *petite* and brisk as a bird hopping from twig to twig. Mrs. Molony introduced her as Miss Petunia Goss. A few moments later it was my fate to hand round the plate of bread and butter. When it came to Miss Goss's turn there was but one slice.

"So you are helping me to fortune, Mr. Joyce?" she said, looking me straight in the eye, then suddenly dropping her glance and blushing. I was rather clumsy at repartee and stammered something about there being fortune in abundance in reserve. She made a little motion for me to take my place on the settee at her side. What I said and what she said was neither profound nor original, but now and then she dropped her voice so that our colloquy grew at last into a delicious *tête-à-tête*.

When Victory rose to go, I felt that my fate was sealed. It stood five feet three in its stockings and regarded me from the corners of quizzical eyes. I was uncommonly silent all the way to Fullerton, although Victory rattled me on the conquest I had achieved. Next time the Molonys called, Petunia was with them. Under my pretence of showing her some new roses, we twain wandered off into the garden. The roses took an uncommonly long

time to reach and I am afraid our horticultural lore was somewhat rambling. Before we returned to the drawing-room it was agreed that we should call one another by our Christian names, as the Molonys and I did.

Our visits from house to house had always been pretty constant. Now they grew fast and furious. Our mother, I couldn't help seeing, was inclined to be watchful, but preserved a discreet silence. Doubtless she scented danger, though, as for me, I could not help resenting even her lack of words.

Coombe Merthyr is a deep-gashed ravine cleaving the wooded Downside. Beech trees hold sway toward the crest of the hill. At its foot is a tangled copse or petty shaw with patches of brake fern, a riot of wilding jungle from early spring to late autumn. I need not give a catalogue of the darling buds that there awake from their winter sleep, open shy eyes of wonder, to pass in the processions of blossom that come like shadows, so depart, as the year waxes and wanes. There is, however, one flower which garnishes this spot onward from the end of May and this I must recall—Solomon's Seal to wit. The reason I single that plant from its hosts of contemporaries is to restate old Gerarde's dictum, which runs thus: "The roote of Solomon's seale stamped while it is greene, and applied, taketh away in one night, or two at most, any bruise, blacke or blue spots gotten by falls, or woman's wilfulness, in stumbling upon their hastie husbands' fists, or such like."

The story runs that in this same glen some sixty years ago the fists of a husband were over-hasty. He battered his spouse here in such fashion that not Solomon's seal nor all the drowsy syrups of the world could medicine her spirit back from the vasty deep.

By reason of this tragedy the countryman was wont to give the place a wide berth after nightfall. Even in the blazing sun of June, when newly-awakened butterflies sail over its parterre of sweets, a shiver, like that of an ague fit, was apt to overtake the hardy pioneer. The legend of the brutal male who here hammered his mate to death in a lust of fury had been passed from one generation to another. No child would stray here to gather a posy of spring flowers. It was said that the victim could be seen any midnight, pacing the tangled walk, moaning,

with her hands above her head, as if to fend herself from blows. Even in broad daylight this was what happened once. A "foreign" child—that is, one from another county—stopped hereabouts to make up a bouquet of wild roses. As she loitered through the wavering footpath, she heard a deep sigh behind her, and a whispered voice in her ear cried: "Run, or he'll catch you." The child turned herself sharply about, but not a soul was in sight. Such dread seized upon her that she took to her heels, not pausing until she had reached the cottage in the clearing a couple of hundred yards beyond.

Now the footpath through this glen cut off a long stretch of dusty road to the foot traveller making for Oozeham from Pyeford. Petunia and I had met—of course by chance—and, as the autumn gloaming loomed, tracked our way through Coombe Merthyr to reach the crest of the Down. That unlucky walk of ours must have brought nemesis in its wake. It all arose out of a bunch of orchid blossoms.

Petunia stole off to the orchid house to gather it and presented her posy to me. I laid it down for a moment on the hall table and, in the hustle of saying good-bye all round, left it there. Next time we met, Petunia was not even decently civil to me. The unlucky accident produced a tiff between us, and Victory poisoned the winged arrow by saying that, if the bouquet had been composed of carrots, I should doubtless have remembered to pick it up fast enough. It was immediately following this same incident that Pet Goss returned home and Mr. Hardy arrived on a visit to us.

No sooner had Petunia withdrawn her sunshine day from our vicinity than I fell into apostrophics. I was wont to wander in the gloaming, wrapping the inky cloak of moodiness about me. I harangued the moon, as a symbol of feminine inconstancy. When that versatile comedian was no longer visible I fell into heroics of the most ferocious seeming. Then, too, I plunged up to the neck in rhyme. It was a case with me of "dart" and "heart" on the slightest provocation. Now and again the humour of it all came upon me as a cold douche, which helped to steady my nerves a bit. I told myself a score of times a day that, in my present state, the victim of faithless desertion, the sleuth-hound, woe, would dog my footsteps for ever and ever.

I was actually getting thinner, for not only did my soul revolt from such sturdy viands as roast beef and beer, but—a new experience with me—sleep flitted warily about my pillow. I rather cultivated its new vagary. When the autumn sun crept into my bedroom I would wake and prattle to myself of aching eyeballs and assure myself that for me the sun had sunk below the horizon for good. I had paper and pencil by my bed head and occasionally the Muse would deign to flirt with my nascent imagination. Who has not in following years come upon a cache—as our old mentor 'Ciseman Love would have put it—of precious relics of a day that is dead, and marvelled exceedingly at the length of the ears of that other self by whom they were fabricated?

Mr. Hardy took in the situation and, instead of pouring cynical ridicule on my parlous state, set himself to rear a temple on the site of a pagan fane. He did not preach at or even appear to be aware of the crisis of dolour through which I was passing. He caught my mood at its highest flood and, by sheer subtlety, sought to change its course. His artistry enshrined the acme of simplicity and directness of aim. It would have been easy to have embittered my outlook or spoilt for me the edge of after endeavour. As things now stood with me, one false step, and that apparently an insignificant step, and all the voyage of my life might have been bound in shallows and in miseries.

One morning, a few days after his arrival, Mr. Hardy, levelling down to my necessities, brought me a sonnet to ask my opinion upon it. The act was double-edged with kindness. First, it flattered my vanity by implying that my judgment in things literary was worth consulting; secondly, it preached a little sermon without a text. Such homilies are wont to bite deeper than those which follow—to use Mr. Hardy's phrase—"the canon's opening roar."

THE KINGDOM OF LOVE.

" Love is a ball young maidens toss at play ;
Love is the murmur of the west wind's trance ;
Love is the essence of a world's romance ;
Love is the dream that dies at break of day.
Love is the master, Life the shackled slave ;
A tyrant's tyrant, bidding live or die.
Love soars in ether, pilot of the sky,
The earth beneath a legend or a grave.

“ Love wed with Life sends legions to the front,
To hold the passes of the far-off land,
To guard the desert and the rock-strewn sand,
To bear the shock and stress of time, the brunt
Of struggle, till the morn gleam bland,
By eyes of sage child-vision deeply scanned.”

I could not help offering the opinion, crude enough in statement no doubt, that the lines embalmed a higher ideal than that of mere selfish dreams. “ They imply that self-surrender is nobler than ease and self-pleasing,” I stammered. Theirs was the creed which our mother taught and lived. Their message came upon me as a mandate of diviner force.

I was surely living apace. A fresh marvel was revealed to me not many hours after Mr. Hardy had consulted me upon the merits and demerits of his sonnet. It befell on this wise. He and I were riding together over the Downs on a morning of far-flung vistas. How could any man be cheerless or morose in such environment? Yonder in the dim background lay the twinkling glory of the sea, a sturdy brig driving across its bosom before an equal-blowing breeze. In the hollows and bottoms beneath us the russets of autumn were flashing to purple and blood-red. A lark or two seemed to be recapturing the rapture of the spring. They flooded the world with a melody too passionate for human speech. What waves of wonder must be pulsing through the brain of those tiny songsters. Surely it is a mystery beyond mortal kenning that one winged creature should sail the world of cloudland for ever mute, that another should storm the heaven of heavens with infinite rhapsody of sound. Almost for the first time since Pet had taken her departure, I felt reviving within me the master call, the enchantment of the clean earth, of its encircling world, cloud-capped.

Over the Downs came towards us a posse of folk on horseback. We mutually reined up, for Captain Biddle, a neighbouring squire, rode at the head of those approaching us.

“ Hullo, young sir,” he shouted. “ The top of the morn-
ing to ye.”

All was cheeriness and bustle. We pushed up alongside them for a crack. Mrs. Biddle was a little, merry-eyed body, with perhaps just a spice of mischief in her glance.

“ ‘ Oh, who will o’er the Downs so free? ’ ” she chanted. “ Let me introduce you, Mr. Joyce, to Miss Mavourneen O’Malley. She has come from dear, dhurty Dublin ”— “ from the best people in the worruld and the best country in the worruld and the best climut in the worruld, ” quoth the lass herself, in the most delicious brogue imaginable— “ to a better climate and a better country still, ” I adventured.

“ Faith, and I belave ye’re roight, ” was the reply, at which all laughed gleefully.

Heaven and earth! Miss O’Malley was Dian’s very self. Surely, never before had I clapped eyes on the one true pearl of womankind. An unspent wave of emotion surged within me. She had a high colour, eyes that danced in glory like the rainbow, hair of glossy blue-black. She rode like a queen of fairyland.

“ Come along, ye laggarts, ” cried Captain Biddle, joyously, after we had rattled on for five minutes in a manner that surprised myself. “ Bring your pipe up to Coombe Market Hall after dinner, Joyce, for a spell of clavers. ”

“ Don’t be too shy to come, ” rallied Mrs. Biddle, in her quizzical fashion. Thus, in a breeze of magic, Mr. Hardy and I rode away. Good Heavens! I had discovered new worlds in the last five minutes. The little tremors of yesterday paled their ineffectual fires. Pet was dethroned. I marvelled that she should have swayed my life from its appointed orbit for an hour. Mavourneen was destiny. The shining path lay before us both like a fate.

In those days we country folk were out and about soon after dawn. For all meals time was taken by the forelock. We were ready for our dinner by five o’clock. The evenings were still open and clear and thus it befell that, after a decent if impatient interval, I clapped spurs to the sides of Sunrise and galloped over the Downs to take up the invitation of the Biddles. The sunset glows, gilding the belts of beech which crest our hillside, were glorious. The level bars of golden wonder, flooding every jutting peak and lighting up each coign of splendour, revealed to me a glimpse of Heaven’s gate, even such as I used to watch for in those far-away days when our father, agog for a jolly fishing cruise, sailed out into the magic world that lay beyond the Jersey rocks.

I could not help speculating a bit as to the reception I should get from the Irish lass, who had stormed my heart with her brogue, with the saucy insouciance of her race. We country lads looked upon the art of courtship much as does the humming bird. The female bird of that tribe is called upon to take her pick from a procession of vain little scraps of rainbow in feathers. One after other, the tiny wooers fan out the marvel of their wings and drop before her spiralling slowly downwards, as they show off colour pageants beyond the dreams of Art. Even thus was it with our local Corydons in those dim days of long ago. We too endeavoured to show off. The young blades from the barracks had a big advantage over the rest of us, by reason of the scarlet of their jackets. What daughter of Eve could refuse to respond to such a signal flag of triumph? 'Tis true we boys had been brought up to regard the Scarlet Woman with wholesome dread, but the scarlet man was he in possession of the women's hearts for all that. In actual verity, the bravery of the uniform, the spurs, the swaggering self-sufficiency of our military heroes, in those piping times of peace, enabled them to call the tune over lads who, 'tis true, knew a hawk from a hernshaw and how to make two blades of grass grow in place of one, but who, nevertheless, were not adepts in the science of ladykilling. My own upbringing had been innocent of such ideas of triumph as the military boasted.

"Egad, you Joyces are mere babes in the wood," quoth one of these embryo warriors to me, a few weeks before the prattle of Petunia had set my pulses spinning.

However, under the prompting of the solemn simplicity of our clan, I fared forth on my way to Coombe Market Hall and in due course was ushered into its dining-room. The ladies had retired. Captain Biddle and a neighbouring squireen—Kitchen by name—were finishing their second bottle of port. The butler promptly brought another bottle and the conversation, which I gathered had been flagging, sparkled out afresh. It was somewhat of the boisterous order, so far as Biddle was concerned.

"See the conquering hero comes," he chanted, in a voice full-bodied and fruity as the liquor he had swallowed. "How many glasses does it take to bring the maid of maids to the mind, lad?" he hiccupped. Kitchen sniggered a sort of chorus. Now this type of talk was

detestable to me. Our mother would have none of it and she yet swayed the current of my being unassailably. I fidgeted and, I doubt not, looked as I felt—profoundly ill at ease. At length, after an interval which seemed to me interminable, the fresh bottle having been disposed of, we three rose to join the ladies.

When we were shepherded into the drawing-room and I had paid my brief respects to the assembled ladies, including Kitchen's wife and daughter, Mrs. Biddle and Mavourneen fell to afresh upon a discussion which our advent had interrupted. Frankly, I was puzzled. They spoke a language foreign to me. The chances of "Tut! tut!" and "I told you so" at the Curragh races—that was the question. Mrs. Biddle, it seemed, was of Irish extraction, although she had left her native country as a child. The debate between her and her guest had been as the whimper of hounds to a hunting nag who hunts no longer. How much had "Tut! tut!" given the other horse at Leopardstown? Mavourneen summed the argument thus:

"Pat Shtory was roidin' 'um then and, afther the race, sez I, 'Pat, that was an oncommon quare finish of yours.' 'Ay, miss,' sez he, 'shure and another half a pound,' sez he, 'would have done the thrick,' sez he."

While this battle was being waged between the two ladies, I could but stand aloof, looking as foolish as I felt. In Sussex we all thought we knew a bit about horseflesh when we saw it. We prided ourselves, too, on a hunting country fit surely for centaurs, but this absorption in the abstract merits of a brace of horses with alien names fairly dumbfounded me. When at length the superior chances of "Tut! tut!" were acknowledged by both combatants, Mrs. Biddle swept me into the talk by rattling me on topics nearer to our countryside. Mavourneen, in her turn, was thus obviously outside the ambit of conversation. Mrs. Biddle and I wandered into vagrant avenues of local interest for a moment or two, when the mention of my name led up to a question of why I was called "Waterloo."

"I was born in the year the battle was fought," I said shyly.

"And I was eight years old that year," quoth Mavourneen simply.

The evening was not going well. I could not but see

that, although I was being received as a lucky youngster, one with wealth and future prospects, I had made no real impression. Mavourneen was impassive, yet my pulses still danced a-flutter to the music of her voice. The pedigree of "Tut! tut!" loomed larger to her than did mine own. I began to feel snubbed. My hostess was the kindest soul alive and would have braved convention to set me at my ease. Captain Biddle was snoring off the effects of the wine in the background of the picture. The Kitchens were, so to say, mere "coarse fish," folk whose ideas were those of hewers of wood and drawers of water.

I threw back my thoughts to those tramps Trafalgar and I had been wont to take with our mother, in our dear days of penury. I longed for a breath of the inspiration which used to hang like an aureole about her. How mean was the perpetual harping on the meat that perisheth. Horses and hounds and election gossip and the talk of Lewes on some newcomer to the town—how flat, stale and unprofitable it all was. When to a nation comes the challenge of war, when ease and sloth are cast aside, men of low estate being suddenly transformed into heroes, making the great adventure without counting the cost, then, then, I said to myself, the world becomes a place of fit achievement. But this sordid story of day to day, of levelling down to a plentiful lack of ideal, how degrading, how unworthy it all grows. 'Tis a soil fit for a crop of the weeds of life, such a crop as merits but to be gathered into bundles, to feed the everlasting bonfire. It will thus be seen that I was cramped as the chrysalis which feels the walls of its case, yet dreams at large of poising flight in sunshine and maturity.

At length I rose to bid my hosts good-night. As I clattered home, I could not but admit to myself that the evening, on which I had built so glittering an air castle, had been a failure. Was that to be my own rôle in life? Was I destined to do anything worth doing, or was I fated to sink into a mere clodhopping squire? Was my epitaph to be so many bottles of port and burgundy drunk, so many rides to hounds, so much gossip talked, a conventional marriage and an inscription on the walls of our little church, recording futilities as if they had been real achievements? If we had remained in obscurity at Newhaven, by this time I should probably have been

at sea. That was at any rate the life of a man. I was growing heartily sick of hanging on the skirts of Fortune. I scorned her cheap kisses.

The fact is, I was passing through the crisis which comes to every lad of spirit. He has in the main to battle his own way through it. He may come forth from the Valley of Despair a man or a mouse, as his own temperament dictates. On our mother asking me what my evening at Coombe Hall was like, I fear my reply was but morose. Victory promptly jumped to the conclusion that there was a lady in the case and put me through a chaffing catechism, which I could not openly resent. I felt that I had drifted away from our old-time moorings.

A few mornings later, when our mother and I were breasting the Beacon, which points like a silent finger to the Heavens and is the weather-glass to Fullerton Manor, she said she thought the time had come for me to make up my mind what I should wish to do with my life. I heartily agreed with her. Was College to be my next scene? Mr. Pooss had been recommending this to her only recently. At that I poured out the story of present lacking and my desire not to stagnate like a weed in the stream of life, but to hold my own in the world and play a man's part. Our mother's half-tearful assent to all I said and the tone of thankfulness and pride with which she spoke were the truest pleasure I had experienced for many a long day.

"What is it to be?" she cried gaily. "I must see you Sir Waterloo Joyce before I die, otherwise my wraith will haunt you in the after-time."

Then I told her that I thought the material future of the world and through that its blossoming time of promise lay in the future of those iron tracks which were beginning to put a girde round the earth. They were already invading our Sussex preserves. My ambition was to throw in my lot with the pioneers who were probing and prospecting our county. A line to Brighton was in the air.

"The Regent" was but a novice in the highwayman's art compared with some of the prospectors who reaped the harvest of human gullibility in their advocacy of railway schemes. The first essential of these gentry was a map of the country to be served. A flying survey

to match an imaginary route on paper, a high-sounding prospectus bearing half a dozen decoy names, and vague promises of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, these things, skilfully manipulated, soon brought forth a procession of gulls, who raced one another in eagerness to invest solid coin of the realm. Parliament was baffled by a novel task—how to foster sound industry and yet to shut out roguery. Moreover, the two Houses were at strife. The Upper House strove with all its might to scotch or hamstring inventors' projects, the Commons lent them a sympathetic ear. Looking back on the bloodless revolution of those days, it is easy now to see how England might have lost her premier place in the world of manufacture, had it not been for a handful of seers, to whom cheap and rapid travel and distribution assumed its true rôle in the providential ordering of human affairs. Congestion of the energies of the community, or delay in their expansion, would infallibly have deprived us of our commercial lead. The Power, victorious on the plains of Brussels, would thus have sunk by sheer inertia to the level of a third or fourth-rate State. Surely in the railway scramble may be seen the silent tide in the affairs of men. London was, by reason of its stringency, the prey to charlatans and caricaturists. Learned physicians stated that by the passage of trains through tunnels the nerves of passengers would suffer wreck. If the story of the folly of the early 'thirties were reproduced, its nonsense would read like a nightmare vision of some other planet. Every new departure in science or economy has reacted on the community of the day in the letting out of the babble of fools. We are no wiser than were our fathers. In the shadowy unknown of the Shepherd Kings I doubt not the innovator met with the faggot, the gibbet and the scorn of petty rascals.

Out of this welter and chaos of ideas—this jungle growth of enthusiasm for the public weal, as well as of its attendant chicanery—emerged six rival schemes for linking London to Brighton by railway. Four of the contestants broke down in the race from lack of prevision or of funds or from squabbling within the ranks of their promoters. Two historic personalities survived the shades of chance—those of Rennie and Stephenson. Both had fought good fights in the cause of emancipation. The reputations of

both were symbols of sane work, soundly done. The understudies of these leaders were Joseph Locke and George Bidder, names destined to endure in the ranks of their associates.

Then followed the familiar spectacle of the endeavour to break the spirit of the pioneer on the wheel of futile cross-examination. For a whole month in the Committee rooms of Parliament an exhibition of rampant folly was enacted. Under its strain both rival projects in the end fell to the ground. The elation of the deadheads at their triumph proved short-lived. The contestants agreed to close their ranks and to unite forces, their legal backers even offering to act gratuitously. It must have been patent to the dullest reactionary that such sporting enthusiasm meant ultimate success. However, the game of mutual bafflement, though checked, still persisted. Once more Rennie and Stephenson met as protagonists. It was a duel of giants. In the end the Committee of the Lower House passed Stephenson's Bill. From the ranks of his adherents went up a premature cheer. By the time the Bill had reached the Lords' Committee, the shares of the concern had jumped to a premium of sixteen points. The hopes of the sanguine, were, however, fated to be once more dashed, for the Lords' Committee in their turn threw out the Bill. Surely never in the history of Parliamentary struggle have alarms and excursions proved so tedious and exacting. The last act of the comedy was in the nature of appeal to a dictatorship. Parliament appointed one Captain Alderson to report on the tangled web of abortive schemes. Rennie, meantime, had met the objections of his rival in Committee and now presented a proposal which, while offering the shortest route, eliminated many of the defects of his earlier plans. Parliament has a knack of exhibiting the sequel to embittered opposition in tame surrender. The precedent was followed in this case. At the last lap Rennie got his Act with almost headlong haste. Thus was the great game played to a finish. For every mile of the railway track laid between London and Brighton £3,400 had been expended in the Parliamentary Committee rooms. When the contest raged most fiercely £1,000 a day was the price of victory.

I have given in review a retrospect of our battle of

Sussex, of which battle I was destined to play my part as the pawn of a pawn. At the moment when I announced my desire to enlist in the ranks of the engineers, our countryside slumbered in blissful disregard of days to come, days when armies of navigators would be as familiar as hips and haws, when the Red Rover would have followed the British chariot to extinction, when men would travel from London to Brighton in less time than it now takes us to cross the great city.

At every phase and twist of my necessities it really seemed as if Mr. Hardy was destined to intervene as *deus ex machinâ*. He was in some way related to Mr. Rastrick, whose name is indissolubly linked with the inception and building of the railway which pioneered our great revolution of the South of England. Rastrick's was an epoch-making, scene-shaking task. I thirsted to range the little cockboat of my life in the ranks of that argosy whose adventurers were setting sail for a consummation no man could see the end of. Perhaps Mr. Clutterbuck was right after all. The Steam God was destined to land the world in anarchy and chaos. For how many tens of thousands of years has mankind been marching a-horse and a-foot towards its goal? What is its goal? Marlborough's and Wellington's armies had in Napoleon's phrase "crawled on their bellies." Henceforward Man's fortunes would be in alliance with a monster of his own creation. The future armies of Peace and War would be fed and carried by a Slave of the Lamp, paling the magic of the Arabian. Railways surely portended a new economy. In the physical world old things would pass away, all things would become new.

There are two schools of men; they trade under a score of aliases. Every creed is ultimately founded on fear or hope. The souls of humankind belong to one or other of these hemispheres. Every tie, both of kindred and of temperament, rendered me a sworn member of the League of Hope.

There were men in plenty at this period who wrote and spoke as if we mortals were but as children building sand castles on the shore. If that were so, how did it befall that such folk as our mother came into being? Surely, surely the mere existence of the heavenly treasure in flesh and blood gives the lie to the creed that we are mere

insects of the day, who sing the puny triumphs of an hour and so pass. Perchance he who has reached the brink of an undiscoverable waste of waters, baffled, disillusioned, worsted in the struggle of existence, may hear in the tragic notes of failure a requiem of despair. As for me, I was but eighteen and a leaguer of Fortune. I scorned both the easy path of surrender and the creed of unfaith. Apollon might straddle across my path. At least I would have the fun of the fight, ere I held up my hands in token of base surrender.

CHAPTER VII

THUS was it that I came to join the Robin Hood Club. We carried out our task in those days in informal fashion. Our function was to prospect one short length of the route laid out by the chief, to marshal all its aspects into perspective for his final award. He was the master builder. Ages of travelling folk to come would pronounce on the soundness of his judgment or its fallibility. We were too close to the event to do more than go forth in the morning to our labour until the evening.

Quodling and Tosh were my immediate associates, and our territory ran for a dozen miles to the north and south of the tiny hamlet of Merstham. In the Canal Era a tunnel for barges had been started to pierce the North Downs. This work we wove into the fabric of our new undertaking. Quodling was the serious man of the party—a tall, solemn-looking customer, with latent humour constantly thrusting up over the surface of his activity. He belonged to a little place somewhere to the north of London—Hackney by name. From his description of it, his home lay in a bit of open country of no special feature, just cornfields and lanes and here and there a villa or farmstead, whence some London merchant rode in and out night and morning. Tosh was, as he said, “a Berkshire boy.” He came from the old town of Reading. I was, of course, a mere tyro and as such had to act as pack animal to the other two. “Saddle the ass” was their motto, when we sallied forth of a morning to our task. I was a willing slave enough and did not grudge my toil. A great wave of energy swept me on its crest. Whether these my associates were aware of my fortune or position in the county, I don’t know. They treated me to a sort of good-tempered serfdom. They knew their job, I had to pick mine up. One thing in my favour was that they did not, as so many small-natured fellows are apt to do, try to keep me in the dark. I was apprenticed to Mr. Rastrick, and this fact alone was a safeguard. The chief, although the soul of honour and self-effacement, was a man whom it was ill to cross.

We tramped our section loyally, although three nags stood at our beck and call in the stables of the "Joliffe Arms." Looking back at those days of ardent toil, they loom up through the mists as if enchanted. Work to be done and the power to do it, that surely is the watchword of human happiness. As for an eiderdown existence, mere easy-going lotus-eating and the satiety that follows in its wake, I spurned such helotry. If I had had the artist's sleight of hand, I would have wrought at a big canvas crowded with figures. I might have failed to achieve, but the effort at least would have brought me the joy of living. Instead of daubing canvas, I was enlisted as a pioneer, one of that little band who were destined to remodel the world. I said to myself: "As well seek to strangle an earthquake as endeavour to put the lid on the transformation railways must surely bring about in every region of the earth's surface." My new job submerged the love heroics in which I had of late played but a sorry part. Now I had marched across the frontier of the land of make-believe. In my new rôle I was bent on achievement. Each visit of the chief fired my ardour afresh. Every young soldier in his virgin zeal is an unconscious hero.

Away to the south of our quarters lay a belt of swampy heathland. Encampments of nomads were frequent there. Across this bit of common swarthy children scuttled about like rabbits. Back in the woody recesses were the caravans of their tribe. These folk were in truth aboriginals, we who called the land ours but interlopers. I had two men following in my wake and knew quite well that on the Common half a score pairs of eyes took stock of our every movement, although to outward seeming the watchers were incurious. Old Meredith—or "Merry" as we always dubbed him—was the best hand we had for a job of chaining or levelling. His understudy was young Rainbow, a veritable Apollo of eighteen or nineteen—a lad over six feet high, with the features and bearing of a Greek of the age of Phidias.

Perched on the crest of the hill above the village stands the mansion in Gatton Park, on the embellishment of which Lord Monson was at this time spending vast sums. He had a year or two before given £100,000 for the estate, part of the privileges which he purchased being the right of sending two members to Parliament. In the park is

the quaint old "Town Hall"—the stone alcove whither the faithful were wont to wend their way to record dearly-bought votes. Cobbett had thundered maledictions on this "very rascally spot of earth," because, forsooth, in 1541 Sir Roger Copley, Knight, being *the* burgess and only inhabitant of the borough, had elected his two members and, even in our day, up to the Reform Act, my Lord Monson's flunkeys had been in the habit of marching to the voting place in solemn conclave with the same object. Did not the marble urn injunct on all voters the duty of choosing only the most trusty and well-beloved for the sacred office of law-making?

On Sundays I was wont to clamber up to the queer little church alongside the house in the park. The parson disappeared before sermon time and presently popped out like a jack-in-the-box, as it were in the roof, having ascended by a hidden stairway. The place is a storehouse of rare old Flemish glass and carved oak. It resembles an ungainly dwarf bedizened with jewellery. Richly carved stalls, an altar and a pulpit said to be the work of Albert Dürer, as well as noble stained glass, are crowded into this little shrine. Is not the master craftsman the world master also? An obscure mechanic fabricates a fiddle or a scrap of glass or china. Future ages can but gaze and wonder at it, as at a miracle of creation. Lord Monson's marbles from Rome, on which he had spent £10,000, were newly laid to form the pavement of the majestic hall of the house. The Corsini Chapel, with its marble-panelled walls, had furnished forth the design of this same hall. Above these were to be grand fresco paintings—female figures representing Prudence, Resolution, Meekness, Patience.

The ideals fermenting in my brain were quickened by a modern instance such as this house presented. Wealth and station are gifts of the gods; they are talents to be chaffered in the market-place of life, so that the race of men may profit by their barter. Such is the Master Craftsman's concept. Used merely to feed with titbits the maggot of personal desire, they are a curse, alike to whoso gives and whoso takes. The lesson of public service and utility sank deep into my consciousness in the dreamy hours of worship spent in that old fane of Gatton.

At the foot of the hill, where the ocean of the Weald

laps the base of the Downs, is Reigate, an ancient town, but in truth in our day little more than a scattered hamlet. It is the tradition that in the retreat of the Danes up the bastion in its rear, the Saxon women fell upon the fugitives and beat them in a great slaughter. Who will assert that this thousand-year-old tradition is fabulous? Ethelwolf, we know, routed the invaders at Ockley and the stragglers, famished and war-spent, may well have met their fate on the Reigate slopes, at the hands of the women of the conquering clan. Many a poor wretch—in his day of success a mere human wolf—would thus have had the even-handed justice of Fate meted out to him in his own hour of dire disaster. However, we mortals see in part and we prophesy in part. History is a mirage which only he that hath eyes to see perchance may read. For me, gazing from the coigns of vantage about our Surrey uplands, the transformation to be wrought by the railway which we were planning filled the picture.

The tangled landscape at my feet, where vast forests stretched in Roman and Norman days, until indeed the iron industry swept the countryside pretty bare of its timber, was destined to become, in the days of our children, the playground and home of a city stretching forth into void lands, a city wherein millions of folk would be amassed for trade and pleasure. Surely he must be a prophet new-inspired, who dared to try to compare the England coeval with Waterloo and the England as it was destined to be in 1915.

We made troops of friends as we came in contact with landowners and farmers. Some of them saw ruin staring the country and themselves in especial in the face. The Wheatleys of Nutfield showed me letters from a North-country friend of theirs. These letters were so redolent of the coming upheaval of society, an upheaval resembling nothing so much as that of the labouring earth, when a continent rises under the impulsion of the banked fires latent beneath her surface, that I make no apology for quoting a scrap from them.

It ran thus :

“ To *us*, who have no turn for these things and therefore cannot and do not realize any description, the seeing them comes with such novelty and force and brings such a

train of new thought—this thing, which is to convey carriages, people, goods, everything, from Liverpool to Manchester, thirty miles *in an hour*, ruining half the warehouses in Liverpool by making Manchester into a *seaport* town, the goods landed at the docks at Liverpool being henceforth transported at once into the warehouses at Manchester, in as short a time as they now take in being carried from the lower to the upper part of the town.

“The effect of the velocity is that when you stand on the railroad and watch the machine coming, it seems not to *approach* but to expand into size and distinctness like the image in a phantasmagoria. The carriages are like the omnibus, a coach with a chariot at each end, some for twenty, some for thirty passengers; also cradles for pigs, cattle, and goods; and *platforms* with railroad wheels, upon which you drive your carriage and horses as into a steamboat, stand still, and be transplanted as upon the fairy carpet for thirty miles, *while* your horses are baiting, ready to drive off and take you on, and making a kind of ferry of it! We got into a kind of German post-waggon—all twenty—a horse cantered with us up the little tunnel, as they call it, and then was taken off and we were launched into the great tunnel, a vaulted passage lighted with lamps suspended from the centre; a slight push sent us off, and away we started at the rate of thirty miles an hour, our speed increasing as we went on, perceptible only from the strong current of air, and the passing the lamps so rapidly. I never felt so strange, so much in a state of magic, of enchantment, as if surrounded by new powers and capabilities. In less than three minutes from having entered the tunnel in the country, we came out on the other side of Liverpool at the docks. We got into our coach again grumbling at Macadam roads and the Derby pace of ten miles an hour.”

Now for the companion picture, the other side of the shield. I quote a scrap from a letter written the Wheatleys from Wiltshire, a district wherein wages stood at starvation level, where the labouring hind belonged to what was merely a servile race, a land as yet unpenetrated by that democratic leveller, the railway. The toilers on the land were seething in suppressed revolt. Feudalism had hopelessly broken down, for the general tenor of those

who should have guided and educated the farm hand was that of aloofness and negation. The hateful system of caste was rampant, a policy of insulting doles in so-called charity, a lack of the prompting of true kindness, taking that word in its ancient sense, had estranged masters and men who should have joined hands fraternally in a common cause. In the ripe language of the old psalm it might be said of the squires who set the tone of this countryside : "Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother ; thou slanderest thine own mother's son." Now the curse was coming home to roost, as the following scrap of a private letter showed :

"About two o'clock we were summoned by two half-drunken men who professed to be *sent on*. They came to the door, and asked for money, 'any trifle,' announcing that two hundred were coming at their heels. After failing of their errand, they went to Pile's house, opposite us, whither I followed them. He was gone to Marlborough and there were none but women in the house. As the only chance, I had the church-bell rung, but none of the labourers came ; perhaps they were too far off and did not hear. About ten minutes after, the troop arrived. The machine had been taken to pieces, but *that* did not satisfy them ; they must break it. And breaking it they were, when Pile on horseback dashed in among them and fired. They would have dispersed, perhaps, in a fright, but in a place where they could close with him, his gun went off a second time. They dragged him down, and have nearly killed him. Then they burst into the house, and broke everything to pieces and for some time I expected they would serve us the same way ; so irritated were they and so mad with drink. Indeed, they talked of coming back to-night, and burning down all his ricks and barns."

Things had not come to this pass in Sussex. Our folk are strong of will, self-contained, able to endure silently, not easily drawn aside from the fundamentals of existence, not given to quack panaceas. An undercurrent of sobriety runs through their judgment. They see things with perhaps too literal eyes. They are wont to stand stubbornly on Mother Earth, nor can they be tempted by the political schemer to forsake the sane path which their

forbears have traversed, who so doing have, in the main, prospered. One thing I made up my mind—on the Fulberton estate I would not wait to be dragged over the line of fair dealing by threats of violence. Every worker should have his due of honest wage and rational toil. I spent one Sunday morning writing Mr. Hardy as to the resolutions I had formed, begging him to clothe these abstract ideas of mine in flesh and blood, to prophesy to the four winds, that the dead bones might live and stand upon their feet.

The Wheatleys were new-comers into my life and I must digress a bit to tell of their advent. All the world knows that spur or salient of the Downs which ends abruptly as a bluff opposite Redhill, capped by its common. Between the two ridges runs a gorge, shaped for all the world as if it had been gouged out by a torrent of water. On the eastern crest a few scattering houses nestle round Nutfield Church. The vistas in one direction of the "mountain chain" of the North Downs, as Gilbert White calls it, and away to the south of the wild savannah of the Weald are gloriously English. At Nutfield was the home of the Wheatleys.

Every Saturday night I was wont to join a sing-song at the "White Hart" in Reigate. A company of good fellows foregathered there. Our potations perhaps erred on the side of frugality and we broke off an hour before the chimes at midnight. Country folk were early out of their beds, as were we, and the attractions of rambling dark lanes towards the small hours were poor indeed. If we only had jotted down a tithe of the quaint old see-saw rhymes we heard on some of these nights, they would have enriched the folk song studies of later days. Merry could troll an old-time ditty with any songster of the county. "When Joan's ale was new" was one of his musical triumphs.

"The next came in was a dyer,
 He sat himself down by the fire,
 For that was his desire
 Among the joyful crew.
 He told the landlord to his face
 The chimney corner was his place;
 And there he sat and dyed his own face,
 When Joan's ale was new, my boys,
 When Joan's ale was new."

So chanted Merry and by acclamation he was awarded the ingle nook.

“No muffled bells for me,” was the old man’s motto, a saying it would be hard to beat as an expression of the die-hard spirit of our invincible English breed. Would the coming of railways blunt the fine ardour of achievement which our folk displayed? In our district we were a community, a commonwealth. Fifty or sixty coaches a day ran through Merstham, between London and Brighton. That stream was as a circulation of new blood throughout Surrey and Sussex. True, here and there, our villagers affected the *blasé* airs of the dandified Londoner, but, taking things as a whole, the coachloads of travellers brisked us up and set wider horizons about us. Thus, I said to myself, are they forerunners of the railways. The sulky humour of the recluse is the temper of the one-talent man, who acts in negation of his imperial quest.

On our local club days processions bearing banners, inscribed with legends of mutual goodwill and the call of duty, were the order of the day. “Speed to the plough” was a favourite device on these occasions; “The Ploughman’s Song” a standard item of our Saturday night’s concert. Here is one verse of it:

“Behold the wealthy merchant that trades in foreign seas,
That brings us gold and treasures for those that live at home at
ease;
For we must have bread and biscuits, rice, flour, puddings and
peas,
To feed our jolly sailors, as they sails on the seas.”

Ah! the hearty good fellowship, the cheery outlook, the trust in men of true intent, the youngness of those jolly gatherings. A man may live to mistrust his neighbour, to watch the sunrise with a jaundiced eye, to hail the sunset with a yawn; he may look on life’s disillusionment as on a boon of the gods, a proof that he is a salted soul who knows a thing or two, who has not roamed about the world for naught. Give me the company of stout-hearted country lads, whose vision of life is uncabined and uncribbed. Let them clink their glasses and troll their honest choruses, unheedful of the gnawing tooth of time, the all-devourer. May the dew of the youth of young-eyed seers never evaporate. Surely it was a

liberal education to hear Merry sing "Spencer the Rover," the man who went a-rambling when fortune ebbed away from him. At the foot of the Yorkshire mountain—so the song recounts—he sat him down by "a clear fountain," to refresh himself with bread and cold water.

"It tasted more sweeter than the gold that never wasted,
More sweeter than honey and gave more content,
But the thoughts of his children, laymenting for their father,
Brought tears to his eyes that made him to layment."

But not for long. The last verse finds him in a wood-bined cottage, whence he goes rambling no more.

Dick Wheatley's master song was "The Death of Nelson," given with all the ardour of a fresh young artist. As for me, my ditties were for the most part wont to tell of the cuckoo note or of how the stormy winds do blow. Every man according as Nature had parcelled out to him the gift of tongues had to bear his share in the rough melody of those nights. We sang to please ourselves, to unthread the rude eye; we sang to attune our souls to the wider vista, to the brotherhood of rich and poor.

"Aye, lads," old Merry used to say, as we shook hands when our sing-song was over, "these nights do shimmer all the week long, surelie."

I had met Dick Wheatley on a-many of these song nights. We were congenial souls, but, beyond the mention of his home at Nutfield, he volunteered nothing of his folk and kin. One day, however, as I was setting out a base line from the shoulder of the spur that overhangs the valley, I was hailed by Dick. His father being with him, I had an invitation to the Grange, of which I was not long in availing myself.

The position of the house had been chosen by a strategist in design. It commanded a sweeping vista and the grounds were laid out by a master in that art. The parterres of flowers, the canopies and lanes of roses must in the blossoming season have been enchanting. Nevertheless, as I entered the stately rooms of the mansion, stocked as they were with beautiful things, their walls studded with rare paintings and engravings and over all the glamour of an historic demesne, its atmosphere redolent of generations of ripening culture and fruitful accumulation, in spite of all these influences, there fell upon my spirit an unconscious gloom, a haunting doubt.

There are houses, neither rich nor rare, that convey a silent message of abounding life to whomsoever enters their portals. The new-comer has no need to whip up commonplace compliment, their very cynosure has music in't and breathes an air of cheery welcome. There are, on the other hand, houses wherein that word "welcome" is ostentatiously displayed on the doormat. The guest appropriately wipes his boots upon the official pronouncement, for in act and deed its message is belied. The visitor feels a stranger from the start. He cannot shake off a sense of chill and boredom that falls upon him, as if it were an atmosphere. Thus is the placard of welcome surely rendered fallacious.

As Mr. Pooss would have told us, every Sussexer must surely know by heart the inscription over the lintel of the historic Selden cottage door at Tarring. The learned John Selden is said to have composed and carved it over his father's portal at the age of ten. Thus it runs :

"Gratus, honeste, mihi, non claudar, inito sedebis,
Fur abeas, non sum facta soluta tibi."

Old Sam Johnson rhymed it thus :

"Walk in and welcome ; honest friend, repose ;
Thief, get thee hence, to thee I'll not unclose."

I have lingered on the threshold of the quaint old Grange, for in truth my entering in conjures up images and scenes that crowd the avenues of memory. In a rhyming fit I once sought to put into some perspective a tangled web of dreams about this very topic. Whether or no I have left more than a cloudy shadow, you who read the lines must judge.

"Fly hither, swallow-thoughts, for round these eaves
Cluster old nests, whence you again may cheep.
Here, as of old, a soul of music weaves
Wrought tones, ripe spirit songs from out the deep."

In the drawing-room of the Grange, to which Dick Wheatley led me when first I went there, are two noble bow windows, one facing west, one east. As we entered the room, his father was gazing anxiously out of the west window, his mother gloomily out of the east window. That, my first glimpse of this domestic interior, has always struck me as a parable. Dick himself, who was a cheery

soul enough at our bouts at the "White Hart," seemed oppressed, as by a sense of prevailing tragedy, when he introduced me to his mother. His father came forward to greet me as an old acquaintance, with all the show of cordiality he could muster. Behind this cordiality, however, appeared to hang a pall of disquiet.

After commonplace salutations, we began to talk of local matters. Mrs. Wheatley shook her head when I assured her that that terrible innovator, the railway, was really going to invade the country south of the Thames. Her idea seemed to be that its advent in the northern wilds should have been a terrible warning to our South Country folk, to keep the accursed thing from out their midst. It was very inconsequent, but some passing reference to Gatton church brought this philippic on my head: "We don't want schism or sacerdotalism here." That appeared a final dictum of hers, as if it clinched all argument. I failed to see its relevance, but the repetition of the saying seemed to give her a similar satisfaction to that experienced by a parrot when repeating his verbal slogan. Thus dawned upon me by slow degrees the nature of the blight which had settled on what should have been a home of cheeriness and content. The lady had the ecclesiastical bee in her bonnet, a troublesome insect whose virus has caused more strife and anarchy in the world than all the kings and emperors. This world was to her but a troublesome stopgap domicile. The narrowest tenets as to man's destiny were the all-in-all of her contemplation. According to this lady, our mother's creed, spanning Heaven and earth with a rainbow of hope, was mere chimera.

I listened and marvelled at the uncharity of it all. Had my upbringing been in a different groove, it might have elicited from me crude scoffing. As it was, the pity of it smote me. Mr. Wheatley seemed oppressed by his own load of trouble and took no part in his wife's diatribes. She continued to harp on the cataclysmic doom of human endeavour. As we sat at lunch, waited on by a butler of intensely sombre aspect, the lady continued her harangue to my increasing discomfort.

Without, the sun lit up the hill slopes, the russets and reds of the foliage of autumn were paling, for winter was beginning to lay his icy hand on all things. Nevertheless, the rooks yet sailed exultant in the cloud world. Nature

had not foregone her hymn of praise. In my heart of hearts I was glad. At length the lady presented her catechism directly to me. It was presumptuous, doubtless, but I could not help recounting the legend of the Troglodytes. According to the ancients, I told her, these early attempts at man burrowed in caves and pits of the earth, as do our moles and badgers. It was torture to them to face the sun shining in his glory. They surely were akin to the owls and satyrs, cousins of the bats and owls. The remnant of the breed were the folk travellers told us of, who lurked in dim primeval forests, not daring to face the widening splendour of the day of civilization.

I fear the winged thistledown of my words fell on stony ground. The lady shook her head decidedly. The gloomy butler scarce suppressed a groan. Mr. Wheatley kept his eyes on his plate and his depression deepened. It was altogether a sorry meal. Dick looked apprehensive and was silent.

When at length the lady rose, Mr. Wheatley took us two lads into his own sanctum. I could see that he sought, while upholding the mother's due regard in her son's esteem, to let me know that his own outlook on life was wider than that of his spouse. He spoke gently enough of the charity that never faileth. Before I left he begged me to regard the Grange as my own home and to walk in whenever "my due steps," as he put it, led me that way. He was very particular to insist that I should neither knock nor ring, but just walk in, as I should do in my own home.

Over the fireplace hung a painting and I ventured to ask who was its original subject. It was that of a young girl, a smile of fair intent upon her lips. Her eyes were of the questing order. The face bore that very quality which indued our mother's with its savour of appeal. Her auburn hair fell in a cascade about her shoulders. The portrait was arresting, a haunting vision. It surely belonged to one who, in the days of her maturity, might "guide our feet into the way of peace," as the noble old canticle phrases it. I could but stand at gaze as I asked my question.

"That," quoth Mr. Wheatley, dropping his voice almost to a whisper, "is my daughter Margarita. Do you see any likeness to Dick here in the lass?"

I was so long immersed in dreams of the perfectness of this presentment of a soul-vision that Mr. Wheatley's question fell on unheeding ears, until it was smilingly repeated. Then I glanced at Dick and said that, while the family type was there, the portrait reminded me of another, familiar to me from the first moment I clapped eyes on the light of the sun.

"Margarita is at school near Paris," quoth Mr. Wheatley at length. "You may have heard of Saint Cloud. 'Tis a desperate journey to and fro. She has been there a couple of years. We have her home at Christmas and this Christmas I suppose it will be for good and all. When you engineers have parcelled all countries into chessboards with your railways, no doubt we shall be able to skip over to Paris in the time it takes me now to ride to Canterbury. Our girl is the best part of four days getting to Paris, but she goes with another pupil of the school—Susan Storey—the daughter of my lawyer man, who lives at Canterbury. The two girls get through swimmingly. 'Tis Waterloo that has made the Crapauds so monstrous polite to us islanders. Last Christmas, Monsieur Jules, one of the masters at Saint Cloud, piloted them home. He used some very remarkable words to me when he was here. 'France,' said he, 'smells afresh of revolution to-day.' There are ruffians galore in old England, trying to influence class hatreds here, men who would set this country in a blaze of the same order re-threatening France. The Chinaman firing the thatch of his cottage to roast his pork withal is an enlightened patriot to some of these gentry, these self-styled reformers. There is no higher treason than that of the scoundrel who kindles the fires of hell in his native land. By a just law of retribution he mostly perishes in the bonfire he has himself started."

"Aye, sir," said I, "the everlasting bonfire, always being lit, smouldering and flashing into fierceness by turns. Those who turn the deaf ear to just reforms are surely its ministers. The firebrand is a villain, so, too, is he who palter with the great creed of the French—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."

Mr. Wheatley burst into a roar of laughter. "Why, you young sansculotte," he made answer, "so the fiery French nostrum has got into your veins, has it?"

"Until it finds its way into the veins of all humankind,

sir, we shall hear of wars and rumours of wars; to-day the mob as master, gloating over its victims and the world shuddering at its crimes; to-morrow the Scribes and Pharisees condemning the Prince of Life to death."

"My lad," said Mr. Wheatley, "give me your hand. I see your instincts at least are sound. You have the hot blood of youth, crying for reforms, which shall reverse the current of a thousand years in an hour. Half the horrors of the world must doubtless be laid at the door of the impassiveness of those who have, the folk who button up their sympathies as they do their breeches' pockets, who would deprive the labouring hind of the very charter of his being, as a fellow brother of humanity. They truly hold the caste creed with a vengeance. I agree with you. 'Tis the world-without-end curse."

Dick smiled. "This is a strange doctrine from you, sir," quoth he to his father, "'for a' that and a' that, 'tis coming yet for a' that.'"

"Nevertheless," replied Mr. Wheatley, "every young enthusiast who is worth his salt says just the things Waterloo says and, what is more, 'tis sound and just that he should say them. It is when you come to apply these maxims to the tangled web of human affairs that your trouble begins."

This was the only time that evening Mr. Wheatley had spoken of me by my Christian name and it pleased me mightily. Eleven o'clock struck and I prepared to depart, for we country folk were early birds.

I set sail from the Grange into an ocean of dreams. In another four or five weeks' time Christmas would be upon us—say rather Margarita would be here. Margarita—the Pearl—was she not justly named? The Kingdom of Heaven is as the pearl of great price, so said the Highest and the Best. That haunting glamour of a soul shaped itself into a thousand airy images, imprinted on the dark curtain of the night. It filled me with content. The dear intimacies of home rose up and cried aloud for fulfilment. "Is she kind as she is fair?" Why put the question? Surely the original of the portrait must be such an one as, by a law divine, we must perforce worship. Ah! the old, old melody that's sweetly played in tune. Who may define its subtle grace? Who can recall at will the scent of a rare perfume, wafted back to us from the

days of childhood? 'Tis like the roadside shrines, proclaiming in the dust of life's highway the perpetual image of the Christ, joy and suffering blent in an everlasting communion. Surely, surely, before the divinity that hedges in our waning human beauty we mortals must offer up pæan and prayer in adoration and gladness.

My walk to Merstham was an experience destined to remain as a part of my being. The night was translucent, a pall of blackness illumined by the myriad eyes gleaming in the heavens. "Lo!" sang the saga of the stars, "we burn aloft in our radiance for ever and ever, while as for you, the insect of an hour, you truly are a mere glorified glow-worm. You bask in the summer twilight; thence you disappear." "Nay," sprang up an answer from my heart, "this little spark of mine in the immensity perchance may watch half your fires pale and wane and flicker out. Before you were I must have been. I am a fragment of perennial life, you surely are its mere dust and ashes."

Altogether I was roaming in a very transcendental frame of mind that night. The stars were mute and so was I, yet mayhap each eloquent. There are things in Heaven and earth undreamt of in our philosophy, dream their dreamers never so wisely.

I tracked my way out of the Nutfield lane into the road that runs from London to Brighton. Just then the night coach from London came swinging along. That the horses kept the track was by an instinct I could not fathom. The twinkling lights loomed up. I stood in a recess in the road, where was a gate leading into a turnip field. There was none too much room for the coach, as well as for a footpad, on a dark night. Footpads! We were not much afraid of such gentry in these parts, and yet now and then they were singularly bold. When they were least to be expected they would suddenly appear. Our watchmen were a dunderheaded crew, never to be found when wanted. Phil Phœbus, as we called our local Charley, slumbered peacefully o' nights and gossiped away his days. What else had he to do? Our calendar was pretty light, although steadily on the upgrade, for the madness of the rick burner was beginning to spread like a pestilence up from the West Country.

After the coach had passed, I waited for a few moments passive. I thought I heard footsteps and, if so, would

let them pass unchallenged. Sure enough, two voices sounded and the tread of night wanderers. They appeared in close colloquy. One of them had a grumbling, inarticulate voice. He held the field until they came abreast of where I sheltered, mute.

“Rural education, sir?” Then quoth the other voice, loud and clear, “Hang, draw and quarter rural education, sir. ’Tis the curse of the country.” So they passed on their way, tramping southward. The second voice puzzled me. It sounded familiar somehow. I went forward northward and had traversed perhaps a hundred yards, when the remembrance smote me insistently. What a fool I had been. The voice was the voice of the Regent. I turned about to give pursuit. Not a trace could I discover. The blackness and stillness of the night blotted out all clue. Just below the spot at which I had called a halt, the road forked in two directions and I, of course, had no means of determining which route the two voices had taken. It seemed futile to attempt to follow up a cleft clue. I therefore wheeled about and tracked my way back for the “Joliffe Arms,” determined on the morrow to pursue the quest. If I laid the rogue by the heels it would be but a sorry satisfaction, I said to myself. He had stolen my purse. ’Twas mine, ’tis his, and stage thunder would not give me back my errant cash. As to retribution, that must wait its slow coming. Though slow, ’twas sure.

CHAPTER VIII

A FORTNIGHT after my visit to the Wheatleys, the rising sun on November 30th was powerless to pierce the sullen clouds wrapping the earth. The sword of that magician could but feebly penetrate the dragon's coat of vaporous mail. We are the creatures of our environment. Torpor and gloom that morning held the master key of human endeavour. Even old Merry said, "As the days grows stunted, folk turns vast glum, sir." The old man, who as a rule faced "shuckish" weather with the cheery optimism of a skylark on a May morning, even he on that occasion looked depressed and cast down. The day stood accursed in our calendar.

Nevertheless, we fared forth to face the music, each to carry out his allotted task. Skulking behind the entrenchments of apathetic slackness would certainly not exorcise the demon. The man who sulks in his tent is lost. The ancient challenging cry of our Sussexers who fought at Battle—"Out! Out!"—is still the master medicine of the world. True, the monument of that great fight was wrought in dead men's bones. No matter—they who fought fought, and, out of hideous chaos, thereafter sprang a breed of men whose wide-flung empires girdle the earth.

The raw chill of the last morning in November clung about us as we tramped to the northern edge of the heath stretching beyond Redhill. Our job was to run a traverse through the woody tract fringing this. Rainbow wished me to know that he was as keen at his job as if he was setting out for a day after the birds.

"I wouldn't be no leg-lapper, sir—not me, nohow, though I ha'e got a touch o' Ol' Lawrence to-dee and 'e be all the time pesterin' Oi not to git on wud me work."

I did my utmost to drag things out of the doldrums and

start all hands going. Accordingly, I promptly picked up my points in rear and set out a new line in advance. This involved tracking through a bit of scrubby shaw and Merry went forward like a skirmisher ahead, at the task. I heard him mutter something about "unked terrification" and that he reckoned he was not going "sowin' ga-ape-seed." We none of us dreamt of the climax of the morning's adventure. After advancing twenty yards or so, the old man turned tail and fairly bolted back. His face was ashy pale and he was trembling like one in an ague fit.

"I know'd we was all wisht together, sir," he cried, after an effort to recover his equanimity, an effort which was, in truth, but a poor one. Then he fell a-shivering afresh and his pallid face was touched with flushed patches here and there, his eyes horror-struck. He looked like one demented.

"There's murder in that there bo-arstal, sir," he gasped. "There's a deid man layin' there. God A'mighty's up against us fer shure."

Merry's alarm and excitement were contagious. Rainbow and I pushed forward in our turn. There lay a corpse, sure enough. A pistol was on the turf at its side, and the poor wreckage that once was human crouched huddled into a heap. At the first glance there was no sign of any wound. The impression flashed upon me that the body had not fallen thus, but was posed. Its beaver hat was crushed on the back of the head. This might quite possibly have been due to the fact that the man had been riding hard, for he wore the breeches, which were lathered with mud. His age was probably about forty-five years. His coal-black hair had the sheen of gray in patches, an indication that he had reached the summit peak of life. No trace of blood was visible.

"Merry," I said in a whisper, "the man is dead beyond recall. We must not touch him. Run you, Rainbow, to the village. Rouse Doctor Thereat. Send a mounted man for Phil Phœbus. He will wake the hue-and-cry Meantime Merry and I will stand on guard."

Rainbow's legs were long, but it seemed an age to me ere we saw him again. In spite of the natural terror awakened by a victim of violent death, I could not forbear to keep my eyes from questing toward yonder poor handiwork of crime, mutely appealing to the heavens for

vengeance. A lowering sky, the setting of a gloomy and forbidding canopy above our heads, hung in black, deepened the atmosphere of tragedy that lapped us about. The murdered man's face was placid and composed. There appeared no evidence of any struggle. He was of the middle height, and had the aspect of one of sedentary habits. His right hand, lying across his chest, was that of a scribe, not that of an outdoor man of action. At his fob hung a massive gold chain, a pin gleamed in his neckcloth. Evidently there had been no indiscriminate plunder of his person. His countenance bespoke the acute and well-bred man. If his dress had been appropriate I should unhesitatingly have writ him down a parson. He was stone cold. That he had been dead some hours was obvious.

Probably an hour elapsed before we heard voices, indicating that Rainbow was returning with assistance. Never surely before in my life had sixty minutes ticked out so slowly. A regular posse advanced, Thereat, our surgeon, heading the procession. Phœbus behind him, in full uniform, bore the air of conscious authority. He came towards us like an officer of command, having forces marching in his rear. On reaching the spot where we two stood, Phœbus stepped out and put himself to the fore. This tragedy was obviously his show. The parish clerk followed on his heels, much as a satellite attends upon a heavenly body.

"Note, gents," quoth Phœbus, "head layin' doo east; feet north-west; right 'and on chest, left 'and beneath body; pistol on turf"—he took out his pocket rule—"two foot and three inches from body. Is life distinct, sir?" He appealed to Thereat.

"Quite," said that functionary, having laid his hand on the dead man's heart. Thereat had a merry eye. His eyes twinkled as he looked upon this village Dogberry of ours. The rustics in attendance had brought a hurdle and two or three old rugs.

"Someone 'as to 'ang b' the neck till 'e be dead fer this day's job," announced Phœbus pompously, looking round on the assembled company for applause.

Half a dozen hands of our united party then lifted the dead man on to his hurdle bier. As they did so, a tiny puncture became visible at the base of the skull and there was a ring of congealed blood on the ground beneath.

The word had already been passed on by the thousand ministers of destruction lurking in every tussock and furrow that a quarry awaited them. This universal army, upon which the living look with disgust, was silently marching to rid the earth of her cumberer. Four bearers made ready to carry away their fearsome load, shrouded in clouts and rugs, and Phœbus was about to step out to accompany them, when Dr. Thereat said, *sotto voce*: "Surely, Phœbus, you are not going without a search of the ground. This body has been brought here. We have yet to track the spot where the murder actually took place, to find such links in the chain of villainy as can be traced."

Phœbus, who had evidently never handled an affair of such importance before and up to that moment had not given a thought to the measures suggested by the surgeon, now drew himself up with an air of offended majesty. He assumed the port of authority.

"Certently, sir," he said, "be the time I have summed up me rectification o' this gallimaufry I rackon we shall know pretty nigh 'and all there is to know of the job. It's a pity if I can't grope my way through this twitten, sir. Let them as breaks the law beware o' clams and petfalls. I say no more. 'Enry 'Awkins, would you step down to the 'Old Blade Bone' with the corpus and ast 'Ost Mell to give it an 'arbourage in 'is outhouse, whilst me and Dr. Thereat follers up the trail o' crime?"

The countrymen then slipped two larch poles under the bier and, assuming the conventional dead march, strode off to the village with the dead man. Our original party, the surgeon and the constable, soon scattered on a quest of discovery. I was the first to catch the scent, for fifty yards down the hill I noticed a furze bush battened, as if by the passage of something dragged over it, and, on close examination, there was, caught in the hassock, a tiny scrap of rough tweed cloth of the same colour as that worn by the murdered man. A dark stain upon this was beyond question blood. It was evident that the body had been scuffled up from the roadway below. Probably not more than two men were concerned in the actual transport of the body across country, or it would have been lifted clear of bushes. Just then Joe Nobbler and his famous lurcher hove in sight, tramping toward the

village. Now Nobbler was one of those primitives who in every community of remote country folk is recognized as a nature-made trapper and snarer of wild birds and beasts. If Joe had been born a gentleman he would have won laudation as a sportsman of the first water. As it was, having been dragged up in a crazy shebeen and inured to woodland ways all his days, he had to be classed as a poacher. It is true the man was much too sharp to be circumvented by so clumsy a rogue as Phil Phœbus. The poacher could carry on his operations under the very nose of the Law with impunity, until perchance sheer accident might have revealed his delinquency.

Seeing this man, I whistled him to join us, which he did with alacrity. The countryman of every grade and degree dearly loves the unravelling of a tragedy. 'Tis as relishing to him as watching a play is to the townsman. Nobbler's dog File soon put us all right. He was on the trail in a jiffy, and led us to a gate from whence a footpath ran into the highroad. Still going strong, he brought us to a dip in the road where a tiny trickle of water from a bit of boggy land above ran through a culvert. Here File sniffed round and round in a circle, so that it became evident he had located the actual spot where the crime had been committed.

Phœbus at once assumed the air of Sir Oracle. "I rackon, gents," quoth he, "we have now worked out our dead 'oss. This is where 'im or them fitted the 'alter round their necks."

There probably had been no traffic worth speaking of along the road that morning, for it was a solitary, unfrequented track. Nobbler said nothing, but his eyes and wits were hard at work. It takes on the average ninety-nine tonguesters to match one silent man.

"There 'as been a mort o' spanelin' about here," at length said Nobbler quietly. "One 'orse and two men 'as been on this job."

Country lad as I was, he proceeded to point out to me a score of minute indications of a scuffle to which I was blind—a blade of rush bent here, a blob of trodden clay there. Nobbler wheeled off to examine a grip on the hither side of the road.

"The 'orse 'asn't come any further than where we stand," he soliloquized. "He's turned round and galloped 'ome.

Someone 'as been a-working out a dead 'orse, I rackon, as Mus Phœbus says," he added, with a grin. His little jest seemed to please him mightily, for he repeated under his breath several times: "There 'as been a dead 'orse job on here, sure enough."

Now this same phrase of his, in our Sussex parlance, indicates the working off of an old debt. A man has facing him the imperative demand for the satisfaction of some obligation which he fondly imagined the lapse of time had wiped out. We call the necessity "working out a dead horse."

"Look 'ere, gents," said Nobbler a few minutes later, pointing to a hardly-distinguishable patch on the road, "that's noo sand that's been wimmed to 'ide something." He took out his jack knife and scraped the surface. File in his more rough and ready fashion was already sniffing and scratching alongside his master. Between them they found a true bill. Under the sand the highway was dyed with a dark stain of blood.

The outline of crime sequence was beginning to be clear. An unknown horseman had been stopped on the road in the grey of the morning. He had been shot from the rear and had fallen from his horse. His body had been dragged and carried through a hedgerow gap across the intervening rough meadow and carefully posed in a bit of scrubland. The spot chosen for concealment was cunningly selected. Save for the accident of our survey, no one would have been likely to wander there. The murderers had emulated the art of the lark in hiding his nest. To the lark the obvious is the obscure.

Phœbus had taken possession of the dead man's pistol when the body was lifted. On his pulling it out of his pocket, as we stood together in the road, we found it to be loaded. It was patent that the attack had been a surprise. The traveller had been inveigled into a sense of false security. The weapon was polished clean and undischarged. This fact ruled out of court any suggestion of suicide.

"Now," said Thereat, critically, "we have by chance on the ground as complete a force as if the Bow Street runners had taken hold of this job from the very start. First of all, there is Phœbus here, who in the execution of his duty puts loaded pistols into his pocket and says,

'Hang the risk.' " Phœbus's present terror, albeit held in leash, was now ludicrous to behold. Henceforth he regarded the pistol—and said so—as if it had been a deadly snake.

"We have scotched the snake, not killed it," chuckled Thereat. "File here," he went on, "is worth all Bow Street in a bunch. The chance of Joyce's morning work has brought us to a red-hot trail. There is one thing you can do, Joyce, to make the story complete. It will help the Court if you could get out a plan of this bit of the road, of the spot where you found the body, and of the track across which it must have been transported."

"Transpo-orted?" quoth Phœbus. "When we have cotched these gentry, sir—me and you—there won't be much transpo-ortation about the job—'twill be Newgate on 'anging morning. That'll be the toon you and me'll play at, I rackon, sir."

So we separated, but, before doing so, I had a look at the pistol. An old weapon, worn smooth, it probably had been carried in the pockets of generations of travellers. It was silver mounted and bore the initials "S.S." in old English characters on the butt. Phœbus went off to put in motion the crowner's quest and to summon the village tribunal "to set on the corpus," as he described it. Dr. Thereat hurried back to his pills and his potions and I started to measure up the locality of the crime, so as later to put it on paper.

Hardly had I begun my self-imposed task, when, as if by common consent, the whole village came streaming up. 'Tis surely a strange infatuation which attracts our English folk to gaze upon a house or a spot of earth, which has harboured or is the locale of crime. Folk may have passed it with no speculation in their eye, every day for twelve months. The news that a sordid tragedy has been enacted on the spot no sooner reaches the public ear than—villagers and townsfolk alike—all flock to the rendezvous and stand in groups agape, as if translated. However, 'tis a pastime which at length palls. The imperial demand of hunger or the obvious call to the winning of daily bread draws the loiterers back to their tasks. Nevertheless, the aroma of a murder-legend will hang about a village green for generations, as do the stories of battles long ago.

I got back to the "Joliffe Arms" in the dusk of the

evening, played out with the excitement and horror of the day's happenings. There I found a note, containing an urgent request that I would go up to the Grange with all dispatch.

"These things never come as single spies, but in battalions," quoth Quodling. "'Tis some fresh enormity, that has befallen your friends the Wheatleys this time."

As in duty bound I waited neither for food nor gossip, but posted off hotfoot to Nutfield. Arrived there, I found Mr. Wheatley distraught, the prey of vivid apprehension.

"How glad I am to see you, dear lad," he cried, shaking me warmly by the hand. "Have you fed? I can see you haven't. Come in and get a meal before we start talking."

I could extract nothing more from him until after I had satisfied my hunger. Then we drew round the library fire, for the day had been monstrous chilly, as well as gloomy. Thus he began :

"The news of this murder cuts me to the quick, Waterloo. I have been to the 'Old Blade Bone' to see the body. Whose body is it, think you? It is none other than that of one of my oldest and most loyal friends—Sam Storey, our family lawyer. He has been the guardian of my purse and of my honour and has on my behalf, during the last few months, been pitted against and in the toils of a gang of marauders. He was coming to this house on an errand which I fondly hoped might have freed me from an impending avalanche of distress. What I am going to do now to struggle against it, Heaven alone knows."

I said, "Friendship in adversity, sir, is the only touchstone of that fraternity we spoke of the other night. The man who sheers off when he sees trouble in the offing may play the Pharisee; he does not play the Samaritan. 'Twas the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side."

"Waterloo," cried Mr. Wheatley, "I know you have your own way to make and cannot get me out of the meshes closing round me, but, nevertheless, I want to tell you the story. I must tell someone the story."

"Bear in mind, sir," I answered, "that it was the timorous mouse who in the fable freed the lion from his toils."

"My estate is deeply encumbered," he said shortly. "Our load of debt was piled up by my father at College.

Hitherto the burden has fitted easy as an old glove. The mortgage was in friendly hands. It has run on in mutual harmony. Now one fine morning, some months ago, an intimation came to me from a firm of City sharks—that they are such I have learnt—by name Levi & Cohen. These gentry stated that their clients, Maurice Amos and Ebenezer Solomon, had acquired and taken over the Tall-boy charge on these estates, that they had decided, under the terms of the mortgage deed, to call in the principal sum due and, accordingly, these gentry gave me, on behalf of their clients, the necessary legal six months' notice of their intention so to do. They wound up their letter with the usual rascally grimace that they trusted their clients' action would not cause me inconvenience. This was, they could assure me, the very last desire, both of their clients aforesaid and of yours faithfully, Levi & Cohen. In a postscript was the sting of the whole menace. These worthies closed the letter by offering me their good offices, should I desire 'any accommodation or rearrangement of conditions.' They would lay themselves out—so they said—to meet my views and readjust matters in any manner involving the least disturbance to me. In other words, they and their 'clients'—who are probably members of the same gang of brigands—are out for blackmail, if that should prove the safer course.

"Well, I posted off to Canterbury to see poor Storey. With the best intent in the world, he could only give me the poorest of comfort. You know, someone has said such comfort is about as comforting as cold porridge. However, he set to work like a Trojan to get me out of my mess. He was on his way here with promises or proposals, which he fondly hoped might strike, like a ray of sunlight through a keyhole. He was done to death on the King's highway. From all I could learn from him, your coming railway is at the bottom of these ruffians' plotting. The links in the chain of calculated chicanery are, first, an assurance that the railway line will be made; secondly, the seizure, by any art or contrivance, of land at its old-time value; thirdly, the division of the spoil among the pirates, we ancient holders of paternal acres having to face being turned out on to the roadside, if we fail in satisfying the harpies' demand. 'Tis Shylock and the pound of living flesh in modern garb."

"How much is the amount of the mortgage they have called in?" I asked him.

"Twelve thousand pounds," he said shortly.

"When has the capital to be found?"

"On January the first," he answered.

"You have then a month to clear the decks."

"I might as well have a month of Sundays," he declared impetuously, "for I know no possible chance or channel for securing twelve thousand pounds in cash."

"Be of better cheer," I told him; "these very murderers may have played into our hands. If we can but hitch their crime to the chariot of a conspiracy to ease you of your land, who knows what may not be achieved?"

One of the greatest blots on the domestic situation at the Grange was the fact that there was no confidence between the master and the mistress of the house. Had Mr. Wheatley been able to rally to his aid the loyalty of his wife, he might peradventure have won through his trouble gallantly. These very hours of trial might then have proved a blessing in disguise, lifting the mantle of the lady's selfish vapouring. When I saw the solitary distress of this new-found friend of mine, and, even more, as I drank of the sweet content of the portrait hanging over the mantelpiece, I could but recall the bitter saying: "The itch of disputing is the scab of the Church." The rhapsody of words with which the poor lady of the house beclouded its atmosphere might perchance have melted into the tenderness that doubtless lay beneath, had Mr. Wheatley appealed to her honest purpose and warm heart, but years of deadening depression blocked the avenues betwixt the natures of the father and mother of Margarita.

Doubtless it was in order to ripen the blossom of the child's young life that Mr. Wheatley had contrived to get her away, to spend her springtide far from the chilling fog of the Grange. Thus was her father seeking to attemper her nature in a happier clime. No doubt he had weighed the risks, the chances that mere frivolity, like a sturdy weed, might overmaster shy content. What he strove to implant in her nature was the artless grace—which is the perfection of art—of high French ideal in womanly equipoise. Blent with the sturdy qualities of English breeding at its best, the product of the twin environment should, he probably persuaded himself, be a glorious being of angel

instincts and a heart of ruth, a nature such as Shakespeare loved to image forth—"the perfect woman, nobly planned."

Mutely pondering as I sat by the library fire that night, Mr. Wheatley at length said: "I can well see, Waterloo, that you realize how hopeless is the task before me. I may have to go through the mill as a host of better men than I have done before me. No matter. I shall never forget that it is to you I turned, as if by instinct, in this time of trial. You spoke of the fable of the lion and the mouse just now. Don't forget that other saying: 'It's a bold mouse that nestles in the cat's ear.'"

"Ay, sir," I cried, "we will play the bold game and keep the flag flying yet."

Mr. Wheatley at these words caught a little of the infection of my boyish enthusiasm, looking his troubles more squarely between the eyes. When we adjourned together to the drawing-room, Mrs. Wheatley was almost sprightly.

"What treason are you two hatching?" she exclaimed.

"I was learning all about poor Storey," said Mr. Wheatley, half apologetically. "Waterloo was the first to come upon his body, you know."

"Our old Merry was," said I. "I wish you could meet the old man, madam. His outlook on life is as cheery as a mudlark's."

"His daughter sells ducks and eggs in the public market at Reigate," said Mrs. Wheatley; "a ruddy girl with a shock of auburn hair. From what I hear of them, I am afraid the Methodist ranters have got hold of them."

"The mon's the gowd!" I cried ardently.

"Ah, my dear boy," replied Mrs. Wheatley, who seemed on the verge of damping off, "you are young and these war-cries sound very grand and telling to you. Wait another twenty years and you will see things with other eyes."

"Is it not best to see things of to-day with the eyes of to-day?" I asked. "But Mrs. Wheatley, the clock is nearly pointing to to-morrow. I have had a heavy and exciting day and must be up betimes in the morning. I must flit."

"Waterloo," Mrs. Wheatley replied, in her kindest tone, "make this house your own, my dear. The more you and Dick see of one another the better I shall be pleased."

I watched a glow of satisfaction spring into Mr. Wheatley's eyes at these words, and our parting that night on both sides was of the warmest. As I strode down the hill I could not but brood that the day might yet dawn which should unchain the ice-bound springs of mutual love betwixt these two folk, whom I had come to regard with almost filial eyes.

It was my habit to sleep, as Merry put it, "like a dead pig," but that night I heard the church clock tell out the slow hours. The hubbub of fateful voices rang their chimes within. I could save Mr. Wheatley from his dreaded eclipse, provided Mr. Rohu and Mr. Clutterbuck but gave consent for a contingent of the Fullerton funds to be marched to his assistance. Then I went through the pantomime of an imaginary colloquy with these two gentlemen. I conjured up the wise saws and humorous comment with which they would not only veto but damn any hint of such a diversion of the family money.

Was not the possible fate of Mr. Wheatley impending on Uncle John also? I knew that the financial anxieties of both were real and insistent. There are tens of thousands of folk whose ragged regiment of investment or income can put up a successful, if hard, fight with day-to-day tradesmen's bills. Call upon them unexpectedly to find a capital sum and they must perforce surrender. *Force majeure* would be their undoing. Had this tragedy into which I had unwittingly blundered any connection with the straitened outlook at the Grange? Had the Regent, whom I knew to have been flitting about the neighbourhood, any hand in the dark doings of the last forty-eight hours? Surely no rogue would risk his neck save for a master stake. The murderers had not plundered Mr. Storey's body. Some document which he carried must have been their objective. Even so, to take life to secure such, was a *coup* to which none but desperate brigands would resort.

No doubt it was anticipated that the corpse would lie on the hillside until the foxes and the forces of decay should render the problem of tracking the crime obscure, if not impossible. Then the circuit of the maze brought me back to the stark reality that in four weeks' time the guillotine would fall for the Wheatleys, perhaps on their bare means of subsistence—a stroke of destiny of which,

moreover, Mrs. Wheatley was in total ignorance. In four weeks' time, also, Margarita would swim into my ken and, at that thought, the ardour of my resolution waxed valiant. To save those questing eyes of hers from tears, to shield her from the darts of the Wicked One, to such a mission I would sacrifice all I possessed, or might possess. "Perish Fullerton!" I cried to myself.

When I bethought me of the years of unselfish devotion during which my benefactors had forestalled my every want, to vow their property to extinction was surely a poor return enough. At length I began to lash myself into a frenzy, such as that of a wild creature fighting against the meshes of a net. I cursed the curse of money and all its ills. When we boys had to face the music, almost as does the outlander or the savage, at Newhaven, we had perhaps but twenty-four hours' food in sight. Yet were we cheery enough. 'Twas sufficient for the day. Now had come, as in the legend, Fortune burying us beneath a heap of God-given gifts—burying us, aye, so that we panted for the breath of life. The soldier facing the odds of wounds and death, the sailor scanning the latent fury of wind and wave, these men are happy at their tasks. We, the pampered playthings of fortune, were racked with anxiety and care for the morrow.

One had read of men who threw up all cankering wealth to retire to a hermit's cell. That was surely a coward's trick, or rather these men were simply mad. One dominant idea had taken possession of them, till it filled their horizon. Under its mastery they hugged their one delusion, as the be-all and end-all of existence. The mighty machine of the universe went on its way with ten thousand notes of pæan and despair. These poor folk clung as to a life-buoy to one miserable crazy notion. The hermit fondly dreamt that the Kingdom of Heaven, which suffereth violence, could be won by creeping into a cave or burrow, by hiding from the light of day, by making earth itself a hell.

The sum of things and the cares of riches grew that night into a veritable fever of the blood to me. I tossed and tumbled impetuously. Now the prompting came to play for my own hand alone. What were the Wheatleys to me or I to the Wheatleys? If I were caught in such a trap as that which held the unhappy owner of the Grange

in its grip, would anyone come to my rescue? Then once more I bethought me how in sooth the Fates—kind or cruel—had made me their toy—perhaps their sport. Had not benefactions fallen from the clouds and perked me up in false security? The idea of handing over the family money to relieve the wants of strangers, because I had happened to see, hanging on a wall, a portrait which pleased my fancy, would have made an excellent jest to the wise folk I had encountered in Westminster Hall. At the Bar mess it would have been recounted with glee.

And yet, in spite of every discouragement which reason put up, I knew in my bones that to lose my life was to save it, that weighed in the balances of the gods the supreme sacrifice laid on the altar of love was the only thing worth living for. Without the capacity to make that sacrifice a man had nothing, save his reason and superior cunning, to distinguish him from the cattle who browsed on the hillside.

One day intervened between that troublous night, and the inquest. It followed that I must lose two precious days in fighting against time on behalf of Mr. Wheatley. I must perforce appear at the Coroner's court. In sober verity, what was I to do? I could not lift a finger on my own initiative. Every step must be done by consent, for I was in leading strings.

Now as I pondered on all this complicated web of cross purposes, sleep came mercifully to my aid. I wandered once more in the golden morning of content—my mother and I were out upon the hills together, with nothing but the blue sky bending over our heads and the chorus of a myriad lark notes shrilling in our ears. As I woke, a dappled dawn began to come blushing over the Godstone hills and sane ideas walked the earth, donning the sombre hues of their workaday garb. Ere making the effort to turn out, I lay at peace, to watch the flooding of the haunts of men with an ever-new panoply of love. At long last I fell a-musing. "Godstone." That was whence the dawn was spreading. Men dubbed the spot by this name because from its quarries was hewn the basement stone of our grey Abbey. "The Abbey" we proudly call it, as if none other existed on the earth. To those toilers six hundred years ago, the tragedy of their hard lot was doubtless an absorbing possession. Nevertheless, they

toiled and hewed the sandstone. By incredible labour, over tracks in which horses and men alike were often bogged, in foul weather as in fair, the stream of stone flowed on toward Westminster. There in due season the Abbey grew apace. Even so, thought I, do we to-day pile up our cairns of daily endeavour, although the all-devouring maw of Time stands ready to sweep our puny efforts to oblivion. Yet from our toil some edifice must surely emerge, be it temple or gallows.

As I sprang out of bed, the morning air had clarified my ideas, my mind was made up. Immediately after I was released from attendance on the inquest, I would ride off to Fullerton Park. There would I lay everything without reserve before our mother. Her advice would be high in plane and unwarped by sordid self-seeking.

CHAPTER IX

NEXT day I finished my plan of the locality of the murder and embellished it with a fanciful North point. The patches of gorse and scrub might have been read as forest trees, and the oozy bit of wet land as a river. However, Tosh, who was our best mapper, pronounced it an effort worthy of an early tracker in the plantations of Virginia—a double-edged saying, which I might take as compliment or satire as the mood befitted.

Phœbus had made his round and twelve good men and true were duly served with scraps of blue paper in the King's name. To the villager, the chance of sitting in judgment on a spicy tragedy is an event on which he looks forward with pleasure, back with pride. Phœbus was as one conferring personal favours. He had two or three names over in case of mishap, and the men selected were his own cronies—shopkeepers, host Boakes of the "Joliffe Arms," and a few farmers and bailiffs. The Coroner was a stumpy little man, who dropped his h's and wanted to get home to his mid-day dinner. Phœbus, on the other hand, revelled in the limelight, and consequently sought to protract the inquiry.

Mr. Joblings, the coroner, having bustled in and taken his seat at the head of the table in the club room of the Ancient Badgers, his clerk being seated at his right hand, Phœbus announced *sotto voce* that "the jury must now be sworn"—and swore they were. They promptly chose Mus' Enery Sollum, our baker (or, as we all called him, "Old Sol"), as spokesman and foreman. His day's work was over by five in the morning and Mistus S. and the little 'uns could do the rest, as he informed the Court. After the jury had viewed the body, Mr. Wheatley was the first witness called. He identified the deceased and told generally the reason of his coming to Merstham. Then I followed with my plan. One of the jury, who had probably

been prompted by Phœbus, suggested visiting the spot. The Coroner thought this unnecessary, but finally gave way. Old Merry had next to tell his tale. He would dearly have liked to spin it out a bit, but the Coroner cut him short. The Court only wanted to know the facts, he remarked, not the frillings. To him succeeded Dr. Thereat, who said his say concisely. Then Phœbus was called. He began a long-winded preamble to the effect that he was jest perceedin' to step down from 'Angman's Shaw, arter a night's watchin' fer poachin' gentry, when the Coroner told him that the Court did not want a lecture, but the facts. Crestfallen, he had to answer a running fire of questions by the Court—or in other words the Coroner and his clerk—and at length, a good deal ruffled at the off-hand manner in which the inquiry was being conducted, gave in, told his story without more ado and thus closed the tale of witnesses.

The Coroner stated that the facts were abundantly clear, and the duty of the jury was to return a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown ; still, if they desired, before giving such verdict, to visit the spot where the crime had been committed, he saw no reason why they should not do so. Accordingly we tramped in a body to the hillside, thus giving Phœbus the chance, for which he panted, of posing as the guardian of the Law, who could see as far through a deal door as here and there one. Coroner Joblings took out his watch several times whilst this performance was in progress, and at length bade a return to the "Old Blade Bone." Here the required verdict was dutifully given. The Coroner and his clerk packed up their papers, their gig was brought round and, after a morning draught apiece, they drove away, leaving Phœbus and the villagers to close the day's proceedings with potations and talk. All were agreed that "this Crowner weren't a patch on the last 'un." Meantime, Mr. Wheatley had made arrangements for the transport of the body to Canterbury, and I was fidgetting to be up and away to Fullerton Park.

The blood-red tints of the fallen beech leaves ensanguined the earth carpet throughout the avenues I rode past. This fiery vista was contrasted with the glorious old gold of billows of withering brake fern. Truly the expiring riot of summer preludes a mystic splendour, as decay's

effacing fingers beckon winter to her throne. In spite of the dark problems which beset me, I could not be blind to the supreme beauty of the countryside. Were we railway pioneers to be instruments in levelling down this magic world to the drab hues of commonplace? How many a dream-city, which has basked away the mellow years through centuries of dim tradition, has been converted into a region of dull vacuity by the meddling of the lightning "restorer." King Hal and Oliver Cromwell, had they taken counsel together, would not have wrecked so many fanes whose design was in the main of light, as have such self-complacent rogues.

How was I to put my case to Mr. Fullerton? It was useless to blink the fact that prudence was against me, but after all prudence, although perchance a good hackney, will never make even a decent third-class plater. The beast I bestrode was a sound roadster enough, but, had the hounds in full cry crossed our track, he would not have mended his pace a jot or done more than prick his ears to the tally-ho! To be candid, I knew my mission was foredoomed to failure before I started on it. Our mother could but counsel the conservation of the Fullerton resources. I was an interloper, a half-fledged cuckoo in an alien nest. For me to suggest to hand out funds following up a quixotic idea, enriching casual acquaintances at the expense of the home fires, surely such folly stood self-condemned.

It was as the westering sun sank behind the bastion of the Downs, leaving a lurid after-glow, that the clump of fir trees on the crest of Maundy Ridge, which overtopped our park, hove in sight. I gave Blucher a touch with the heel. He clattered over a grassy trackway and struck the ride by which he knew as well as I that we should come out on the flank of the west entrance of the park. The curtain of the dark was beginning to throw its shadows over the wide landscape, as I dismounted to open a side gate, whence Blucher would be on his native heath once more. A short gallop led us to the drive and a few minutes later, after a stablehand had rubbed him down, he was munching his oats, in peace with himself and all the world.

Our mother was delighted to see me, although a trifle apprehensive as to why I had arrived unexpectedly.

As for Victory, she was so genuinely pleased to have me home again that a new tie seemed then and there to spring up between us.

Victory had a trace of the hawk in her composition. Although a home-loving child enough, she was as free and graceful as a wild bird. Her outlook was ever far afield. No one could be truer when her affection was touched than she, no one more tantalizing when her mood lay that way, no one more incisive and defiant when she stood upon her dignity. As I recalled her image in clouds of tobacco smoke by the fireside of the "Joliffe Arms," she always stood before me as an untamed Pocahontas, unconventional, flashing out in wilful self-assertiveness, yet with a golden heart of ruth and good intent.

"Now, you young scapegrace," quoth she, "is she blue-eyed this time?"

"All my merry jigs are quite forgot,
All my lady's love is lost, God wot;
Where her faith was firmly fix'd in love,
There a nay is placed without remove."

"Come now, confess, Wat. Confession is good for the soul. Is not that a true bill, sir?"

"I see you have not grown wiser, for all you've grown older," I replied, rather lamely. "Keep still a moment, Vic. Why look here, mother, see here is a grey hair and no wisdom to match with it."

"Tell us shortly," said our mother, "what it is brings you home in this helter-skelter fashion. Is anything wrong? We are both delighted to see you, my boy, but—why, why?"

"For one thing," I made answer, "I have been mixed up in a real tragedy. Listen." And I told them of the murder and the inquest. Victory listened wide-eyed, with bated breath, to my story, but thereafter came back to her starting-point.

"That is not the real reason you have come home suddenly," she said, in a dreamy soliloquy. Her eyes, as our father would have said, raked me fore and aft. Some subtle atmosphere about me set her thoughts a-puzzle.

"It is quite true," I said at length, "that I have come

to talk to you, mother, and to Mr. Fullerton about a matter which to me at least is all-important."

"What is the colour of her eyes, Wat?" retorted Victory afresh.

"Look here, Vic," I said, "I know you can blow hot and cold when the humour suits, but, my dear, this is a matter of life and death to me. Money comes into it, but is not of it."

"Mr. Fullerton is away in London," our mother replied shortly. "I don't know what troubles him, but the trouble is real. He has been backwards and forwards half-a-dozen times while you have been away."

"I think I know what's troubling him. It is troubling me too," I murmured. "Often and often have I wished that we boys were knocking about the pier heads at New-haven, mother, or that I was taking lessons from ' Ciseman Love in Noah's Ark as of old. Which master am I to serve—Money or Love?"

"You have told us so far, my dear. Victory's tongue may have a sharp tip, but it bears at its root the balm of true love after all. I really think it is better that we three should have all one another's confidence, rather than doles of it."

Thus it befell that with the artless force of conviction, I told my story. No love-lorn swain ever had a more sympathetic audience.

I recounted the links in the chain of my acquaintance with the Wheatleys. I had visited the Grange but twice or thrice. The Wheatleys could hardly be called friends. All this I admitted as preface to my tale. Dick was a jolly lad and we sang our songs with mutual gusto. The lady of the house was a bit of a wet blanket; that could not be gainsaid. The servants moved about as if under a cloud. The master was struggling with a nightmare of anxiety. He should by rights be a cheery soul enough, but penury, like an avenging fate, was on his track.

As I approached the subject of Margarita's picture, I could not but feel how weak my case was. The ice was thin in all conscience, yet beyond it lay a promised land. Woe betide me if, in poltroonery or by lack of faith, I turned my back on achieving the perilous shore where in imagination, lay the Holy City of my dream. I hesitated and stammered, but at last plunged onwards.

"Tell me, mother," I cried, "if now in what I know to be the supreme crisis of my fate, I am to forget all the lessons you taught us boys when we were living from hand to mouth at Newhaven. Am I to turn my horse's head and gallop away to safety, or ride on into the *mêlée*—it may be to wounds or death, yet at least to honour, seeking to accomplish that which I know to be the highest."

"Need you ask?" said our mother quietly. Vic looked a trifle quizzical. They neither of them knew what was coming. How to put the incident forward in sober verity was indeed a task.

"Pictures are parables," quoth I at length and was silent.

"Now you are going to tell us tarradiddles, I can see," Vic interjected. "'There was a ship,' quoth he."

Our mother perceived that some strange ferment was working within me and replied, "Out with it, my boy. Give us the whole mystery. Ridicule can never kill true love. As for you, Vic, don't try to play the jester out of his course."

So at last I faced the music. "My theme lies in one word," I cried. "Margarita is the inspiration of my thoughts and acts." I paused again, so long that our mother had to prompt me to resume my story. "She comes home at Christmas—is she to come to ruin and chaos or am I to be the means of rescuing the family from the toils of the Jews?"

"That is a hard saying," quoth our mother. "Where does Margarita come from and how on earth are you to be in a position to play the good Samaritan to the family? You have only shown us bits of your puzzle, you see."

"Mr. Wheatley is haunted by the collapse of his fortune," I replied. "I have the will, and, if permitted, the power to come to his rescue. That is shortly how matters stand at the Grange. Margarita is at school near Paris. Her portrait hangs on the wall of Mr. Wheatley's study. That portrait is the parable of the pearl of great price."

My narrative had been told obliquely enough, Heaven knows, but the vision of my day dreams had grown real to my auditors. Now I could but await the dictum of our mother. That would either grapple our souls closer still with hooks of steel or leave between us a rift for the first time in our lives. Whatever she might say, the

ultimate word did not rest with either of us. The wiseacres of Westminster would have the final casting vote.

“My voice would go to urge you to follow the vision, but first of all to be sure it is no will-o'-the-wisp this time that lures you on with false light. At the best, my dear, money can but give money's worth. It cannot be bartered for betterment. This old man Merry you tell us of, is a regal soul. Probably he never owned a five pound note in his life.”

I breathed more freely. I had told my tale. It had not been treated as idle fable by our mother. I rose and kissed her fervently. As I did so I could not but note how the expression of Vic's face changed. A sort of latent mockery was there a moment before, now the springs of kindly sympathy broke forth. We three were knit closer in the bonds of the charity that never faileth. Our mother was profoundly touched by the climax of our interview.

“I feel,” she said at length, “that you do not seek the worldly-wise course. Thank God for that, my boy. At the same time, even if you were of age and could dispose of your property as you would, prudence would dictate caution. It is easy enough to plunge into a morass where money is concerned. Often, having got into the swamp, it is a hard job to extricate oneself from it. My counsel would be this. Advise Mr. Wheatley to have Margarita home at once. Put Mr. Rohu and your Uncle John in touch with him. If what you so ardently desire is possible and they think it can be honourably achieved, well and good. You have done your part and played the man. If the siege cannot be raised, you can do no more. Recommend Mr. Wheatley to lay the whole dilemma squarely before his wife. Who knows but that thus the good in everything may come to the surface and this threatening cloud yet show a silver lining?”

How glad I felt that I had disclosed the unfolding drama to those best able by good intent and the ties of blood to counsel wisely. Now that I saw my course in stark colours, I was for remounting Blucher and galloping back forthwith to the succour of the folk at the Grange. Our mother shook her head decidedly. Night was drawing on apace.

“Start as early as you will to-morrow,” she said. “Stop here to-night.”

Thus it befell. As we sat round the fireside after supper, I filled up the gaps in my narrative of our Merstham experiences, embroidering its borders with those little touches of Nature which had become sources of vital delight to me. Fullerton was a stately place, replete with the accumulated relics of generations of cultured folk. We Joyces had stepped into the demesne, rich with the endowment conferred by the hard struggle for daily bread. We might have been as were the Goths, spoiling the luscious splendour of old Rome, as the blatant parvenu emulating the ass who riots in the lion's skin, as Christopher Sly in the comedy. Our mother, nurtured in the true school of life, held her own among the county folk by sheer force of character. Victory, under the tuition of Mr. Pooss, was already reaping the harvest of cultured grace. Compared with the daughters of half the gentry about us, she shone by native vigour. In our day the girls of the wealthy were apt to be brought up in cloistral vacuity, whereas Vic carried the stamp of her own personality into all the activities of life. The rawness of our early upbringing was giving place to that veneer folk call *ton*. Thus do we use a foreign phrase to express a product of alien skies.

Next morning the low sun in a fiery sky loomed up as if the universal bonfire were afoot. Every leaf and spray bore a bloom of moisture, different indeed from the beaded bubbles of the summer dew. No air stirred. The rooks sailed so low that I could hear the clap of their wings. Even that cheery optimist, the robin, had caught the wintry note. He sang full-throated, perched on fence or bough, but his was a minor melody, remonstrant, foreboding. Blucher plodded doggedly on his tracks of yesterday. I steered our course through lanes and byways, following routes I had learnt by heart. I was bent on reaching Nutfield before midday.

Muddy and travel-stained as I was, I sought Mr. Wheatley immediately on my arrival. My zeal and energy on his behalf touched him greatly.

"You have done more for me, Waterloo," he cried, "than all other folk and kindred put together, save and except poor Storey. He, I fear, laid down his life in trying to do me a service—trying and failing," he added gloomily. He seemed to drop back into the trough of a recurrent wave of melancholy.

"Sir," I said, "I have taken counsel of one best able to give it."

I had perforce to tell him a little how matters stood with us at Fullerton. It was a subject I had hitherto avoided at Merstham.

"You see," I told him, "we are not really county folk at all, but by a queer stroke of fortune I have money and land. I fear—I don't really know—that he whom I call Uncle John is now also passing through some such strait as you are. At best I am but a minor. The power does not rest with me. If I had control of my own I would put matters straight for you both in twenty-four hours."

"In other words," said Mr. Wheatley, rising with eyes kindling with pleasure, "you would impoverish yourself to pay my debts. My boy, words are too poor to express my gratitude and pleasure, but I would not listen to such a scheme for a moment—not for one moment. No, if I go down, down I go, but it shall be with my flag flying, for never, never will I drag my friends down with me."

"How do you know," I asked him, "that I should not be able to make quite a good thing out of you? In a year or two, when the railway works start, land will jump in value by kangaroo leaps. Believe me, sir, I am really mercenary. I shall make money out of your necessities yet."

Mr. Wheatley smiled sadly and wanly. I could see that my proposal had touched him to the quick. He had of late passed through so many vicissitudes, such lets and frets, that he had no faith in any panacea. The good will of my proffered service was just then more to him than aught beside. In the end I told him how our mother had advised that Mrs. Wheatley should be kept fully informed of all possible changes. The shock, if shock there was to be, would be softened by foreknowledge.

"It is a hard saying," he replied, "but I am well assured such revelation is my real duty. Poor Sophia! Whatever will she say? The padres whom she affects are the prophets of our special and exclusive Providence—Lares that attach themselves to the Manor first and foremost. If these Lares desert us in our hour of need, what will the verdict be then?"

"Our mother's creed is a creed of good will also," I answered. "It is the creed parabled in the rain that falls alike on the just and the unjust."

“ 'Tis a hard enough task,” was his reply, “ to lay bare the poverty of the cupboard to my wife.” He mused. “ She has never had an anxious moment in her life, so far as worldly affairs go. The wheels of her daily round have run in oil. Now, whether we will or no, discordant music has to be faced. We shall learn who are souls loyal to us, who time-servers. It is not as though we two—she and I—were at an age when the tree trunk can be bent to unkindly winds of Fate. As for us, the storms will uproot us, bring us crashing to the earth—shattered and rent.”

Blucher had had two hard days and I arranged with Mr. Wheatley to leave him in the stables of the Manor and to set out for Canterbury on one of their nags—Raffler by name. What I should be able to do when I got to Canterbury we neither of us had the remotest idea. Nevertheless for me, hard exercise drove off the demon of anxious thought. Something too perchance might come of the visit. Dick presently coming in, we determined to set forth together as crusaders. Our meal was a sorry affair, although after my early ride, I had the hunger of a Hottentot to appease.

Mrs. Wheatley kept the talk rolling on the lower levels of commonplace. It is a region of sheer doldrum. A capful of wind therein is recounted as if it were a hurricane or a typhoon. The petty becomes vital in interest. Human folk dance like puppets on wires. However, all meals have an ending. Thereafter it befell that Dick and I galloped along the high ridge track that leads to the Kentish border.

The dreaming Weald lay stretched below us, mile on mile of tangled woodland and parterre, dotted here and there with church spires. The landscape was redolent of the slow growth of ordered advance. That great plain is as a living page of history. Our little island has been shaped and hammered on the anvil of Providence. A hundred times over, according to the minor prophets, have we been going to the dogs, drifting down the current to national perdition. The prophets, for all their cock-sureness, have been wrong. We islanders, buffeted and battered by adverse fortune, have time and again shaken ourselves free, each struggle leaving on our hands another continent or so to redeem from chaos. We fight best when

we are beaten. Those whom we conquer dance to our tune. The skies fall about us. We pick up the pieces and frame them into a national pattern, making ready age by age for the supreme crisis which is hidden from men's ken, when upon the ashes of a wrecked world is to spring up an ordered democracy of peoples. We threw away in a fit of folly, a whole continent of our kith and kin. Peradventure the day may dawn when from both sides of the Atlantic shall arise, self-kindled, the imperial mandate for reunion. By reunion the flag of a united race, made one after generations of divided counsel, would be arbiter of the world's destiny, the dream of a true commonwealth of English-speaking folk sober reality. Then might this storm-beset planet of ours slumber, changed into something new and strange, lapped in fraternity equal and free.

In spite of the tragedy which had just caught us in its toils, in spite of the net of rascality spread about us, this vision for me summed up the story. Thus is it to have the optimist blood within. Forgetting those things that are behind, one presses toward the mark, a goal attained at length by reason of its very impossibility. If we Britons had started our oversea enterprises by first drafting for each such enterprise a profit and loss account, we should to-day have been another Iceland, peopled with folk content with their store of cattle and pigs, grouped in self-complacent communities gathered each about its own dunghill, having no wider range of vision than that of the beasts that perish.

We boys beguiled the way with wild talk such as this, one to the other. Dick held more strongly than did I the patrician creed, but ever and anon was carried away by my impetuosity. We grew fonder and more intimate as we rode and talked. The day held out bravely. As so often happens before floods of rain come, the distant vistas were clear-cut. We journeyed on in a region of perpetual mirage. Even the dusky shadows of declining light but added to the magic of the landscape, unravelling like a scroll before us. Every twist and turn of the way revealed some fresh delight. Perchance—who knows?—the ecstasy we experienced arose from within our own souls, irradiating the world about us. Had we lacked that bond of congeniality, our trip might but have induced boredom

and *ennui*. Amid outer shows—the wrappings and ceremonies of the spirit—we mortals are fashioned each by the working of his own temperament.

The road we traversed lay through the Garden of England. Along it has shuttled a stream of busy folk since the dawn of our history. Hitherto came those medieval wanderers, drawn by the magnet of the memory of a great crime. The murder of A'Becket marked an epoch. An ambitious and scheming ecclesiastic, whose name would have been writ in fading ink save for the tragic stroke which downed his policy, his story has in sober verity been writ across the heavens. Like the national heroes of the Greeks, he was translated in the eyes of the men of his age into a flaming constellation. The pilgrims flocked to the shrine of a murdered man, seeing in that shrine the symbol of the passing of an ideal. Its material fleeting garment paled before its inner spiritual significance, even among men whom we to-day should rank lower than the Calmucks. From their contemporary ardour sprang our glorious minster. In similar fashion were we two lads seeking the bourne from whence a murdered man might perchance be avenged.

I could not talk freely to Dick of the trouble impending over his father's head, for I did not know whether his mind was a blank on the subject or no. He spoke a vast deal of Margarita. This talk set me wandering in a fairy-land of my own creation. I could but hold my peace, save that, when he showed an inclination to slacken, I threw in a word or two to keep the ball delightfully rolling.

The wondrous panorama of the landscape unfolding as we trotted or galloped—now by lanes, which in the summer time must have been a tangled riot of blossom, now over the springy turf of the Downside, anon clattering through some village street—was little known to us. The bastion of the chalk hills looming over our heads, set me dreaming of Caburn and Ditchling. Ere we reached Maidstone we paused to take in the wonder of the picture of the Medway stealing to the sea—the wood-clad hills, stark in their lack of foliage, the windmills and church spires, wisps of blue wood-smoke rising here and there like pillars into the sombre winter sky.

There are degenerate sons of England who would write

across this noble legend of our ancient fame, Ichabod—its glory is departed. Let them go. To me at least that ever-widening stream of ordered growth comes as an inspiration. The German mercenaries, who sold their souls to some ruthless princelet, bartering their alien swords for foreign gold, were of the same kidney as are our modern *dilettanti*, to whom the Old Mother calls in vain, "I bred you to love and honour my name, not to besmirch it."

After more than a snack of a mighty steak and kidney pudding, and its satellite viands at the Star Inn, we pricked on our way, even as did the Becket pilgrims, toward our mutual goal. Those same pilgrims journeying to their shrine at Canterbury,

"Ordeyned their dyner wisely, or they to church went."

Even so had we. Thus onward we trekked, skirting the Downs once more, until Charing and its dell were past—Charing, of whom her envious rivals used to say :

"Dirty Charing lies in a hole,
Has but one bell, and that she stole."

Now from the rising ground toward Chilham, lo and behold! gleamed the grey minster faintly on the darkling horizon. It gleamed as did the Holy City to the visionaries of old, its massy towers looming like the patient finger of God, pointing mutely, hailing the travel-stained, preaching a silent sermon of the vista and the goal. To the man who in travel, seeks dust and noise, dust and noise are his guerdon. The dust of the rose petal is the meed of the perfume seller. He carries its legend in his heart, whether the skylarks sing and the land be girt about by Maytide or the dour winds of winter whistle o'er the lea.

Thereafter we two boys cantered on stout-hearted, and, in due course as the early twilight was beginning to brood over the city, drew rein at the "Fleur-de-Lis." Should we invade the privacy of our friends that night, or wait upon them in the morning, when we had shaken off the slough of travel?

The first thing was to eat. Now in the coffee room were but three travellers and a waiter. "All waiters," said Dick sagely, "are either William or Tom. We shall hear in a moment which of the twain our reverend friend

here is." The waiter might have been lifted bodily from the Cathedral. He had the aspect of a minor canon, at the lowest computation.

"William," shouted one of the three guests, "another slice of your mutton and a bit of crisp fat with it, my boy." That demand made our mouths water. "Crisp fat." Was there anything at that moment more in the primal order of things?

"Thought you'd say it were a tender and juicy bit o' leg, sir," responded William. "'Tis from a three-year-old o' Squire Melhuish's and has been in the pantry turn and turn about for three weeks. The Squire was in an hour ago, sir. He was 'ere for lyer Storey's funeral, sir. 'Ave they traced them what did the deed, sir?" asked William, bustling off for the second helping of mutton and without waiting for a reply.

"I saw poor Sam put under the sod, too," quoth one of the other guests, warming his coat tails, as he leant against a mantelpiece at the opposite end of the room. "There must have been a hundred and fifty people there."

"Poor old Sam," responded the first speaker. "We shan't see 'is like again in a 'urry. I wonder 'ow 'e'll cut up. 'Is gal Charlotte was in a dreadful state at the grave. Mrs. S. stood like a marble woman—petterified, I suppose." Just then William reappeared with a slice of hot mutton.

"Try another 'alf bottle of that claret, sir," he insinuated, "or shall I bring you 'alf a pint of '15 port, sir? The gents 'ave been working it pretty 'ard of late, sir, but we've got jest a few dozen left for our old customers."

"Will you gents join me in a glass of port?" said the first speaker, addressing us. "I needn't ask. Bring us a bottle of '15, William."

Our friendly waiter was off again on his fresh errand and the diner, who said his name was Hatmaker of Faversham, returned to the charge.

"I dessay you know our house, gents—Hatmaker & Crundall in the 'Igh Street—stale fish salesmen we are. 'Is Royal 'Ighness," he went on, "the late Prince Regent, as 'e then was, was once graciously pleased to do me the honour of askin' what the devil we did with stocks o' bad fish. Good joke that, eh? Ah, 'ere we are, gents. Pour out, William. Well, gents, 'ere's to our next jolly

good meetin' and confusion to all Crapauds, rick burners and Catholic Emancipators."

I didn't feel called upon to argue with this setter forth of strange doctrines as we sipped our wine. A few minutes later William, the deft, had smoking basins of soup set out for us and waved his napkin as the signal for assault.

"Try a bottle of our '27 claret, gents. Mr. 'Atmaker will give it a good character, I'll wager."

"Fust classs," responded that gentleman, and we could not do other than accept, for the good of the house, the suggestion. Mr. Hatmaker then rose, thrust out his hand and bade us good-night.

"If you are ever down Feversham way, gents, Mrs. H. will give you a 'earty welcome—'earty," he added by way of benediction. We thanked him and he withdrew.

Then the second speaker strolled up from his corner. "You are strangers here," quoth he, "I can see. We've had a shock in Canterbury—a regular thriller. One of our best-known townsmen has been murdered. Storey his name was. He and his father before him have done the lawyering work for half the county. Not a soul ever had a bad word for Sam. He'd do anything for anybody. His poor wife is fairly broke—broke on the wheel. God knows what she'll do. There are two girls—one abroad somewhere, the other at home. She was a Dyke, brought up to luxury and ease and never had a sorry day in her life before."

I said that we had heard of the tragedy and asked if any clue was forthcoming of its perpetrators. "I am told the runners have marked a couple of old hands down," was the reply. "They'll have them by the heels before many hours are past. It promises to be one of the most amazing affairs in the history of crime. So the Chief Constable told me himself. I am an Alderman myself—Alderman Huxtable, at the corner of Mercery Lane—hosier and silk mercer. If you are wanting anything in that way, gents, I can do you as good a line just now as any man in the county."

We thanked him and promised to bear this in mind. He was quite apologetic about leaving us. "Mrs. H. suffers from nerves," he said, "'ysterics, you know, that sort of thing. You know what the women are. This murder job has fairly flummoxed her. She has known poor

Storey every since she was a girl." So saying, he took his departure and, save for the silent man in his recess by the window and William, who flitted in and out like a guardian angel, we were left in solitude.

Now no sooner had these worthy citizens gone forth into the night than the storm of wind and rain, which had been hovering in our wake all day, fell, as if with a pre-meditated fury. The blast-laden rain and hail scourged the window pane of the coffee room. Our halcyon day had proved the forerunner of a mighty gale.

We discoursed in low tones and were agreed that we could not disturb Mrs. Storey at the end of so distressful a day. Poor soul, she would probably get no sleep, we argued. The vision of a big deserted house, mother and daughter in the depths of despair and no one about them but domestics filled us with pity and respect.

"I haven't seen Charlotte since she was ten years old," mused Dick aloud. "She was a bonny child. I can just recall her cascade of auburn hair and her pretty complexion. I was a boy of twelve and father brought me over to see the Cathedral. I've seen Susan lots of times with Margarita. They generally come together to Brighton from Paris. Susan is dark as her father was, Charlotte is fair like her mother."

The man in the recess, who had been poring over the *Kentish Herald*, now advanced somewhat timorously and passed the time of day. He was a sallow man, with jet black hair and piercing eyes. He cast a furtive glance our way and took up his quarters in the ingle nook. His voice was deep and resonant, his manner abrupt and self-absorbed. We were just finishing our meal, so we pushed back from the table, drew up to the fire and lit our pipes.

CHAPTER X

“ON the 29th of this month 'twill be six hundred and sixty-three years since A'Becket died,” quoth the stranger, in a sepulchral voice. “Hark! thunder and rain, lightning and wild storm are upon us, even as befell on that dire night.” He paused and looked round with a sort of mystified air and then resumed his tone of incantation. “Pitch dark is the night and souls of murder are abroad. You boys cannot realize the horror and despair of it all. Have you read your *Lear*?”

I told him that I knew the scene on the heath by heart. “'Twas a Kentish scene,” he said shortly. I could but judge the man to be some wandering barn-stormer, who was bent on giving us a taste of his quality.

“ ‘ Rumble thy bellyful! spit, fire! spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters,’ ”

he declaimed. He looked round upon us wild-eyed. The man was certainly an actor of mettle. The wind without blew great guns, cannonading the windows of the coffee-room. Cascades of rain swooped down.

“ ‘ Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow
You cataracts and hurricanes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples.’ ”

He was off again. “Six hundred and sixty-three years and just such a night as this,” he cried. “*Lear—Becket—Storey.*”

I began to get a little apprehensive that the man was demented. His eyes rolled in a fine frenzy and sought to impale one with their inner fury.

“Listen.” We could not do anything else. He fixed us with his glittering eye. “Fitzurse, Moreville, Tracy, le Bret—they were the accursed who did the deed. They struck down an old man a few yards from where we sit by this cheery fire. They waited in the gloaming, they

crept in at an unfastened casement like robbers. All fled, dragging the Archbishop with them through the cloisters and the chapter house, to the church. Becket was a martyr, for he faced the music fearless as a hero. Le Grim was faithful to him. The murderers knocked the old man's brains out and fled into the wild storm of the night. Hark! what crash is that? Some thunderbolt let loose by the Avenger." Doubtless a tile had clattered down into the street without. "What refuge had those men who did the deed? The brand of Cain was on their brow. Not all the waters of the sea could wash away the stain, nor could the bulge of the round earth hide their deed. They were forbid, haunted, you will say. Aye, haunted for ever by the stars in their courses."

The man's mood seemed to pass as rapidly as it had eclipsed him. "He's a rattling good actor," I whispered Dick.

"What ho! lads, good lads, bonny lads, and now good-night and farewell.

"'Fare well I could not, for I supp'd with sorrow.'"

So saying he rose, made us a stage obeisance and strutted out of the room. Soon after, William coming in to clear away the empty glasses, we asked him who this guest of his might be.

"I don't know no more than the dead," he answered. "He come in late, as it was getting dark; 'as 'ardly swallered a mouthful excep' some brandy and they've put 'im"—he sunk his voice as if it was a rare jest—"although 'e don't know it, into the 'aunted room."

Dick and I were so ripened and mellowed by the day's hard riding, by the meat and drink and the cheery fire that, in spite of the fury of the blast without and our woeful mission to a stricken lady and a fatherless girl, we found it hard work to keep our eyes open. We had said our say in the glamour of the morning and now the call of tired limbs grew imperious. We could hear the murmur of William's voice in the bar and, after yawns and spurts of talk intermitted with dozing lapses, both of us as by one consent rose to seek bedroom candles and so to bed. The howling of the wind and the chatter of the windows were a noisy fugue of lullaby to me. My head was barely on my pillow ere I dropped into dreamless slumber. Sleep

is the sovereign balm of all our ills. "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting," sings he whose verse the reviewers are never tired of holding up to ridicule. We mortals are a purblind race. It requires two generations of men to unthread the shallow judgment of their sires. With me just then all philosophy, all guesses as to the meaning of the riddle of life were submerged in unfathomed ease.

How long this state of torpor lasted I cannot tell. A crash, which surely must have rent the heavens, caused but a languid stir within me. I was just sinking afresh into a world of eiderdown, wherein the will no longer holds her sway, when I became sleepily aware that excited voices were answering one another in the corridor without my room. I sat up, rubbed my eyes and listened. Our actor friend was at his old tricks again. I heard scraps of Shakespearean apostrophe to ghostly visitants. It was borne in upon me with a sort of drowsy intensity that Shakespeare employed the supra-sensuous much as the pianist does the loud pedal. It was part of the machinery of Shakespeare's art, that art being the reflex and the sum of his pervading outlook on life. The perception of this aspect of the master mind of the world let loose within me an eerie sensation. I grew suddenly wide awake. All my faculties were restored to their pristine vigour. I sprang out of bed and hurried on some clothes. What could the clamour going on outside my door portend? I poked my head out to see what was toward. There stalked the actor, flame in his eye, apparently under the compulsion of real passion.

"'Avaunt! and quit my sight!'" he cried. The only visible object for his objurgation was a singularly puny night watchman, whose one care seemed to be self-effacement. This scene, which in another mood would have had its comic side, awoke my faculties with a sharp wrench. Just at that moment Dick appeared at his doorway, like myself in scanty attire.

"Can I get you a drop o' brandy, sir?" quoth the little night watchman to the ranter. "Do 'ave a drop, sir."

"'Art thou anything?"

Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil,
That mak'st my blood cold, and my hair to stare?
Speak to me what thou art,"

shrieked the actor.

"Come, sir," purred the little man, "it's struck twelve and you'll disturb the gents and raise the 'ouse if you go on like this, sir. 'Ere's your room, sir, so please to 'op it," he added, with a trifle more self-confidence.

"'Prithee, see there! behold! lo! how say you?
Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too,'"

declaimed the distraught man.

"Now go quiet, sir," persuaded the night porter, "if you don't go quiet I shall 'ave to call up the master, sir."

"'Ring the alarum bell.—Murder! and treason,'"

screamed the other.

"Come, sir, no more o' this," interrupted the porter, with gathering courage.

The pelting of the gale without came as an interlude to the play of words. A saner mood seemed to be overtaking the mime.

"'Thou think'st 'tis much, that this contentious storm
Invades us to the skin: so 'tis to thee;
But where the greater malady is fix'd,
The lesser is scarce felt,'" "

he responded. "'The place is haunted.' I know it, I. But I go, sir, to dree my weird." Having thus, as it were, delivered an ultimatum, he drew himself up, saluted and withdrew to his chamber. The little porter now perceived us boys.

"Sorry you've been disturbed, gents," he said apologetically. "The wine's in and the wits is out, as the sayin' is. Pore gent! he really do seem to 'ave some-think on his mind like, don't 'e? But then them play-actin' mugs is all of a piece. I've 'eard 'em rantin' and cussin' and swearin' like Billy-oh! down at our theayter. 'Arf an hour arterwards they'd be takin' their 'arf a pint at the 'Grey'ound' like you or me might, sober as judges a' circuit." We bade the little man good-night and retired once more to our rooms.

I tumbled uneasily for an hour thereafter, seeking vainly to set the incidents of the evening in their true perspective, but, silence dropping its curtain, the tension relaxed and my pulses sank into a steady stroke, as deep sleep fell

upon me. In the grey of the winter morning a clatter and hubbub arose in the street without. I went to the window to look for the cause. The gale had blown itself out for the nonce, its traces in the scoured streets being all that remained.

The London coach from Dover stood at the door. The ostlers were changing horses, the guard roasting Mistress Molly from the bar for her curl papers and half-awakened air. However, she had hot coffee ready for the few hapless wayfarers who had been caught in the Channel and there buffeted by the gale, and who now presented a woe-begone and battered aspect. While this familiar scene of chaff and dolour was being enacted, our actor friend of overnight came forth. He looked the personification of despair and abject terror. The effect of his night's lodging in the haunted room evidently lingered about him still. He crept into the inside of the coach, carrying a valise and a rough bundle tied with cord. So far as I could see he dived into the farthest corner of the vehicle, where he sat huddled and impatient for the start. Nor had he long to wait. Anon old Steve was up at his perch on the box seat, the guard blew a blast, the handful of passengers climbed wearily back into their cramped quarters and the coach rattled noisily away.

I looked at my watch—a quarter to seven. The distractions of the night and the raw morning air alike favoured action, which is the antidote of half the ills of life, so I dressed and strolled down into the lobby of the inn. Mistress Molly had retired to finish the night, leaving sweepers and scrubbers with pails of water in possession of the ground floor. I steered my way between these obstacles out into the street, leaving I doubt not a main of gossip behind me. Once in the open air my spirits rose, so that I chanted under my breath "The Pilgrim of Love." That was a song Victory was wont to sing, giving occasion for time-honoured chaff between us.

As I strode out I could but recall the words of the Conqueror's oath. He was accustomed to swear "by the splendour of God." That splendour lay visibly about my path. Dominating the picture of the dreaming city rose the mighty Bell Harry Tower, its scarred pinnacles an emblem of the glorious fabric of England's calm endurance. A wave of prideful delight arose within me. This city was

the birthplace of Kit Marlowe, who wrote, surely in no vain boast, the words :

“ All things that move between the quiet poles
Shall be at my command.”

I made my way at random through the sleeping streets and arrived by chance at a quarter near the Dane John, where by instinct I guessed our friends, the Storeys, would live. It seemed dreamily in a backwater of bricks and mortar. Quite by chance I happened upon Foreland Lodge, the very house we were to seek. About it hung the halo of the mystery of the young day. A glimmer of washed-out sunshine was beginning to steal over the quaint old quarter. Its very houses seemed asleep.

I could not help standing for a moment at gaze. Poor folk ! I knew full well that sore hearts beat within that placid-seeming mansion. When the master was there it must surely have been a very haven of content, a home such as we English claim to hold the patent of. The front had bow windows that caught the wan morning sun. It was gabled and corbelled like some ancient mosaic. Its windows were of leaded panes. The very brass knocker looked as if it had been rapped by ghostly generations, whose bones now mouldered in quiet country graveyards. The flower-beds in the season of blossom must have carried the palm for luscious scents and deep content, even in that city of fair gardens. As I stood mute, the atmosphere of home smote upon my senses insistently. All was so absolutely still and peaceful. How pitiful the situation was. Tragedy stalks our meanest streets, laying its icy fingers on the warmest heart. *'Ανάγκη ! 'Ανάγκη !* Fate, that overshadowing of shadows, the chaos and wreckage of our best-laid plans, the swoop of phantom forces, remediless, merciless. Write ye this man forbid, accursed ; the other pampered of the gods. Why ? That question is old as man upon the earth. We see in part. Perhaps that is the only answer mortal man will ever be able to frame.

One of the upper windows caught the glare of the early sun and shone as if from the fierceness of a gleaming eye within. As I stood in a tranced mood, a hand at this window drew aside the blind and a young face, sad yet serene in expression, peered forth. I did not wish to be

regarded as one prying into the poor folks' privacy. I therefore moved away and by a *détour* arrived back at the "Fleur-de-Lis."

Dick was fidgeting and impatient for an onslaught on the breakfast which William had laid out for us.

"So you've 'ad ructions in the night, I 'ear, gents," was the latter's salutation. I told him that his troublesome guest had left by the London coach. "Armen, so be it, all fat and no suet, as the sayin' is, sir," he responded. "If some o' these long-'aired chaps as does the book-writing was to come along, I could tell 'em a thing or two. We sees all sorts of folks at a inn, sir—all the world and 'is wife, as the sayin' is. Why I've known a reglar cracksman come in and give 'is orders as if 'e was a general on parade. We generly get the nod from the chief constable about 'em before'and. We are always full up to them gentry. I don't know if you know 'ow we 'as to manage when they're about. The master leaves thirty shillings in the till for 'em. If they cracks a crib, you know, sir, and don't find their do-nation ready to 'and, 'ave you heard what their little game is? Their rule is that they turns on all the taps and goes 'ome. Nice mess they leaves be'ind 'em. Comin', sir, in 'alf a tick. Is there anything more I can bring you, gents?" and he was off to attend on another hungry guest.

I told Dick of my early ramble and we decided to make for Foreland Lodge as soon as breakfast was disposed of. We had a letter from Mr. Wheatley. I rapped a muffled knock at the Lodge door. It seemed like sacrilege to do even that. A maid, the acme of trimness and clad in sober black, opening the hall door bade us enter, then stole off with our missive. A couple of minutes later Mrs. Storey came to us.

In the noble face of this lady I realized the difference between things seen and things eternal. She had evidently suffered terribly by reason of the distress and anguish that had befallen her and yet, beneath the suffering, the spirit within had conquered. Her whole bearing seemed to symbolize the conflict between the natural and divine, the ultimate triumph of the spiritual. In her wake followed her daughter Charlotte. They were a worthy pair, types of the womanhood of England. The mother was perhaps forty-five years old, calm, stately

and serene ; the daughter, well above the average height, a striking figure also. Hers was

“ A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet.”

I was reminded of that glorious portrait of our Lake poet by

“ Her eyes as stars of twilight fair ;
Like Twilight's, too, her dusky hair.”

Both Dick and I were silent for the first few moments of our meeting. The difficulty of saying anything which should not appear either artificial or *gauche* oppressed us. Moreover, we were under the eclipse of that vision of beauty, sorrow, resignation. Mrs. Storey soon set us at our ease. She ushered us into a cheerful apartment.

“ You are more than welcome as coming from our old friend Mr. Wheatley,” she said, “ doubly so as coming in our hour of anguish, as the bearers of that which is beyond empty sympathy. It is in a moment such as this that one feels how poor are words to express the promptings of the heart.”

As the finder of the body of her murdered husband she asked me a score of questions. Then we turned to present affairs.

“ I will send to my husband's chambers for his confidential man,” she presently said. “ My husband placed implicit trust in Neame,” she added. “ He has held his present post for forty years. We in the home have, of course, heard merely echoes of business matters. A country attorney's mind is, you know, like a strong room, in which the affairs of hundreds of folk are lodged.”

I glanced round the room and made some remark to Charlotte about one of the oil paintings on the walls. It was the speaking likeness of a girl of about her own age—a vivacious, sparkling countenance.

“ Is that picture not by a French artist ? ” I asked. She said it was a portrait of her sister Susan, painted by a young American, trained in the Paris schools. Susan and Margarita would be home in a few days, she added, and then she lapsed into a silence more eloquent than words. Thereafter, while timid reminiscences were beginning to spring up like the rath primrose in the winds

of March, a knock at the front door announced the arrival of Hezekiah Neame.

He was a venerable old man and carried the conspicuous blue bag of his trade. We paused at the threshold of discussion, as Dick's possible ignorance of his father's involvements rendered me chary of plunging into talk which would lay bare the situation at the Grange.

"Tell these gentlemen all you know, Neame," quoth Mrs. Storey. "They are friends in distress. We have had scores of offers of kindly offices, but Mr. Dick and Mr. ——" she paused a moment. "I did not catch your name," she said.

"Call me Waterloo," I cried. "I am Waterloo Joyce, now and always devoted to your service, madam."

"Mr. Dick and Mr. Waterloo," she proceeded with a smile, "have pricked to our aid like a brace of gentle knights."

"To tell you all, I must tell you much I would rather had remained unsaid," replied the old man, "but, when the tide sinks to its lowest range, unfamiliar rocks get left bare. First of all, our firm has been engaged in a desperate race against time. In order to save the estate of Mr. Wheatley from a gang of City sharks—highwaymen in broadcloth, I call them——" Dick jumped up at this.

"My father's estate in danger?" he cried. "Why did not my father take me into his confidence? What are money and money's worth compared with the fellowship of mutual esteem?"

Mr. Neame went on as if unheeding the outburst. "A gang of City sharks are trying, by forcing on the foreclosure of a mortgage, to grab the Nutfield estate."

"Did you know anything of this, Waterloo?" asked Dick excitedly.

"I heard a rumour of it," I replied.

"And have kept me in the dark about it too?" he exclaimed amazedly. "Do you call that worthy of true comradeship?"

I could but mumble regrets that he had not heard it from his father. It was surely not for me to talk of his father's intimate affairs.

"But there it is," Dick answered. "Now tell us the worst, sir—the very worst," he added, turning to the clerk.

"I am sorry if I have trespassed on thorny ground," the old man resumed. "We lawyers have to face rough music every week in the year. Our job is to save our clients from shipwreck if we can; if we can't, to rig up some sort of a jurymast, to enable them to make a port." He produced a closely written document. "The Tallboy mortgage on the Grange is for twelve thousand pounds. It has to be paid off in full on or before December 31st. Now for ways and means. Mr. Storey had secured a new mortgage for six thousand pounds at eight per cent. from the Victory Benefit Club. Here is a memorandum of the transaction. That left six thousand pounds to be arranged. I have reason to believe that he was expecting to raise the rest of the funds on post-obits. We had two transactions going on in the office; one was about Nutfield Grange, the other about a place called Fullerton Park."

"What!" I cried. "Fullerton Park? Why, that's my own property."

"Your own property?" exclaimed Dick in astonishment. "Since when have you been a landed proprietor, Waterloo? Wonders will never have done ceasing."

"Are you the gentleman that dropped into the estate promiscuous like?" asked Mr. Neame. "It's curious," he said, "that I've never heard your name. Now Mr. Storey acted for both parties and he was endeavouring to get a loan on personal security which would relieve both parties of their difficulty. He had not, I know, brought the two clients together. I have some reason to think that, when he met with his death, he had on his person certain securities of great value. When I say 'great value,' I mean perhaps three thousand pounds. I have turned up his private letters. He was going straight for Nutfield, after seeing some very old clients of ours at Tunbridge Wells. With them he hoped, I know, to make an arrangement which would have put him in command of certain loose cash or liquid securities. By means of these, his plan was to lay the foundation of settlement—partial payment, partial postponement. You must pardon me if, at this juncture, I do not mention the name of our Tunbridge Wells clients. A messenger has gone to them, and if it is as I surmise, the murder resolves itself into one of vulgar robbery."

I hinted that it was Neame's duty to tell us everything,

even to the lees of the story. He was, however, staunch in his adhesion to the principle of safeguarding the affairs of a firm's clients—"which," said he, "is a duty as sacred as the priest's in confessional."

I pointed out that, as we stood that day, the amplest exposure of fact was justified. He stuck to it, however, that he could not divulge the name of the firm's Tunbridge Wells clients, without their express consent. On all other points he was willing to depart from convention and disclose what he knew. He dived into the blue bag and brought forth a series of papers which substantiated his statements. There was a big packet of correspondence endorsed "Messrs. Levi & Cohen *re* Tallboy Mortgage." A similar packet marked "Messrs. Cutting & Cute *re* Fullerton Mortgage," also came from his lucky bag. Letters from the Victory Benefit Club told their own tale. The only link in the chain missing was that of the possible lenders of money on the security of post-obits.

"On whose deaths were those bonds to have been secured?" I asked him.

"There again, sir," he replied, "my mouth is shut. I must not say a word without the consent of the parties."

Half an hour's more talk merely brought us to our starting point and it was obvious that we had all the information available. Neame begged to be excused further attendance, pleading the pressure of the firm's work. Its affairs had been cast awry, he said; lots of transactions were locked solely in Mr. Storey's breast, and their bearings and issues could only be reached by a quiet study of the documents left by the dead man. Accordingly he rose and left us.

Mrs. Storey, with the sunlight flooding the quaint old room in which we sat, lighting up rare old pictures, dainty bits of Sèvres china, a thousand links of the home with travel, legend, books, Charlotte's fair face and halo of dark hair the noblest picture of it all, was part of a dream world to me. This sweet Canterbury interior, English through and through, in the city of medieval miracle was itself surely a modern miracle of grace and beauty. There are houses which we enter with unconscious awe. Theirs is holy ground. The ignoble struggles of the world are forgot within their precincts. The hushed sound of the Cathedral bells floated about us like answers to mute prayer

That simple saying, "It is good for us to be here," came upon me with insistent force. We were in the very cradle of the homeland of the heart.

"Why should not you three young people go to the service in the Cathedral?" quoth Mrs. Storey.

We two boys were all alacrity. I said we must both get away with all the speed we could muster—I to Fullerton, Dick to Nutfield. There was not an hour to lose, if we would counter the wiles and tricks of the master schemers who were plotting the undoing of us all. Before I could hope to reach the goal of safety I should have to see my guardian in London.

A few minutes later Dick and I were escorting Charlotte to the grey romance of the Cathedral. As I entered the vast nave the sensations that surged upon me were those of moving in the magic and mystery of a dream. This glorious pageantry in stone and glass, handed down by dead ages, the finely balanced and subtle scheme of Art of the choir, have been woven on the loom of Time. The men who wrought its wonders held creeds which the world has outgrown. Nevertheless, the oneness of their aspirations with ours is borne in upon us in sculptured roof and the great east window gleaming like a jewel in mid-air. Then swept over us the roll of the organ, followed by the ghost-like procession of the Cathedral clergy. As a climax we listened to Spohr's anthem, "Now earth waft sweet incense o'er thy plains." We were enveloped in a delicate web of harmony.

"The seraphs hail Thee, the worm and the dust.
Thou art our Maker, Thou art the loving one."

I glanced at our companion. Her face was rapt in fairy wonder. On Dick's honest countenance I noted a light I had never seen there before. The well-worn words of the service I verily believe put on immortality for us all three that morning. If such moments could hold habitual sway and cease to be mere floating images, would it be necessary for man to be born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward? We filed out of the Cathedral, each in a trance of the imagination. We made our way with few words spoken, through the grimy streets, through chaffering crowds, back to Foreland Lodge.

Within its home-like portals I experienced a sharp twinge of what I can only term lumbago of the will. The

Storeys were folk after my own heart, hospitable, genial, sincere, without the faintest approach to pose. Charlotte was flesh and blood, Margarita a shadowy portraiture. There came back to my recollection as the charm of charming things smote upon me, lines written on the flyleaf of an old book at Rye. Though the name of the scribe is lost, the echo of his thought rings true to-day :

“ And though the dystance of the place
Doe severe us in twayne,
Yet shall my harte thy harte imbrace
Tyll we doe meete agayne.”

Their overshadowing calamity had brought the Storeys closer to me in the desire of service than would years of humdrum acquaintance. There is no bond so intimate as that of companionship in distress. The cloak of the conventional falls before a common grief.

My twinge of will-paralysis was happily short-lived. The picture of Margarita regained its ascendancy. I spurned my momentary declension. As well might a soldier in the heat of action listen to the whisper of treason. I announced my intention of riding off to Fullerton with what dispatch I might. As for Dick, no compelling necessity required his instant departure for Nutfield. Our kind hostess would fain have kept us both about her for at least the rest of the day, but, the path of duty being plain, she put up no obstacle to the fulfilment of my obvious task.

The fierce gale of the previous night had left a wild scudding sky. The wind was still high and rain clouds hung in the offing. No matter ; blow wind, come wrack, as our friend of the haunted room would have phrased it, I must fare forth on my way. Mrs. Storey's description of us as knights-errant had in truth stirred my imagination. In the end I left Dick to a more leisurely return home on the following day, and, after a meal at the Lodge, wended my way to the “Fleur-de-Lis,” paid the reckoning, leaving William my henchman for life, and, mounting my nag, rode off.

No sooner had I reached the country roads beyond the precincts of the city than I became aware of the havoc wrought by the storm, which so far from having blown itself out seemed to be gathering up for a fresh bout, much as the wrestler gets his second wind.

By tracking my way to Tunbridge Wells I should, according to the map, be making pretty well a bee line for Fullerton. Here and there near the villages we had passed yesterday the country roads had sunk into swamps and quagmires. Great gaps occurred at one or two spots, owing to the scouring out of the surface of the highway. It would have been well-nigh impossible—so it seemed to me—for any wheeled vehicle to circumvent these breaks, yet already by roundabout routes through neighbouring fields the country folk were beginning to track out fresh passage ways. Thus were we dropping back to the conditions of primitive days, when the caravans of pilgrims had to steal across country by heath and fell. One thing began to dawn upon me. I should not reach Fullerton before nightfall. The delays due to my being forced to meander across rough pastures and over ploughed land grew more continuous. The day was prematurely darkening. Banks of cloud piled up more and more threateningly.

My route lay through Ashford and Cranbrook. At the former town I pulled up at the "George" for a snack to man and beast and in the coffee-room ran against a grave old gentleman who told me his name was Jemmett. If I ever passed that way again he begged me not fail to call at the Bank house, where he assured me Mistress Jemmett would welcome me. As I rode away I noticed his cosy quarters. I thought his domicile a quiet backwater where, I doubted not, the money bags bred and multiplied unhindered. The Quaker-like old banker I pictured as one who paced to and fro the quarterdeck of life, from Sunday morning to Saturday night. All the week he was doubtless to be found in the Bank parlour. On Sundays he probably varied the routine by regular attendance at the parish church. His evenings were devoted, I imagined, to playing patience and sipping port, an occasional bout of dinners with the county gentry being his one and only form of relaxation.

Cranbrook's long street recalled in the race-type of its villagers the trade in woollen cloth of refugee Flemings. As I drew near to Tunbridge Wells twilight was settling down early over the landscape. The town of fantastic rocks and fashions, of gewgaws and rusty springs of water, lived, like a faded beauty, upon its past. Could Rattler

and I but have taken in the reverse direction that historic flying leap of the Enemy of Mankind, we should have been able to prick our way to Fullerton Park without risk of being benighted. All the world knows how the inquisitiveness of the gentleman of many aliases was checked at Mayfield by the prompt action of Saint Dunstan ; how the saint seized the Devil by the nose with tongs red-hot from the forge fire ; how the Devil by one mighty jump sprang to the Wells and for relief how he there plunged his seared nose into a limpid spring ; how that act of his imparted chalybeate properties to the waters for ever.

The wet blanket of the night settled matters for me, as I clattered up to the "Swan" and off-saddled. I must remain there till the morning. The coffee-room looked desolate and forlorn. It would be uncommonly stale sport, I reflected, to spend the evening counting the number of times the pattern of the wall paper repeated itself.

In the far corner of the room sat one solitary guest. I made my way towards his table and passed the time of day with him. He responded, as I thought, in somewhat morose fashion. I asked if I might eat my dinner at his table. He was pleased to assent, but unenthusiastically, giving me the impression that he thought I was forcing my society upon him. So doubtless I was, but the alternative both for him and for me was that each should take his food like horses munching their oats in several stalls. If I found the man still unresponsive after the meal was over, I made up my mind to sheer off and leave him to his own devices. Meantime a basin of steaming hare soup coming in, I called for a bottle of Madeira and begged the stranger to do me the honour of taking wine with me. He did so with some degree of favour, eyeing me, however, the while curiously. I made some obvious remark about the wildness of the night. The stranger nodded his head, but with a quizzical glance, as if he regarded me as a young bear with all his troubles before him. His age I guessed at about forty years, but the deep lines in his face I took to indicate that he had led a life of struggle and hardship. I noted that two fingers of his left hand were gone. Now and again a flash of humour appeared to irradiate the more habitual expression of gloom in his demeanour.

"You may think me inquisitive," he said presently, "but I am curious to know your name, sir."

"There is no mystery about it, sir," I answered, and promptly told him what it was.

"Aye, aye," quoth he. "Waterloo, eh?" He looked me over in a more friendly fashion. Meantime I had nearly overtaken his more leisurely eating of dinner.

"A rare good piece of Southdown leg, that is," said the stranger. "Try a glass of this sherry with it, sir. I venture to say you won't taste a better glass of sherry this side of San Sebastian," he added. His geographical limitation was quaint, I thought. He was evidently thawing and I accepted his proffered glass of wine with due acknowledgments.

"I am Major Harry Markland," he told me. "I see we are finishing our dinners pretty well in a dead heat. What do you say, sir, if I order a bumper of port into the snugery and we blow the cloud together there in friendly rivalry?"

"With all my heart," I cried, and five minutes later we were seated in the ingle nook of a cosy room toasting our toes at a bright wood fire, a bumper of ruby wine apiece at our elbows, the atmosphere rapidly deepening in density from tobacco smoke.

CHAPTER XI

“SO you think this is a wild night, eh?” began Major Markland. “I remember this day twenty years ago. Holy Moses, my lad! it was worthy of the Moscow retreat. That winter of 1813 was one of the fiercest in history—fierce in the fight of the elements, fierce in the struggle of men. You know we English had picked the lock of France. It was a duel between the Duke and Marshal Soult. It’s a great game, is war—the greatest game of all. It breeds men. Lord! how well one remembers every throw of the dice. A month before we were advancing from the south, hugging the sea, and edging Soult away to the east. A week or two later four thousand of his German mercenaries deserted him in a bunch. We shipped ’em back to their Fatherland, sir. One of the little picture scenes I remember is that of the Duke and Soult appearing and disappearing on the skyline, like actors in a play, the Duke on one height, Soult on the opposite height, the two armies *vis-à-vis* in the ravine below. The leaders would watch one another for a few minutes through their field-glasses and then gallop out of sight. ’Twas hide and go seek with ’em. I well recall how we lighted bivouac fires in one of the passes and the two armies lay at close quarters. The sentries were perhaps thirty or forty paces apart. We could have shot theirs down and they ours, but *noblesse oblige*, sir. The laws of the game forbade murder.

“While we were feigning and reconnoitring up and down that valley, Soult, by one of the strokes of which he was master, withdrew his whole force, as if bent on continuing his retreat to the north. The Duke was too wary a player to be bluffed into a tight corner. Soult had but shifted the weight of his army across our front, to attack our right flank. We gave ’em as handsome a thrashing when they attacked as the heart of man could desire. Five thousand dead men strewed the spurs of the hills.

Many of 'em remained where they fell, until the kites and the wolves had picked their bones. You think this night a wild one? How would you enjoy marching in snow and sleet, a bitter blast about your ears and that loathsome shambles reek of the battlefield perpetually in your nostrils? Lucky were they in those days and nights who had a bit of canvas to sleep under. We preferred being choked with the smoke of the camp fires to perishing from cold and yet, in spite of it all, our men roused the chimes with their camp songs. The fact is, if a man has not been salted hardy as a wolf, in a winter campaign he soon sleeps under the sod instead of on it.

“Now this very night twenty years ago I well remember we reached a place on the coast called Biarritz. We were constructing a bivouac which we called Fort Charlotte, after the pretty daughter of the Mayor. The old boy was a clever Monsieur Facing-Both-Ways. He claimed before each side to hold the stakes as a neutral. I doubt not the old rogue lined his pockets the while from both armies.

“The moral I want to draw is that a fine strapping lad like you, if we were only safely at war again, would soon learn to face a night such as this in the open and continue to hang on to his little spark of vitality, in spite of it all.”

I thought I had been brought up in a pretty sharp school too, but, in face of the Major's story, all the brag went out of me for the nonce. That mention of Fort Charlotte gave me a little internal twinge, when I recalled Dick still at Foreland Lodge. For the first time in our acquaintance there was a hint of rivalry between us and its accompanying demon, jealousy.

“Tell me about yourself, my lad,” quoth the Major, throwing on a fresh log and stretching out his legs to soak in its genial warmth. So ingenuously enough I told him of our early Newhaven days, of my sudden accession of fortune, of my present occupation on the survey of the coming railway. So far as talking went, the Major now left the running to me, merely throwing in an occasional aside. A hint dropped here by him and a suggestion there drew more and more intimate confidences. The wine went round pretty often too, for he had insisted on calling for a second bottle. When we rose to say good-night we were fast friends.

“Look here,” the Major said, “I can put you on the

very track you are searching for, to get you out of the clutches of those rascally Jews—the very people, my lad. They owe me a good turn too, if ever folk did. If every other card fails I can always fall back on the Duke, you know. This is the address of my agents in London. Come and look me up when you get there and report progress.”

He took out a card from his case and wrote his name across the top of it. The printed name was Mr. Ales Fidge, 17 Islington Common. I was, in truth, dead tired, and thereafter tumbled into bed with cheery memories of a congenial evening. A great weight of anxiety was lifted from my spirits as I thought of the influence and goodwill of my new-found friend.

I was off betimes in the morning before the Major stirred and galloped into Fullerton Park as our village clock was striking twelve. From a stable lad I learnt that our mother was pottering about in a new-fangled building called a “glasshouse.” It was one of several, like big sentry boxes, kept hot by water pipes fed with heat from a furnace, to simulate the climate of a tropical country, in order to force on fruit and flowers out of their due season. At Fullerton the concerns were more than mere toys. Even then, just before Christmas, a forest of some Japanese shrub was in blossom. Our mother, who possessed in a pre-eminent degree the faculty of making two blades of grass grow where one grew before, moved in her element in this quaint world of Lilliput. Her handling of plants was a species of wizardry, for shy flowers, knowing the hand that fed and tended them, responded by producing miracles of beauty, awakened out of the course of Nature.

To this little glass cabin I accordingly pursued her, to tell of the progress of my quest. We really had not advanced one step toward the solution of the mystery of the murder or of its intent, moreover we knew nothing as to how its roots were interlaced with the fortunes of Fullerton. That some crisis was impending our mother was fully aware. Mr. Fullerton was even then at home, but, she said, greatly depressed and full of morbid fancies. How far these apprehensions of his rested on reality she had no means of ascertaining, as he had so far not taken her into his confidence.

Said our mother: “The young cuckoo bird hatched in

an alien nest by the kindly offices of a foster mother repays that motherly care by shouldering the lawful occupants of the nest over its edge, where they perish miserably. Whatever happens, Waterloo, we Joyces will be loyal souls. We will stand by Mr. Fullerton to the end. If our glory is to be but a short-lived flash in the pan, we shall at least have had our day. Whatever comes, we will not play the ingrate.

“ ‘ Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
Thou dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot.’ ”

“ But, after all, mother, the estates are mine, you know,” I replied. “ Don’t you think Uncle John should at least keep me posted up, if toss-penny is to be played with our fortune? To hear from a lawyer’s clerk whom one meets by chance that the mainstay of its support is wobbling in the balance seems hardly the right thing, does it? ”

“ My boy, you are jumping at conclusions all the time,” answered our mother. “ Uncle John may be able to see much farther than you or I can. He has been all his life the custodian of the property. To have to justify his actions to a boy who has been made master of his own demesne by a mere freak of favour is a hard task. We must have patience and faith. If all this trouble ends by an unseemly squabble, we interlopers will come out of it more shabbily than does the young cuckoo who breaks the necks of his rivals. Go by all means and have a chat with Uncle John now, but don’t forget to give that kind soul his due.”

Accordingly I went off to see my guardian. I was in a humble frame of mind, conscious of our relative rôles in the pageantry of Fate. Whereas half an hour before I was inclined to regard myself as the master player, I now saw that I was but a pawn in the game.

To change the metaphor, I realized that my true task should be to emulate the tactics of that hardy songster whom the countryman calls the storm-cock. In the bleak wintry season his note rings triumphant through coppice and shaw. Nothing daunts his ardour, in defence or attack. In the bitter blasts of a late spring his note sounds as a challenge. As Gilbert White has shown, he has earned his inherent right to his Welsh title—Pen-y-llwyn—Master of

the Glade. He holds his own against all marauders. His home is his castle, to be defended at all hazards.

In this chastened, if storm-cock, mood I sought Uncle John in his private sanctum. He was genuinely pleased to see me, but the difficulty was to know how and where to begin. We tossed the ball of words from one to the other, both fully aware that the time had come to get to grips with hard fact, yet neither making the first approach.

I said I had just arrived from Canterbury, whither I had gone to endeavour to unravel the dark mystery spun round the fortunes of my friends the Wheatleys. The threads of that conspiracy I knew partially enveloped our own freedom of action in the future, for Neame, Mr. Storey's confidential man, had told me as much.

Uncle John rose at this remark and gloomily paced the room, at length seating himself again near the window overlooking the park. He did not speak for several minutes and I also held my peace.

"I had made up my mind to tell you the whole story, Waterloo, the next time I saw you," he said at last. "The fact is, it does not brook delay. We are on the edge of a quake which may bring us all down to the dust. I have no right to withhold the story from you. I have had to put up the best fight I could, single-handed, and so far have failed dismally all along the line. Storey has been battling the watch like a Trojan for us. How far he was likely to succeed—if at all—no one knows. The secret was locked in his own breast when he was done to death. We now have sixteen days' respite and then I suppose some rascally trickster will set the machinery in motion by which we shall be at his mercy. Precious little of that we have any reason to expect."

He went on to recount the now familiar legend. A mortgage, which had been a fixture on the estate for generations, had been bought up. He had not regarded this purchase with apprehension at the time, but, when notification came that the principal moneys were to be called in, he saw himself the victim of a plot aimed at our possession of the estates. In the present unsettled condition of the country, with vast economic changes impending, who would have the hardihood to acquire a remote property, the solvency of which hung on the thread of the continuity of the old régime?

The problem was, in short, on all fours with that facing the Wheatleys. This emboldened me to tell Uncle John a little more of my intimacy at the Grange. I contented myself by saying that I was intent on rescuing those dearest of friends from their dilemma. I proposed to see my guardian in London and, if he and Mr. Clutterbuck consented, I was prepared to sacrifice all I was worth, if by so doing I could redeem the situation of both houses. Uncle John listened patiently.

"No harm can come of your going to talk things over with Clutterbuck," he said. "Of course, before we burn our boats we want to know a lot more than we do at present, not only of what we are giving up, but also of what we are getting. The whole thing is a case of balancing profit and loss and acting for the best."

"Yes," I replied, "with a margin of time of sixteen days. Please bear that in mind. We have rapacious Jews to deal with. They have a plotted campaign in hand. We have to meet them, not only on their own terms but within their own time limit. If we fail they have us properly on the hip."

Poor Uncle John seemed rather distraught. I noted that he had aged a lot since I last saw him. I fancied he snatched at the idea of shelving the matter by letting me go to London to face the music on our joint behalf. He was like a drowning man clutching at straws. He was trying to deceive himself that, by the respite of my journey to London, he could at any rate stifle our present anxiety, pretending it did not exist.

From my point of view, I had gained his assent to trying my hand at a solution of the trouble by a journey to Westminster. I had, moreover, a sort of qualified authority to act in extremity to the best of my judgment.

If I should be drawn into a corner and issues important to us all had to be decided on the spur of the moment, he could hardly blame me for any action I deemed it necessary to take on my own initiative, in the face of our present discussion.

By riding across country to Cuckfield I reckoned on catching the night coach from Brighton, and, accordingly, after a hasty hail and farewell to Victory, once more posted off. It was a neck and neck race, but I had just time to hand my nag Zebra over to an ostler to await my

return, to eat a bit of chicken, washed down by half a bottle of claret, and to stow myself into the interior of the coach, before Joe Chatfield took up the ribbons again and called time.

The roll of the coach acted like the rocking of a cradle to me, for I dropped into a slumber so profound that I knew nothing until the guard routed us all out at the "Golden Cross." It was pitch dark, but the distant rumble of the country carts bound for the early market at Covent Garden recalled old memories. It did not take me long to find my way between the sheets, to finish the night. When the boots, with a grin on his face, brought shaving water into my room, the morning was pretty far advanced, although a grey pall overhead permitted but little light to steal through the blinds. I stretched and tumbled luxuriously for half an hour or so and at last, at the call of duty, sprang out of bed.

How little change there was outwardly in the precincts of the inn, yet, as I descended to the familiar rooms, its present atmosphere seemed alien to me. We mortals each carry our own world as a knapsack on our back. A cynic would say that wonder fills the boy's pack, suspicion that of maturity, regret the pack of old age. Our mother would have phrased it differently. Her dictum would have been that perforce we learn our three r's in a hard school. In the first act the boy spells out a word here and there in the fairy tale of life. In the second act the man writes fiercely of his rights and of his wrongs. In the last scene of all he seeks wistfully to balance the profit and the loss.

As I sat at breakfast I began to realize what a stubborn struggle I was up against. Here was I, like David with his sling and pebble from the brook, faced by not one seasoned Goliath, but by a score. How could I hope to resist insidious foes ambushed on all sides against me? One supreme difficulty was to know friend from subtle and hostile plotter. How far did the league against us south-country landowners reach? A gang of ruffians, who did not stick at murder to gain their ends, were a formidable host to combat. They were like the sheep-stealers—whose lives are forfeit, their bolt shot—which fact makes them reckless of all else that may betide. The first thing I had to do was to face my legal guardian. Had I a ghost of

a chance of persuading Mr. Clutterbuck to my way of thinking? Frankly I had not. What was the next card to play if I failed to move him? So far as the operations of the Jews were concerned I possessed no status. They would rightly decline to discuss anything with me, as the events of the last few weeks gave me no authority to intervene on behalf either of Uncle John or of the Wheatleys. I was in a pass from which I declined to retreat, but with "no thoroughfare" staring me in the face ahead. However, I could but fare forth to try my luck, leaving the issue to the forces—blind or kindly, as every man must conceive them for himself—which shape our ends.

Half an hour later I was amongst the chambers of the Law Court at Westminster. I knocked at the door which bore Mr. Clutterbuck's name upon it. The door was opened by a youth whose countenance wore a pasty hue—"sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought"—a youth with ink-stained fingers, long-faced as a sheep, his black hair plastered about his temples, a youth whose eyes obviously regarded the world and all that therein is, firstly as a supreme jest, secondly as composed of "crooks" to be laid by the heels under process of the Law.

"Well?" this youth interrogated.

"Can I see Mr. Clutterbuck?" I asked apologetically.

"*In re* what matter?" he demanded, in his best cross-examination manner.

"In my own matter," I answered.

"And who are you?" he queried.

"My name is Joyce," I said, "a minor. Mr. Clutterbuck has been appointed my guardian by the Court."

"Joyce? Joyce?" he soliloquized, with his head on one side, apparently sizing me up. "What was the case and when were you in it?" he asked, picking up a sheet of paper, as if to take down incriminating evidence.

This legal *gamin* was evidently thrown out as a permanent skirmisher by Mr. Clutterbuck, to guard his inner precincts from intrusion. Just at that moment a door facing me opened. The outer room in which I stood was packed like a ship's cabin with black tin boxes, having inscribed upon them the names of clients or cases, and also with rows of books bound in law calf on dingy shelves. The unhealthy-looking youth himself inhabited a tiny alley-way in this gallery of dusty mortmain. The opening of the door came

as a stage surprise to me, as its existence was effectually concealed by the contents of the room. Mr. Clutterbuck himself loomed out of the gloom like a giraffe emerging from its stall. Even he was at a loss for a moment to recall our relations.

"Of course, of course," he cried, as our pantomime with the judge dawned on him. "Come in, Joyce, come in. I am delighted beyond measure to see you. What brings you to Town? I trust Mr.—Mr.——"—"Fullerton," I interjected—"Oh! to be sure, Mr. Fullerton—is in his usual excellent health. Why, what an age it is since I saw him."

I intimated that our conference took place only during the Long Vacation.

"Now it all comes back to me," he responded. "Yes—yes—yes. You had dropped into the estates of the late—Janet Fullerton, was it?"

"Maria," I corrected.

"Of course, of course, how obtuse of me," he replied, with alacrity. "Maria Fullerton—so it was. Come in, come in. Padge"—turning to the pasty-complexioned youth—"if anyone inquires for me, except by the way in Hogsflesh *v.* Wildgoose, or—let me see—oh! ah! in Pitchfork *v.* Hollowbone—mind, I am engaged three deep."

"Certainly, sir," responded the clerk, arresting for a moment the cutting of a quill point. "There's the Slybody conference at twelve, sir," he insinuated.

"So there is, so there is," said Mr. Clutterbuck.

"And," added the clerk, "his lordship would be glad if you would take a chop with him in No. 3 at one o'clock, sir."

"Right, Padge, right. Now see that I'm not disturbed with Mr.—Mr.—Joyce." So saying, I dived with him into a square box of a room lighted by two windows, from one of which the red sail of a Thames barge going up with the tide was visible.

"Now what on earth is it brings you to London so soon again, Joyce?" he asked, toying with his eyeglass. I told him how matters stood as concisely as I was able.

"A pretty kettle of fish this," was his answer. "But what do you want me to do?"

"I want your authority, in conjunction with that given by Mr. Fullerton, to apply the family moneys to save our

estates and those of the Wheatleys from the grip of these harpies," I told him.

He screwed up his face and stuck his eyeglass in his eye. "That's a mighty tall order," was his comment. "Why the Wheatleys?" They were very close friends and were threatened with the same fate as the Fullertons, I replied. A quaint grin overspread his face.

"Close friends?" he asked. "How close?" I hesitated a moment considering how to put it, and then thought what our mother's answer would have been.

"Only as close as soul and body," I answered.

"Ah! I am afraid you can't produce legal evidence how close that is," he went on, the grin twitching about his eyes with a more sardonic expression still. "No, Joyce, no, 'close friends' don't count, my boy. In order to save the Fullerton estates, some assistance—with the consent of the Court, you understand—might perhaps be granted, but as for the other parties, their estates must fight their own battles, I fear." He took out his watch. "Where are you putting up?" he asked. I told him. "Come and have a snack with me at the 'Whistling Oyster' in Vinegar Lane at five," he said. "I am very full up this morning and cannot give you much time."

"I must ask you to remember, sir," I said, "that our fate and the fate of the Wheatleys"—again that grin overspread his face—"will be settled for good and all at the end of the month."

"Don't take these threats too seriously, Joyce," he replied. "In the Law we have a hundred ways of hanging things up and of hanging up the people, too, who commit murder as part of their game of plunder—in fact, if we hadn't that faculty our fees would suffer a big eclipse. No, keep up your pecker. We'll battle the watch somehow. So you'll come and dine with me at five?" Thus saying, I was politely shown the door of his sanctum. Padge skilfully took up the game, so that not many minutes thereafter I found myself on the pavement outside, under the shadow of Henry VII.'s Chapel. What was to be done next?

I had racketed from post to pillar since the day of the murder and an overpowering desire now oppressed me to get away somewhere out of the stream of hustle. Young as I was, a sense of the shallowness of "the uses of this

world" overwhelmed me. A breath of Downland air, the sight of a line of breakers beating on some desolate strand would just then have eclipsed for me the clamour of men, their plaudits or curses.

I wandered at random down an alley way and pushed open a swinging door I came to. Then I stood in the Poets' Corner of the Abbey. Lord! what a sense of relief fell upon me. It was as 'twere to a sun-plagued wayfarer on a dusty road who strays into a garden of rare delight, a realm of velvet lawns, sun-dialled, garnished with a wealth of blossom, wide vistas and bowered wilderness. Here in "the silent meeting place of the great dead" abides the security of the Immortals. "O eloquent, just and mighty Death!" My eye fell on the tomb of Edmund Spenser, cheek by jowl with that of Geoffrey Chaucer—Spenser, who died neglected and distracted by private grief, yet at whose burying the master poets of all time—Shakespeare probably amongst them—each threw into the open grave an elegy and the pen that wrote it. "Their bodies are buried in peace, their name liveth for evermore." Then above my head glowed the glorious rose windows, a magic artistry of light and shadow, the perfect balance and poise of column and arch and triforium arcade. So I roamed from the transept to the choir, to the nave, out into the cloisters and thence to the old-time repose of Dean's Yard. I came back to the roar of the streets with a sense akin to that of the son of Thetis, after he had been dipped in Lethe's stream.

It was clear to me that I must not let the grass grow under my feet. The somnolent tactics of Mr. Clutterbuck would never haul my friends out of the pit they were like to be thrown into. No, I was the only live figure in the play; of that I was convinced. I must act regardless of the slow-moving precautions of folk who refused to realize the urgency of the call to action. I would make my way to Major Markland's agents. That should be my first quest.

I accordingly hailed a hackney coach. The jarvey was five or six deep in capes and struck me as a surly simpleton. When I told him our destination he remarked: "I done a hold gent in there last night. Wery 'appy 'e were too." Being new to the game I made some further comment, which brought upon me an avalanche of talk spoken in

a language I could barely follow. From its general drift I gathered that my Jehu made a speciality of hovering around in likely quarters late at night to pick up strayed revellers too bemused with drink to help themselves.

"We does it all square as the Bank," was his remark. Those not too far gone gave him their addresses and he exacted special terms on delivery of the goods. Those who were hopelessly hocused he took to an inn, the keepers of which were his confederates. In the morning he called for his property, consigned it to its destination and as a rule the drunken man's friends were only too glad to pay the sum demanded.

Clambering into his box of tricks we rambled off in an eccentric fashion. The man's horse appeared to have been worn out by the last night's frolic of his owner and we wobbled from one side of the road to the other, narrowly escaping collisions with loaded wains and smart phaetons bearing young City gents, who lived in the country and tooted it into Town with the air of conquering heroes about midday. The language of these young bloods when we shaved their wheels was worthy of a museum. The husky guttural of my many-caped friend on the box, however, in general held its predominance.

After traversing the narrow and noisy streets of the city we struck off into a main road alongside which patches of green were soon dotted about, meadows here and there. Quaint old hostelries with strawberry grounds and bowling alleys then cropped up. These were the spots whither the cits roamed out to taste the country air, to drink syllabub and sport with Amaryllis in the shade. Leery, raddled, out-at-heel quarters many of them looked by daylight, as we ambled on our way. At length the rôle of the Islington meadows in the life of the city grew more in evidence. At Laycock's dairy farm are big herds of cows and here, too, are the vast sheds he has put up, wherein the cattle, as they are being driven to Smithfield, may be housed to recover condition before dispatch to the shambles there. That quarter and thence as far as Saint Paul's and the Bluecoat School is surely a disgrace to London, for it reeks with the carcasses of the hecatombs of luckless beasts, poleaxed by armies of bloodstained ruffians.

In the country air of this Islington retreat live a scattered tribe of those who have made their mark as actors or writers.

They mostly inhabit trim cottages, with a flower garden between them and the highroad and a strip of land for potatoes and cabbages in rear. The New River Head is not far away. It brings a stream of limpid water into the outskirts of London, a boon such as few great cities can boast.

Years later, I came to know a man who was intimate with a whimsical artist in words, whose fantasies will, I believe, be immortal—Charles Lamb by name. Hereabouts lived Charles Lamb and his sister, a lady of infinite parts, but much afflicted. My friends showed me a letter of Charles, which gives so exact a picture of the type encampments of this prose-sequestered spot that I quote a few words of it :

“The New River (rather elderly by this time) runs (if a moderate walking pace can be so termed) close to the foot of the house, and behind is a spacious garden, with vines (I assure you), pears, strawberries, parsnips, leeks, carrots, cabbages to delight the heart of old Alcinous. You enter without passage into a cheerful dining room, all studded over and rough with books; and above is a lightsome drawing room, three windows, full of choice prints. I feel like a great lord, never having had a house before.”

When we reached the quarter I deemed the centre of the Islington colony of folk—the place was perhaps too big to be called a village—I pulled up the coach at the “Strawberry Pottle” and told the jarvey to await my return, bidding the landlord to serve him with a quart of ale to drink my health in. I then strolled on afoot and soon found myself amid a crescent of houses, having a bit of gorseland to the fore. This proved to be, as I guessed it might be, “The Common.” On ringing at No. 17 I was bidden enter by an old fellow probably of the gardening fraternity, for he had the conventional garb and a tag of bass hung from his pouch or pocket. I asked if Mr. Fidge was at home. He stared at me for a moment and then said: “Oh! ah! I’ll go and see,” leaving me standing in a mean slip of a passage. A rusty birdcage hung at its only window. In the cage a very Job of a skylark kept up a faint twitter, as if anxious to blot out the

memory of his skyward flights, before the Sabeans fell upon him and took him away. I mused as I watched this mute, inglorious songster and marvelled at the reason why Major Markland's agent should live in such sorry surroundings, he himself being a man of importance in society, with friends in high quarters to back him up. Then I heard a familiar voice ; it was that of the Major himself.

"What, Joyce, my boy," he cried, advancing cordially. "By the merest chance in the world you catch me on the spot—the town mouse visiting the country mouse. Come in, come in. Our quarters here are pretty cramped. 'Tis only *un pied-à-terre*, as they say in old Gaul. I am like the marten who plasters his nest on to the wall of a stranger's crib. One of these days you must come and see my Hampshire place. We can't rival your ancestral acres at Fullerton, but I reckon, for a bit of rough shooting or trouting, my little place near Christchurch is pretty hard to beat, too."

So saying, he led the way to an ancient parlour with French windows overlooking a dingy scrap of turf, surrounded by shrubs of melancholy aspect. The Major noted that I took in the situation.

"Flags of distress, eh?" he exclaimed. "Fidge is a funny boy. He revels in this sort of thing. I've wanted him to have half-a-dozen good men in to make a clean sweep here. A bit of a Dutch garden on that far side and a few carpet beds to the left, with a bower of roses to block out the background and a fountain with goldfish in the middle there, would render the place quite civilized. But no, I can't move him. He's an anchorite. Give him his cell, a few pounds of tobacco to fall back on, a few black letter folios to pore over and he is happy as the day is long."

"The day for me," I said, "happens to be short. I have to dine with my guardian at five. I have kept my coach to carry me back in time."

"Business, business," quoth the Major ; "what a martinet you are, Joyce. There's not much chance of leading you astray from the point, I can see. I'll fetch Fidge and then we can all go at it, a long pull and a strong pull and a pull all together, and if we don't haul those Jew gentry out of their lair it won't be your fault or mine either."

Accordingly he departed and a few minutes later returned

with a little man, almost a dwarf in fact, whose head seemed too big for his body. His face was seamed and puckered in criss-cross lines. He looked the image of impassivity, but when the Major rallied him, his countenance was thrown into contortions, for all the world like those of a rubber dummy when one squeezes and twists it, now into demoniac laughter, anon into a lugubrious sourness of aspect.

"Look here, Fidge," said the Major, after the ice was broken between us, "put on your puzzling cap. Call up all the wits you are worth. This gentleman is a friend of mine, a big landed proprietor in Sussex. The harpies are after him. It's true he is but a minor, but any bargain he makes he will honour to the last drop of its ink, unless I have utterly mistaken my man. He wants twelve or fifteen thou. to pull him through. It'll be as safe as the Bank. Take my word for that. The only thing is—'if 'twere done, 'twere well it were done quickly,' as Waterloo would put it. Now who would be the best man to go to? Lord M. is a likely enough source. He has not only got the coin, but is a sworn foe to this type of rascality. He'd set about it merely for the fun of spoiling the Egyptians. Then there's Sidney G. He might open his mouth a bit wide, though he could take the job in his stride, as easy as kissing your hand. Tell us what you think. There's no man in London or out of it whose judgment I'd sooner back."

Fidge stretched himself in his seedy old leather chair, put his hands behind his head and gazed at me intently. Then he leant forward and whispered something into the Major's ear. Markland burst into a roar of laughter.

"Do you know what our friend Fidge is afraid of, Joyce?" he cried, tumultuously. "He wants to know if you are one of the young bloods who drink up cash like a sponge, get squeezed dry at the gaming table and then are ready to inspire afresh. Fidge, Fidge, when will you drop your suspicions and learn that I can read a man's character like a book? Joyce is the soul of honour. Any money we find him will be expended as if he was executor for the widow and the orphan. Put all those quite natural fancies out of that great wooden head of yours and tell us what we had better do. I mean to clear Joyce somehow, with or without your assistance. I may as well tell you that at the start."

Fidge winked and blinked and still stared me out of countenance.

"Who has given the notices for calling in these mortgages?" he asked.

"Messrs. Levi & Cohen," I replied.

"About as ugly customers as any in the City of London," he answered. Then he fell afresh to studying the map of my face.

"I have it," he cried at length quietly. "In forty-eight hours I'll bring these gentry to book. I may have to see you so as to secure easy terms. If I don't do the job, may I never spit white again, as Falstaff says. Go and eat your dinner with your guardian. Don't say a word to him of what I have told you. Lawyers are mere jarveys. Their job is to drive you where you order 'em to go, not to take you where they have a fancy to. A wise man holds his counsel. When he has heard every side of the story he says to his lawyer: 'I am the pioneer. Your job is to tell me how to pioneer safely.'"

"What a mug you are, Fidge," quoth the Major. "'Pon my soul, I believe you might have saved Beau Brummel from the Egyptians, if he had come to you in time. Let us be off, you and I, Joyce, and crack a bottle at the 'Strawberry Pottle.' Sixty seconds after we are off the premises I'll wager old Fidge will be back again at his black letter nonsense."

Fidge's rubber countenance twisted into a surprising series of contortions. It befell in the end that, after a decent interval, I took my leave of the Major, with the Dutch courage of half a bottle of port coursing through my veins. We were not long thereafter in returning on our outbound tracks. From the wamblings of Jehu on the box seat I fancy my quart of ale was not the only liquor he had imbibed at the "Strawberry Pottle" while I was absent. At the "Golden Cross" I had an hour to pass ere setting forth for the "Whistling Oyster." Quite a high percentage of that interval of time was devoted to a money settlement with the jarvey, whose wits had grown alert in time for its discussion. With the assistance of the hotel porter I finally got rid of him, he being divided in his mind between willingness to carry me anywhere in the future and a sense of the insufficiency of the dole he had received for our Islington jaunt.

CHAPTER XII

THE "Whistling Oyster" was in the heyday of its fame as a rendezvous of good fellows who were wont to hear the chimes at midnight in queer quarters. Toward Vinegar Yard, a grimy alley near Drury Lane, wits and nightbirds of the better type flitted as the shades of evening fell. The coffee house itself—for that was its true designation—was of the shabby genteel order. Its frequenters were actors, painters and the Bohemian rank and file. Of the men of the Literary and Art world who gathered at the hostelry, like moths about a candle, the rig of many of them was that of footpads, for they were bearded like the pard, reeked of stale tobacco, were garbed in ragged velvet. Jests and laughter reigned supreme. While some of the former had better have been strangled at their birth, take it all round the atmosphere was decent and tolerable enough. The "Whistling Oyster" performed nightly to as distinguished a mob of outlanders as could then have been brought together in London. Beefsteaks garnished with a bowl of oyster sauce were the favourite viands of the house. A man as big as a menagerie giant was present on the night Clutterbuck and I dined together. His nose had been broken in youth and he wore a pair of glasses which rendered his aspect that of the learned owl. He was a big man every way, destined later to take the Town by storm. Thackeray was his name. He declared that he had shown the landlord's pet to a Yankee from Massachusetts, who pronounced the hull menagerie a tarnation bit of Barnum. In Murrice they had an oyster that sang Yankee Doodle right thorough and followed his master about like a dog.

There was so much hubbub, such caddle, going on around us that Mr. Clutterbuck and I had no chance of intimate talk. To be frank, I was not sorry. He had treated our

emergency much too lightly to please me. To a man under sentence of death a reprieve is the thing, or better still, a pardon. A discussion on the fibre or fit of the rope that is to hang him merely touches him on the raw. The caterers at the "Whistling Oyster" adapted themselves to the good "old English" appetite of their guests. Kickshaws and foreign wines and the fanfaronade of the gourmet would have been out of place. Old porter, brown and stout, was the staple drink, beefsteaks hung and beaten until they melted in the mouth were the one dish called for, served steaming hot. The tables were surrounded by a hustling mob of folk waiting their turn for the meat fresh from the grill.

My guardian told me who some of the feasters were. Their names have faded out of my recollection, as in sooth for the most part they have faded in their special world—whether that of Letters or Art. I remember a tubby little man who strutted with evident self-appreciation. That was Tommy Moore, I was informed. A sad figure posing as a rollicking maker of fun was Tom Hood.

" Oh for that small, small beer anew !
And (heaven's own type) that milk sky-blue
That washed my sweet meals down."

His dirge of boyish memories might have been writ as the motto of his later days. The robustious humour befitting our warriors returned from the wars was already fizzling out in the thirties. The age of sophistication was dawning. James and Horace Smith were but fitful frequenters of the "Whistling Oyster"—so I heard. One of them stuck to law, the other to stocks and shares. They hit off the foibles of the time pretty neatly in their "Rejected Addresses."

" Shakespeare, how true thine adage, ' fair is foul ;'
To him whose soul is with prevision fraught,
The song of Braham is an Irish howl,
Thinking is but an idle waste of thought,
And nought is everything and everything is nought."

When we had eaten our fill of the rough and ready fare of the "Whistling Oyster" Mr. Clutterbuck announced that we would move on to look in at the Owls. This was a club of men who, as he said, were wont to hoot o' nights. As the name of the club portended, the faculties of its

members were at their nimblest in the small hours "ayont the twal." After various migrations—some of which were probably involuntary—the club was now housed at the "Shakespeare Head," a tavern in Wych Street, hard by to Drury Lane. It was kept by a man destined to make his mark, as Mr. Clutterbuck announced when he introduced me. Although a feeble little jest, it served to raise a laugh, for the innkeeper's name was, I learnt, Mark Lemon.

Mr. Clutterbuck and I retired to a corner and he began cross-examining me as to my day's movements. Now I was determined to be mighty mysterious with him. The essential condition from my point of view was that of finding cash for the extrication of my friends from their entanglement. Should more entanglement follow the extrication, such dilemma must be faced in its turn. Wary fencing, wise saws and modern instances would not save the Fullerton and Grange estates. Nothing but coin of the realm would do that. My duty was to seek this coin out, as the trained pig does truffles. Some day I should be master of my own fate. Meantime I was not going to throw away any reasonable chance of securing proffered assistance, because the hands that proffered it did not look over-clean. I replied, therefore, to Mr. Clutterbuck's queries that I had been marking time in Town and had, moreover, made a trip outside the city to visit a military friend.

Mr. Clutterbuck stated that early on the morrow he was dispatching a representative to Canterbury, in order to find out from Sam Storey's people exactly how matters stood. Such representative was empowered to procure any affidavits which would enable an application to be made to the Courts, if this step should prove necessary. He had carefully weighed all I had told him earlier in the day. Any attack upon the Fullerton estates was a matter which, as my guardian, he was concerned to counter. He had lunched with the judge and had taken the opportunity of discussing matters with his lordship, who fully concurred in the steps he contemplated. His survey of the situation summed up the position and, uncommonly wise in my own conceit, I set myself to draw him away to the scene about us.

The Owls were a merry crew—judging at least by the

boisterous mirth which reigned supreme. The club room had a long table fore and aft, smaller tables dotted about here and there and groups of roystering folk clustered in knots. It was grimy and unkempt. A great fire roared at one end of the apartment and a couple of waiters dodged among the guests. It was a sing-song night and all seemed agog in anticipation of the coming "harmony."

The M.C. having rapped at the head of the table vigorously, some of the guests found their hats and sticks and made off. The rest, including Mr. Clutterbuck and myself, ranged up and took our places at the festive board and the "melodious numbers" began. I am bound to say they were not of a high order. "Punch" was the first toast. Our host, Mark Lemon, responded in the briefest terms.

"Actions speak louder than words," he said, and forthwith proceeded to brew a mighty jorum of that beverage, the assembled guests watching his operations with avidity, giving advice as to the proportions of the ingredients and generally talking and behaving like a pack of schoolboys on spree. No one durst refuse his share of the flowing bowl as it passed round the table. Whether the songs and toasts were tempered and watered to suit the ingenuous young guest present that night, I don't know, but the sentimental songs might have been sung at an academy for young ladies, so die-away were they; the bacchanalian ditties were of the "Down among the Dead Men" order. Toasts were interlarded in orthodox fashion.

As our father would have said, I was fairly caught betwixt wind and water when a rubicund speaker, after expatiating on the days when we all went gipsying, a long time ago, wound up by saying that they had that night the honour of the company of a young gipsy from the country. He enlarged a good deal on the fact that, as was well known, the countryman had nothing to do but wander with a dog at his heels and a gun under his arm through the turnip fields, while the town man had to toil away his days as well as burn the midnight oil, in order to keep the wolf from the door. He wound up by giving my name in full as his toast. When the hammering of the table and the clattering of heels had ceased, I rose with trepidation to reply. In truth my heart hammered at my ribs almost as loudly as had the guests' fists on the table. I began by saying that for a harassed town man

our rubicund friend was remarkably well preserved. As to the midnight oil, it could not be better employed than in lighting up good fellowship and harmony amid such a jolly and cheery crew as those I had the honour of addressing. I wound up by proposing the health of "The Owls."

After that I have only misty recollections. The members with one accord surged about me and demanded that I should take punch with them individually. I remember that Mr. Clutterbuck and I, as the lights began to dance and wheel round, rose and took our leave; how we rumbled over the cobble stones together in a hackney coach until the "Golden Cross" was reached; how, on arrival there, after much vociferous farewell of my guardian, I ascended to my room. In the morning I woke as the grey winter day was dawning. My head ached confoundedly and I felt abominably sick. The jovial boots who brought uncalled-for shaving water advised me strongly to try a glass of small beer. "There's nothin' like it, sir, next mornin'," was his comment. I took his advice and in truth felt uncommonly miserable and not a little homesick. Cold water helped to pull me together and an hour's ramble in the parks finished my cure. I can but imagine that that insidious punch must have been brewed a bit too strong, for I had only—I swear it—how many glasses of the stuff was it? I can but remember two. At any rate if the liquor had been good it could not possibly have gone to my head, as apparently it had done. So we will let the subject drop.

And now I had a harder task to face than that of action. The fury of battle will bear the soldier safely through a thousand chances of death, but that same soldier's courage leaks at every pore, if he lie mute in a rat-hole trench, perchance in wet or biting cold, with scant food to boot. Another day was running through the glass of time. The thirty-first of December came nearer with every tick of the clock. I was fretting and fuming, a mere useless mouth, in the precincts of the "Golden Cross." How long and dreary were to be the hours of penance who should say? I had nothing to fill the void withal but futile regrets of my folly overnight. It is true my head no longer ached as if about to split. There was probably not a man in the inn who would not have laughed at my remorse and its cause. A carouse by night and the normal consequences

in the morning were the standing jest of the hour. All the scribblers and joke makers in cartoon were agreed that nothing was so laughable as the plight in which I found myself at that moment.

It must be borne in mind that I had had days and nights of toil and travel, of anxious foreboding—a load of care beyond my years. The backwash of all this inner turmoil and tumult was flying home to roost. Not a soul came to proffer me assistance or sympathy from without. I was much too miserable to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness about me. My fellow-guests eyed me curiously and askance. No one volunteered anything beyond vacant salutation. Thus I wore out the wretched hours, watching the slow hands of the clock, anon wandering a few hours up and down the Strand.

The giant city held its own course regardless of me. Men traversed the streets in battalions, each unit bent on pursuing his own concerns. Some laughed away the puzzlements of their neighbours; the vast majority ignored them. If my *ego* could have been retrojected into the London of the Cæsars I surely could not have been more isolated, more like a fish out of water, than I felt just then. I was an alien in a foreign land.

“ Let Hercules himself do what he may,
The cat will mew, the dog will have his day.”

The period of daylight was happily for me almost at its lowest ebb. Shadows fell early. Soon after three o'clock the lamp men lowered the lamps slung across the streets, replenished their oil and wicks and hoisted them again lighted. The winking of these glowworms above one's head came as welcome relief, for they showed that the weary hours were moving to their appointed goal. Yet did this very efflux of time chafe and gall my spirit almost beyond bearing. I deemed every hour precious, for on the first of January the hammer of Fate was to fall. I was thirsting to render service and here, in the vital nick of time, came this ghastly pause. I asked myself what more could I do. Mr. Clutterbuck had said all he meant to say. Major Markland had made all sorts of promises. I did not know another soul in the great Babylon. I was stranded and cast away, a derelict. I was like a shipwrecked mariner, tossed on some barren shore by the waves and left to die

of sheer inanition. Can a man sink to a lower or more utter loneliness than when wandering in such a plight as mine about a great city? My appetite was dainty still and, as for liquor, I dreaded it as the burnt dog dreads fire. I had half a mind to hire a horse for a blind gallop away beyond the region of bricks and mortar, but lacked the resolution to set about even this. All I felt myself capable of was to drift whither the tide should carry me. The ordinary baited traps that beset a young lad circumstanced as I was failed to appeal, for the simple reason that I did not see or comprehend their meaning. We boys had been brought up in another plane of being. I watched painted human gauds with mere wonder, hardly even with curiosity. I was as a visitor from a strange planet. No one went out of his way to take me by the hand, to proffer hospitality or friendly greeting. Had any man done so in my present mood I should quite likely have held aloof, regarding myself as the victim of a plot.

I lingered about the shop fronts where jewels flashed. These were pretty toys enough, but I had seen gems as real in the beaded grass of sunrise. Exclude food and drink and the wherewithal of clothing and what is left in the shop fronts of a city? Could I have heard music that pierced beneath the surface of things or have seen grand painting or statuary, their magic would have carried me away in the spirit to a nobler clime and charmed me to a truer atmosphere. At that moment anyone might have led me by the lure of high ideal.

These were the days when all the world and his wife flocked to Vauxhall Gardens. If I had had a congenial companion we should doubtless have wended our way thither as the shades of night fell. Whenever one went (so I heard from a stranger at the inn) there were thousands of lights lighted and fireworks let off. These were always extra and special. Then as to the ravishing music of the band, he asked who that once had heard it could forget? Nights at Vauxhall were, he said, one galaxy of lavish splendour. The man who went thither a prey to low spirits would come away a changed being. The cheeriness—so this stranger told me—was infectious.

Now, in spite of all this alluring talk, high jinks somehow did not attract me just then. I cast a jaundiced eye in their direction. I therefore moped away the time until

I could find a reasonable excuse to cut the tedium short and retire to sleep. Thereafter I tossed and tumbled for an hour, but at length sank into a deep oblivious slumber from which I awoke late in the day, but sane and sober. My appetite had miraculously returned. I was alert and keen to face whatever should befall.

The new day bore in its murky gloom the *flair* of London at the period just before Christmas. All things about me were shrouded and shut in. Destiny hung in the heavens palpably lowering, as hang scutcheons of bygone splendour reminiscent of memories of the dead. I found it hard to shake off the incumbent load that oppressed my spirits. However, will-power came at length to the rescue. Only a few days now remained in which to relieve the tension of our financial chaos. I could almost count their number on my fingers. How was the struggle to end? In spite of all my racing up and down the countryside was I to acknowledge myself bet? Were both houses nearest my heart to pass under the Caudine Forks?

After an early breakfast I made my way past the works in progress to provide a vista for Londoners, wherein should be set in dominance a column to the honour of our immortal Nelson. I thence found my way into St. James's Park. The navigators were still hard at it in the grounds of the Park laying out ornamental waters, in place of the ancient straight reaches resembling the dykes of Holland. The gingerbread Chinese bridge erected by the late King was coming down. Londoners possess, perhaps, the noblest bridge in Europe—that bearing my own name—and yet they failed to protest when, with funds drawn from the taxes of the country, this trumpery, pagoda-like monstrosity was reared in their park. One reason for their apathy was, perhaps, the fact that so few folk promenaded in St. James's Park. Some day, I doubt not, its seclusion will be broken by better routes of access. As it was I had to skirt well-nigh to the river to find a way to enter in. When arrived in its grassy walks I took a sharp breather, every step bringing me nearer to my saner self. The cloud that had settled upon me was lifting like a mist. Not for long, however. The situation recurred ever and anon as a sensation of inevitably-impending doom swept over me in waves. I had reached an *impasse*. So it seemed to me.

When I got back to the "Golden Cross" I could but beat the devil's tattoo on the table of the inn parlour. Here was I, thirsting to be up and doing something, yet tethered. I said to myself: "This must surely have been the sensation of the old Egyptian's emancipated soul, when he watched the mummy cerements being bound about his tenantless clay." The golden hours were slipping away, fraught with and hastening on to disaster, and I was powerless. This thought gave me a sharp relapse into the miserables, but in its turn the buoyancy of youth leapt forward to the rescue.

It was drawing on toward mid-day, I watching the stream of wayfarers swaying east and west past the window, when I got a glimpse of Major Markland bustling into the inn. Something was in the wind at last, I was assured, and I put up an inarticulate *Te Deum*. I heard him inquiring at the bar and went out to tell him of my whereabouts.

"So I've run you to earth," he cried.

"Come in here," quoth I. "Here we can have the place to ourselves. First of all, what can I order you?"

"I'll have a tankard of Meux," he said. "There's nothing like Meux as a pick-me-up in the morning." So I bade the waiter bring two pints of revival to the snuggerly and the Major and I settled down to business.

"Nice job you've let me in for, young 'un," he began. "Never had such a bout of singlesticks in my life before. If it had not been for Fidge it couldn't have been done. I could see you took Fidge at a superficial valuation the other day. My boy, he's one of the hardest nuts in London, a man who will never take no, never say die. I thought I could bring some pretty heavy metal into play myself, but Fidge knocks me silly. I am not worth a tuppenny dam, as the Duke would put it, in comparison with Fidge. He's done your trick for you. Here's to you, Waterloo, and may you never want the long arm again to pull you out of a mess when you are bogged."

So saying, we both took a draught at the Meux. Then I looked him full in the eye, with some admiration and a good deal of relief.

"We've settled it all for you," he went on. "Nothing could have been neater than our friend's handling of the gloves. He's bowled over the champion scuttlers as clean

as a whistle. Both estates are saved. I don't want to take more credit than is my due, but the fact remains that the bigwigs would have wrangled over the affair for a couple of months and then wouldn't have done half as much as Fidge and I have done between us, in less than that forty-eight hours we talked to you about. Again I say, we've done the trick."

I was all ears and eyes. "Tell me the details," I said. He drew two letters from his pocket.

"There you are," he added, "and if they don't convince you nothing will."

The first was headed *Re Tallboy Mortgage, Fullerton Estate*, and ran as follows :

"To Messrs. Fidge & Co.

16th December, 1833.

"DEAR SIRS,

"We have consulted our clients in the above matter, which we find complicated in the highest degree. We may say that no negotiation of recent years has given us more anxiety. Realizing the interests at stake and the length of time the estates have been in the hands of their present owners, we have had to exert all the pressure we are capable of bringing to bear, in order to relieve the existing tension, as we were genuinely desirous of doing. Under ordinary circumstances we should, of course, have had regard solely to the interests of the clients instructing us. However, we have succeeded beyond our anticipations in arriving at a solution which, while satisfying our clients, may, perhaps, be not unacceptable to the gentleman for whom we understand you to be acting.

"Briefly, we are in a position to arrange matters on the following basis :

"1. The Tallboy Mortgage to be taken over by other clients of ours, the rate of interest in future being increased to ten per cent.

"2. As and when he comes of age collateral security to be given by the gentleman for whom you act in the form of a second charge on the property for the sum of three thousand pounds at ten per cent. Meantime he is to undertake to enter into the necessary covenant as to payment of interest until he comes of age and when he comes of age to execute the second

mortgage to our satisfaction. On hearing from you that this arrangement meets with the approval of the gentleman for whom you act, we will prepare and submit all the implements requisite to give the arrangements effect. Meantime perhaps he will sign the preliminary undertaking enclosed.

“ Believe us,

“ Your obedient servants,

“ LEVI & COHEN.”

The enclosure ran as follows :

“ To Messrs. Levi & Cohen.

“ 16th December, 1833.

“ DEAR SIRS,

“ In pursuance of the settlement of the question of the mortgage on the Fullerton estate in the terms of your letter to Messrs. Fidge & Co. of even date and in consideration thereof, I hereby undertake to pay the sum of Three Hundred Pounds per annum in quarterly payments to your clients and when I reach my majority to execute in their favour a second charge on the Fullerton property for the sum of Three Thousand Pounds at Ten Per Cent., you to transfer the existing first mortgage of Fifteen Thousand Pounds to your said clients as aforesaid and to arrange for the withdrawal of the present notice of foreclosure.

“ Yours etc. —”

“ So much for that,” said Major Markland. He beamed upon me triumphantly. “ If I haven’t pinked the bull’s eye neatly tell me so and I’ll admit myself a sorry bungler. Now for the affairs of your friends the Wheatleys. It is the same thing *da capo*. But their present mortgage is for only twelve thousand pounds and I have accordingly beaten the Jews down to a further charge on the Fullerton estate of only two thousand five hundred pounds. Not a bad bit of marching on my part, I venture to think. You and your bewigged friends might have buzzed and banged like bluebottles against a window-pane, but you would have got nothing in exchange for all your buzzing and banging, save, perhaps, such a headache as the bluebottle must surely suffer next day. Now here are the letters as to the Grange matter.”

They ran thus :

“ To Messrs. Fidge & Co.

“ 16th December, 1833.

“ DEAR SIRS,

“ In reference to the foreclosure notice in respect of our clients' mortgage on the above estate we are now able to say that, provided your client will pledge us his word of honour *in writing* to carry out the terms hereinafter set out, we can obtain the withdrawal of the notices served. Your client must please sign the enclosed letter to enable us to give effect to the arrangement foreshadowed. If such letter is not received by us within one week of this date our offer is withdrawn. You will note that the suggested basis of settlement is that our clients should have the benefit of a third charge for Two Thousand Five Hundred Pounds at Ten Per Cent. on the Fullerton estates, your client paying to our clients Two Hundred and Fifty Pounds per annum until he comes of age and executing the said third charge as and when he comes of age.

“ Your obedient servants,
“ CUTTING & CUTE.”

“ To Messrs. Cutting & Cute.

“ DEAR SIRS,

“ I hereby pledge you my word of honour to give effect to the arrangement foreshadowed in your letter of even date to Messrs. Fidge & Co. and more particularly in consideration of the settlement reached to pay to your clients the sum of Two Hundred and Fifty Pounds per annum in quarterly payments until I come of age and when I come of age to execute a third charge on the Fullerton estate for the capital sum of Two Thousand Five Hundred Pounds, such charge to bear interest at the rate of Ten Per Cent.

“ Yours, etc., —”

“ There ! ” shouted the Major, blowing a great cloud of tobacco smoke and throwing himself back with a complacent gesture. “ Now it's up to you, Waterloo. You can either see the twin estates pass into the clutches of wreckers or take the terms I bring you. If I were in your

shoes I should give the thing about five seconds' consideration—no more. I should say: 'Markland, here's my hand upon it and my word's my bond.' Perhaps you fancy I'm fishing for something into my own fob. If so, you do me grievous wrong, I assure you. I have taken a fancy to you, Waterloo, and if you were to say to me: 'Here's a banknote for your trouble for'—what shall we say? '£100, £500, £1,000?'—I should tell you to go and roast chestnuts in a warm corner we've all heard of. No, my boy, I would not touch one farthing of your accommodation money with a barge pole. If I have deserved well of you and rendered you a service, that suffices."

While the Major ran on in this sort of strain I was ransacking my brains for some guiding light of action. When he at length pulled up for a moment I felt puzzled and confused. As I have said in its place, the rent roll of the Fullerton estates all told was some six or seven thousand pounds per annum. That looks a big sum, but we Sussexers were passing through parlous days. We had a poor rate in one part of the county of twenty-six shillings in the pound on assessment or about thirteen shillings on actual value. In a neighbouring parish out of its seventeen hundred inhabitants eight hundred and fifty-seven were paupers. Farming was to all appearance at its last gasp in England. In the near-hand parish I speak of, the farmers' proved losses amounted to over fifteen thousand pounds a year. What wonder that farms should be thrown up right and left, that farming itself should be slovenly to a degree, the fields half-choked with weeds? Mock-beggar-halls were as plentiful with us as cuckoos in May. Farm hands might almost be said to be sold into slavery, so miserable was the pittance they were able to earn. Work hours too were long, well-nigh beyond human endurance. The hinds on the Fullerton estate were treated on a better scale than those about us, a matter of furious denunciation at the market ordinaries where petty farmers, who had to earn their living by the sweat of their brow, were wont to congregate. We Fullertons were "onaccountable brabagious," in the parlance of the county folk. Our working hands on the home farm were noted as being "ma-ain nicely burnished," in other words plump and well set up, not like the lean

and hungry labourers, whose lack of food and comforts rendered them listless slackers. We prided ourselves on the fact that our men were alert and keen at their job, that there should be woman labour in the fields only in times of special pressure. Our cottages and tenements were decent compared with the average hovels—reeking and comfortless—in which the bulk of the country people herded. Nothing but generations of grinding poverty and repression could have produced tolerance of the desperate straits in which Sussex labourers then lived and moved and had their being. The grumblings of revolution were in the air all over the county, yet were the common folk too miserable and depressed under the conditions of their service, too much beneath the harrow to squire and parson, to have pluck enough to show fight. On our estates, as I took pride in recalling, every cottager had his pig. His pig was the joy of his life, a subject for boasting and emulation on his daily round. On the Sunday morning our hog-pounds were rendezvous. Broad Sussex was to be heard in the parliament assembled about them. The cottager would meet half a dozen of his neighbours and moralize and brag “wonnerful” and the posse would wander from one pigsty to another, hanging over each in raptures. Here is a specimen of the talk to be heard about these occasions.

“Ah, many’s the time as we’ve a-stood over the ’og-pound together and looked ’em over and rackoned ’em up, whiles people was a-church. Little did ’e think as ’e’d be putt in afore that ’og were killed, and ’e allus allowed she’d weigh sixty stun.”

These memories and kindred reminiscences floated through my brain while the Major was talking. I fear I was but an indifferent listener. When at length for a second time he stopped I woke as it were from a reverie. He laughingly protested that he might just as well have been haranguing a church full of people, so little heed was paid to him. The fact is, I saw in front of me plainly the divergent tracks. Either I must perforce accept these conditions, which were almost as hard as those of a conqueror in war, or the chaos and break-up of both estates would commence forthwith. When once that disastrous process started I knew from stories I had heard that its rapidity was amazing, its end inevitable perdition. It was

as the gathering of the vultures about a carcass, like the assembling of our longshore human raffle when a wreck fell into their clutches.

I remembered on one occasion at Newhaven how a heavy gale had brought an unfortunate barquentine yawing and driving helplessly toward the lee shore away to the east of the harbour, and how the old wrecking temper, which slumbered skin deep among our folk, came to the surface in a trice. You may have summered and wintered a seafaring hand and only know him from without. Wait till a wreck is in the offing, and he'll be a man possessed, a new creature, the old inherited instincts of his forbears, who burnt flares and enticed errant craft ashore, to whom the shipwrecked mariner was a gift of the gods, will re-awaken and you will see sights over which it were best were you to draw the veil. The old latent savagery and innate bestiality which our softer times have doused will burst out afresh into a flame. Such wild orgies as I have witnessed no moderner would credit—men staving in barrels of spirit driven ashore, lapping the fiery stuff like dogs, until they littered the strand as the dead do a battle-field, and how if they had not been carried thence by saner folk their corpses would have been borne out to sea, after the rising tide had drowned them.

Well, it was with memories such as these that I wrestled in reverie and old reminiscence. At length I became aware that the Major was waiting for some indication of my view on his offer. He rose.

"You want a bit of time to think it all over, I can see, Waterloo," quoth he. "Quite reasonable, quite right. I wouldn't say one word to influence you either way, right hand or left. Look here, Waterloo, if you will have me to dinner I will invite myself. Afterwards we two young sparks will look in at Vauxhall and make a night of it. What do you say?"

What could I say? "Be here at five," I said. He assented and I was alone.

Thereafter I passed a miserable day, "so full of fearful dreams, of ugly sights," was it. Ought I to see Mr. Clutterbuck and disclose the whole proposal to him? I shirked facing that petty cock-sparrow of a clerk of his. As for Mr. Clutterbuck himself, I feared his faculty of—as we say in Sussex—"beating the Devil round the gooseberry

bush." He would blow hot and cold, throw off and on, refer and refine and postpone until he drove one to the verge of frenzy. He looked upon our difficulty through a spyglass, from a distance. He was just a tradesman and this was his job. Supposing I signed these letters without consulting him, what would Uncle John say? Well, he had practically delivered himself into my hands. I had his authority to do the best I could. As for Mr. Rohu, he didn't count at all. His function was purely that of a local adviser.

What I chose to do in respect of the Grange estate was surely my own affair. Mr. Wheatley would protest to the last, but I was bent on coming back, like St. George after that famous interview of his with the dragon, as a conquering hero. Mr. Clutterbuck had said positively he would not lift a finger to help in that quarter. Well, this proposal meant that I should have to guarantee the payment of £250 per annum for three years and after that period make the arrangement definite. I guessed what would happen. Mr. Wheatley would take the extra tax upon our estates on his own shoulders. It was a poor look-out if at Nutfield they could not muster an additional five pounds a week by hook or by crook. I felt quite certain that the railway works would come and that we should all be happy ever after.

As to Fullerton, our obligation would be to find £300 a year more. Even so, we must scrape and screw a bit for a year or two. That was better than that the whole concern should be chucked into Chancery. The end of a Chancery suit would be that we luckless landowners would be ground between the upper and lower millstones of lawyers' fees. Here and there up and down the county the pride of ancestral acres had been humbled, their owners and tenants cast away to seek a fortune under alien skies or to pass under the harrow of desperate poverty or—what was worse still—to subsist under grudging doles from kith and kin, and all by reason of the rapacious sharks of the Law.

CHAPTER XIII

THE Major arrived with military punctuality. He was in his most boisterous humour and rallied Mistress Betty in the bar as we passed it together, making for the coffee-room. Betty was a lady of many moods. The minute shades of difference of her repartee gave a discerning index of the character of each individual guest, showing her wide acquaintance with the foibles of the sets of men frequenting this hub of London. So far as the Major was concerned she appeared to unbend somewhat to the soldier, rather to hold aloof from the man. We had at the bar a nip of the special cordial with which, as the Major said, all guests at the "Golden Cross" were wont to christen their dinner. He begged Betty to honour his glass with a sip preliminary. Her reply was to take a teaspoonful of the stuff and spurt it on to the fire, to pick up my glass and moisten her lips with its contents.

"That's how it ever is with you womenkind," quoth the Major, striking an attitude. "Tried worth gets the go-by, Fortune favours the young. Come along, Waterloo, and let us leave Betty to her tricks and grimaces, for a 'Golden Cross' dinner tarries for no man."

I could not long maintain my frozen seriousness of mood, as the Major rattled on of a thousand foibles and nonsenses, telling me of foreign travel and war experience and I know not what beside. He barely skimmed the surface of events, when referring to our Fullerton affairs. Now, as the dinner progressed and I mellowed, the man's parts filled the picture more and more. With our second bottle of Chambertin, I too grew merry and talkative. 'Tis true I had not a fund of oversea wonders to draw from, such as the Major possessed. I knew the antics of the fish and wild fowl of our Sussex country. Then, too, memories of the rambles we boys took in the old days helped to fill the void.

Before we had finished our port the Major, silently but

ostentatiously, fetched an inkpot and quill from a neighbouring sideboard, and put them on our table. I had made up my mind how to act. I therefore drew the two letters from my pocket, signed them and handed them across the table to him. There was just a glint of triumph in his eye as he stowed the letters away in a pouch. That glint gave me an instant qualm of pause. The next moment he rose.

"Come on, young 'un," cried he gleefully, "don't let you and I copy the Prince Regent, who didn't like meeting the world and—his wife."

So we donned hats and sticks and set forth, bent on our frolic.

"For to-night we'll merry be," chirruped the Major, "and to-morrow sober." I was strung up to a high pitch of expectation. The wonders of Vauxhall were on all men's lips at this time of day. We hired a coach and arrived outside the Gardens. The crash of the band within and the twinkling of the many thousands of coloured lights set my pulses dancing.

"Cast away niggardliness" might have been the motto inscribed above the portals. Half a guinea took us within the precincts. On entering the visitor wandered through a dark alley-way, at the end of which a sudden blaze of light burst upon him. Walks led in many directions from the central enclosure and each avenue was dight with dazzling lamps. What with the clatter and laughter, the rattle of plates and dishes, the stormy melody of the orchestra, the gaily illuminated balloons floating high in air, the flags, the mirror panels, the stars and festoons, the arcades picked out as with ten thousand glow-worm power, I experienced under this accumulation of effect a sensation of exhilaration such as I had never felt in my life before.

I was a lad from the country, unsophisticate, innocent of the dark side of the picture. The merriment and *abandon* which reigned supreme filled me with a new sense of freedom. I was enraptured with the free and easy appeal to the senses, the careless joy of mere animal existence, such as was evidently the order of the day about me.

The great set piece that night represented the Battle of Waterloo. It was done to the life in fireworks. "Amazing" was the term used in the advertisement, but one

adjective could not express half the wonders of the magic scene. Before us we saw actually portrayed that death grapple about Hougoumont, descriptions of which we all know by heart. Every now and then an ammunition wagon would blow up with an infernal racket, or sharpshooters would steal out and blaze away at spurts of fire from the opposing height. The wonder-spectacle spun on to its climax, when the Duke appeared and doffed his cocked hat, amid a blaze of fireworks and a perfect tornado of stormy music and frantic cheering.

The Major told me that to his certain knowledge the Duke had of late been to watch the mimic scene of his triumph not once nor twice, but often, and had pronounced it "monstrous clever." Now as soon as our warlike instincts were appeased with the counterfeit presentment of the crowning victory, there was a stampede to the supper room. Lord! what a medley of folk surged and swayed about us. Three parts of them made me shudder. I saw raddled old beauties, painted and bedizened, their weary eyes ogling and leering at men padded and stayed, bewigged and tricked out, as if for appearance before the footlights. In the tell-tale daylight, what would these same sorry bucks and belles be like, I asked myself? For the matter of that, take away the flashing lights and the mob of gaily dressed folk and the stormy glitter of night and what would Vauxhall itself be like? Just a grimy range of tawdry buildings and untidy walks and seedy ranges of sheds.

The fact is the veneer of the whole thing was wearing away. I was beginning to see things as they really were. In the meantime the Major had hustled me away to the supper room. There was a story going the rounds that the cutter-up of the supper meats had undertaken to cover the eleven acres of ground of the Gardens with slices from a single ham. Then there was another story of a London cit entertaining his wife and daughters at these tables, of how he grumbled at the wafer sandwiches and exorbitant charges of the place. "There goes tuppence—there goes thruppence—there goes a groat," he is reputed to have cried out, at every mouthful taken by them. A year or two ago, I heard, the managers wanted to secure the services of Paganini for fifteen nights. The fee he demanded was ten thousand pounds. "No wonder the slices

of ham are thin as charity soup and the prices charged are monstrous high," was the Major's comment. However, there we were in the supper room. Round the walls ranged gaudy pictures representing sumptuous bacchanalian carouse—nymphs and satyrs and the crushing of the grape, country dances and routs of revellers. One could hardly hear oneself speak for the sturdy bandsmen fiddling and blowing as if for dear life. When the band ceased the guests shouted and sang, corks popped, the rattle of knives and forks and calls to waiters filled the void of sound.

"You must taste the famous arrack punch," cried the Major. "Burnt wine," was shouted for at the next table to ours. What we were actually served with I don't know. The bill which I had ultimately to foot would have kept us all in the old days at Newhaven for a month. Finally we wended our way to the "Marine Cave," to hear full-blooded ditties sung. A large lady dressed in a small frock, who ogled her audience outrageously, and whose name I heard was Mrs. Wheichsel, sang what was called in the play-bill "a rondeau." Its opening lines suffice to show its calibre :

" Maidens, let your lovers languish,
If you'd have them constant prove ;
Doubts and fears, and sighs and anguish
Are the chains that fasten love."

The scene and its setting, the stifling air of the cave, the reek of the lamps and the drink-sodden audience, the deadly iteration and lack of idea in the songs—whether sung in ripe, porty basso or, to the accompaniment of would-be enslavement, in thrill soprano—soon brought disillusion to me. The delights of Vauxhall had gone up like a rocket. They were beginning to come down like the stick. I told the Major we would march. He was for introducing me to some of the painted beauties who haunted the cave, but, so far as I was concerned, reaction had set in like a strong ebb-tide. He saw I was for flight, and shrugging his shoulders and muttering something about milk-sops and apron-strings, we accordingly, none too steadily, left din and clatter behind us, and anon were racketing over the cobble-stone roadway in a coach for the "Golden Cross."

When we had crossed Waterloo Bridge, the Major stopped the coach and alighted. Then I rattled on my

way alone. Now that the fizz and fireworks were over I began to see seams in the canvas setting of our evening's sport. While I thus pondered, drowsiness took possession of me, until at length the inn was reached, where the porter paid the jarvey and piloted me within.

It was not long thereafter that I was snoring stertorously between the sheets. Later I awoke in pitchy darkness. What the hour was I had no means of telling, for my watch had run down. I felt confoundedly jaded. That inconvenient appendage we call "conscience" was in revolt. I answered its dire insinuations with such spirit as I dare muster in the middle of a troubled and restless night. Just then a neighbouring church clock struck two and, before finishing my Job-like exhortations and rejoinders, I had sunk away into a bemused slumber.

The boots was the next intruder. There must have been something unusual in my appearance, for his first words were, "Let me get you a draught of small ale, sir." It was useless to disguise the fact that I had a consuming thirst upon me. Thus did my night at Vauxhall end in small beer, a racking headache and the sense of how flat, stale and unprofitable are all the uses of this world. Perhaps, I said to myself, Hamlet himself had been wandering in his own Vauxhall Gardens before he gave expression to that dictum of his.

As the day emerged from the condition of a callow fledging, it continued ugly and clamorous. We had to accept the statement of the almanac makers that the sun had risen above the horizon. So far as the gloom of the heavens and an overshadowed earth were concerned, the reign of Erebus might have come again. How was I going to break the ice to Mr. Clutterbuck? The more I reflected on the possible consequences of facing that gutter sparrow clerk of his and after him my guardian himself, the less I relished the job.

A bright idea occurred to me. I would write to acquaint him of developments, in so doing adopting rather the jaunty, *fait accompli* tone. In order to achieve this end, the next thing obviously was to retire with some stationery to a corner of the snugery and, as Hamlet says, "leave my damnable faces and begin." Begin? Ay, but where? That was the rub. First of all, how could I address him? "Dear Mr. Clutterbuck" seemed too familiar ;

“Sir” too formal; “Dear Sir” too much like a touting tradesman. So at last I determined on “Hon^d. Sir.” At this stage I experienced a lengthy pause, making as many false starts as often do the Derby horses before they get away. “You will doubtless be curious to know what measures I have adopted”—that was scrapped as too presumptuous. “When I had the honour of conferring with you, I told you of my having met a military friend”—that wouldn’t do, for he would naturally say, “Why didn’t you bring your military friend to see me?” Then I followed the sentimental tack, thinking to appeal to his finer feelings. That attempt was discarded for the narrative method, whereby I hoped to circumvent him with subtlety. The fate of all these efforts was to be torn into small pieces and dropped thoughtfully into the wastepaper basket, a blank sheet still confronting me. I wrote at last:

“HON^d. SIR,

“Enclosed I send you copies of two letters which I yesterday handed to Major Markland, a friend who is able to command attention in the best City circles. Knowing this, I appealed to him to extricate the Fullerton and Nutfield estates from their present dilemma. After much persuasion, he has consented to do so on the terms now agreed by me. I trust you will approve my course of action. It is no doubt true that the solution of our troubles will throw some additional money burden on the Fullerton estates, but, as the prospective owner of those estates, I am quite willing to face such burden. I feel that a year or two will show a vast rise in the value of Sussex properties, due to the improved means of access which will result from the county railways when built. It is also true that just now the values are at their lowest ebb, owing to the severity of agricultural depression, but I am convinced there will be a speedy recovery. In any event, I feel my honour bound up in defending from assault both estates in question. I have therefore taken those measures which appeared to me to afford the only means of escape to safety.

“Believe me, Hon^d. Sir,

“Your obedient Servant,

“WATERLOO JOYCE.”

I read the draft of this letter through several times, finally making a fair copy of it and at length, after much cogitation, determined to send it by hand to my guardian. The friendly boots, who told me that that drop o' ale he had fetched me before I rose was a wery good vindication of what 'e'd 'eard called barm in Gilly's 'ead—though 'ow folks could expect to clear their 'eads by swallowing barm 'e didn't know—was my messenger.

After dispatching this fateful missive I strolled out into the slums behind the hotel. I followed the route taken by the Regent. I tracked my way to the great arcade then being built in Regent Street. At the spot where the Duke had passed us I swung off to the right and wandered on by the unravelling clue of instinct. The narrow cross streets grew puzzling. Nearly all of them had a down-at-heel beerhouse at the corner. Some subtle aroma at the entrance to "Wentworth Butts" pulled me up. I was like a hound picking up a faint scent. I turned down the passage and there, sure enough, on the right hand lay the alley with the stone post on which I had been deposited after the rifling of my pockets. Wandering still farther down the Butts I came at No. 7 to the clubhouse, at which I was to have been introduced to Lord Brougham and Tommy Moore.

The birds had flown. A dirty scrap of paper in the window announced that these elegant premises were to be let at a moderate rental. The paper gave an address of the agent who had the letting in hand. While I was making a note of his address a frowsy woman watched me suspiciously. She was a stout, truculent-looking trull enough. Her aspect had something menacing and aggressive about it. I accordingly wheeled about and sauntered out into the main thoroughfare from which I had strayed. To find the battered nest once inhabited by the rooks who had plucked me bare had afforded a couple of hours' occupation and thus served to fill up the void of time. Moreover, I experienced a glow of satisfaction in having run to earth the one-time quarters of a dangerous gang of ruffians.

Arrived back at the "Golden Cross," I found a formidable-looking sealed letter awaiting me. The music had to be faced, that was clear. To help me do so, I ordered a basin of the turtle soup for which the inn was

famous, a slice off the joint just coming up steaming hot from the kitchen and a pint of their extra dry sherry. A few spoonfuls of the soup gave me courage to cut open the envelope and this is what I read :

“ DEAR MR. JOYCE,

“ Your letter of to-day's date delivered by hand fills me with amazement. Why in Heaven's name did you not come to see me before committing an act so presumptuous and rash? Do you realize what you have done? You have committed the most serious offence known to the Law. It is flagrant contempt of Court. The judge has the power to imprison you indefinitely for it. The matter is entirely at his discretion. There is no process known to legal practice—save the clemency of the judge—by which you could be extricated from a well-merited incarceration, when once ordered into confinement by his lordship. You have been woefully abused and entrapped. The whole manœuvre is patent to the merest tyro in the Law. To imagine that a chance acquaintance picked up at a country inn could cancel and avert legal processes and that, if he could, he would do it, merely out of casual esteem to you personally, is surely worthy of those historic characters, the Babes in the Wood, of whom you perhaps have heard. They were to have been stripped of their possessions by a wicked uncle, as you may remember. For Heaven's sake call such small grains of sense as you may possess to your aid and fight shy of the arts of the cardsharper and the gaol bird in future. There is only one consolation in all this sorry business. I have seen the Judge and we have talked the matter over. At first his lordship was disposed to take an extremely severe view of the case. The offence was so patent and unpardonable. There was absolutely no palliation possible. Before I left him, however, I induced him to accept my view of the situation. You may consider yourself uncommonly lucky that I was in a position to keep matters straight for you. We agreed that the letters you have written are mere waste paper. You are not of age. You have no legal status whatsoever in a negotiation such as this. If the men with whom you have been resorting are foolish enough to regard these documents as possessing any binding value whatever, that is their

affair. His lordship and I are both at one in treating the whole incident as *ultra vires*, null and void. You stand at this moment exactly as you stood forty-eight hours ago. Come and see me this afternoon and I will explain to you more fully what a very narrow shave you have had of a long period of incarceration.

"Your obedient Servant,

"ANASTASIUS CLUTTERBUCK."

My heart was in my mouth as I read this effusion. The notion that in taking the only course obviously practicable to safeguard the estates from spoliation I had broken the Law, appeared to me so monstrous and absurd that I actually laughed at the idea. Of course the Judge and Mr. Clutterbuck could regard my letters as waste paper if it pleased them to do so. For my part those letters expressed my purpose and intent. I meant to abide by them. I finished my meal in a somewhat defiant frame of mind. In an hour or so I would beard the lion in his den and stand up to my punishment, in spite of the covert insolence of that little *gamin* in the outer office. The little wretch would doubtless know all about our correspondence. That he would patronise me and look down upon my foibles and follies I knew quite well. All right, I would brush him aside and say my say to his master, without abating one jot of determination.

This abstract resolution was all very well, but, when I pushed open the swing door of Mr. Clutterbuck's chambers, and was confronted with the small imp of darkness who kept watch and ward therein, my mercury fell several degrees.

"Oh! ah!" he volunteered, without any prompting from me, "it's *in re* Fullerton Estates, I believe. Let's see"—he turned over some manuscript documents. "Conference with Mr. Justice Billing," he murmured, "in the matter of alleged contempt of Court. Have you any appointment to see Mr. Clutterbuck?" I told him I had not anything but his general request that I should call. "No specific hour of conference fixed, eh?" he queried. I told him that was about the state of the poll. He regarded my levity as out of place, I could see, but retired at length to the inner sanctum. After a few minutes' absence, he returned to inform me that Mr.

Clutterbuck was not within—which of course he knew quite well from the first.

“ You might perhaps catch him in No. 5 King’s Bench,” he added. “ The case is Wisbery *versus* Pemble.” Upon this I withdrew. I was about to enter the domain of the man who could, an he would, put me in the village stocks for a vagrant.

On entering King’s Bench No. 5 I instantly recognized the occupant of the Bench, though bewigged and muffled in the robes of his office, as the old gentleman who had disarmed my nervousness and given me fatherly advice when first I came to London. Mr. Clutterbuck was on his feet addressing the judge on some case about a boundary dispute. There were a mere handful of people scattered over the back benches and probably most of those were in some way interested in the issue that was being tried. Half a dozen counsel sat in a row and immediately in front of them, under the eyes of the judge, were the attorneys and principals in the case. These latter whispered audibly to their respective advocates as to any point they thought essential. The judge’s clerk, perched on a tier below his lordship, was patently in a state of somnolence, although his eyes were open. The judge himself seemed bored to extinction. The Court building was dark, gloomy and stifling. How those practising in it could keep their wits from stagnating in such an atmosphere it passed my comprehension to imagine. The case apparently had to do with some paltry dispute as to trespass. One set of “ learned friends ” said a particular bit of fence was three inches within the land belonging to Tweedledum ; the Tweedledee faction said the fence was dead on the boundary line. It was the first time I had listened to the deadly iteration and petty tricks of pleaders. The entire dispute was a trumpery business. The judge mildly insinuated that a minor coin of the realm, manipulated by the parties interested in accordance with common practice, would be a more appropriate method of disposing of the matter than an appeal to a public tribunal. He quoted some doggerel which I pricked my ears to hear :

“ When fools fall out, for every flaw
They run horn-mad to go to Law.
A hedge awry, a wrong-placed gate,
Will serve to spend a whole estate.”

However, the dreary farce went on. Obviously I could not interrupt Mr. Clutterbuck in the flow of his oratory. Like most listeners in a Court of Law, I immediately took sides. Tweedledee was the aggrieved party. The exaggerated advocacy of Mr. Clutterbuck, Tweedledum's man, did not convince me. His simulated wrath fell flat. Apparently the case was in its final stage. When Mr. Clutterbuck sat down the judge put the issue in a nutshell. The whole adjudication rested on a question of fact, and as to this the evidence of witnesses equally entitled to credence was in direct conflict. To mark his sense of the impropriety of taking up the time of the Court with a matter of so trivial a character, a matter, he added, quite capable of decision by reference to any independent surveyor, he had made up his mind that the defendant as the attacked party was entitled to a decision in his favour. He therefore gave to defendant with costs.

The elation of the family party clustered on the judge's left hand was extravagant, to the onlooker foolishly disproportionate to the triviality of the proceedings. It was, however, that magic word "costs" which had caused so joyous a bustle on their part, as they gathered up their papers preparatory to decamping. While this subdued fluster was going on Mr. Clutterbuck rose gloomily to intimate that his clients would probably take the matter to a higher court. His lordship nodded and, in the interregnum between this and the next case, I passed down the seat behind that reserved for learned counsel and touched Mr. Clutterbuck on the shoulder. He wheeled about and regarded me with a wrathful eye. I couldn't help thinking that this attitudinising was part of the histrionics of his profession. His wrath was simulated and exaggerated.

"Come with me to our conference room," he said. I followed in his wake. We traversed in a bunch along a passage and entered a dark little crib of a room, not much bigger than a sentry box.

"Truly monstrous," quoth the attorney in the case just disposed of.

"What will the costs run to?" queried the litigant ruefully.

"My dear sir," warmly urged Mr. Clutterbuck, "you surely do not contemplate sitting down quietly under

so obvious an injustice. His lordship's decision is clearly against the weight of the evidence. We must carry the case on. I should be failing in my elementary duty if I omitted to impress upon you the absolute necessity of getting this iniquitous decision reversed."

"But what will appeal cost?" queried the suitor.

"The costs will be practically nominal, sir," replied the attorney. "There will be no evidence to produce, you know. It will simply be a review of that already given."

"Hum! ha!" ejaculated the defeated man. "I must consult my wife before I decide." He looked harassed and dejected, took up his hat and departed. As soon as the door closed upon him, Mr. Clutterbuck and the solicitor glanced from one to the other.

"The grey mare is evidently the better horse," quoth the solicitor, with a grin.

"He's a poor-spirited Briton for stirring times like these," added Mr. Clutterbuck. "However, one may take the horse or the mare to water. He or she won't drink against their will."

"Costs, indeed," fumed the attorney. "One would think the man was some pettifogging linendraper, instead of a landowner with a rent roll of five or six thousand a year." The lawyer's clerk meanwhile was savagely stowing bundles of blue foolscap paper tied up with red tape into a big blue bag. He seemed to regard the hesitation of the landowner to embark on fresh litigation as a personal insult.

"Are you in the next case?" asked the solicitor. "Gosling *versus* Mildun it is."

"I believe I am," answered Mr. Clutterbuck. "Ah, here comes my clerk. Are we in Gosling, Slybody?"

"Yessir, and Mr. Beater 'e's opening the case now, sir," replied the clerk.

"Prior is there, isn't he?" said Mr. Clutterbuck. "Just step back into Court and say I shan't be many minutes."

"Yessir."

Mr. Clutterbuck and I were left *vis-à-vis*. "I marvel at your assurance, Joyce," he broke out. "How you dare show your nose in Mr. Justice Billing's court with the risk of being tapped on the shoulder for contempt, simply amazes me. Of course I know that you are a green, raw

hand, that you have allowed your wilful folly to lead you astray, but—well, well—to walk into that Court and take your seat there, with the sword of Damocles hanging over your head—it's amazing, it passes belief." He sat and glared at me as if I had been a hardened criminal. "What have you to say?" he demanded.

"Simply," I replied, "that I have taken definite action which will at least prevent the fall of the guillotine, whereas all you ever proposed to do was to talk. Don't imagine for a moment that I am going to draw back from my honourable undertakings. I am not. It's true they will hamper both estates for a few years. If the estates had been plunged into the Courts, they would simply have melted away. Just think of the randy we have been listening to. This unfortunate landowner, whoever he is, will have to pay hundreds of pounds for the luxury of a squabble as to whether a hogpound is three inches too wide or not." My temper was rising, so was Mr. Clutterbuck's.

"You foolish boy," he cried, "why the whole burden of the great cause of public justice might well hinge on just such an issue as you describe. In Law verity is what we aim at, sir, whether the cause be little or great. An issue involving a farthing's damages may be just as important as one involving ten thousand pounds. In the eyes of the Law, abstract equity is all, proportion is nothing."

"That would be all very fine," I made answer, "if you lawyers were a college of Greek philosophers, arguing as to the foundations of ethics and conduct. Socrates and his disciples were not paid according to a taxed scale, you know. They orated for the good of all humanity. You advocates do it for a living."

"Waterloo Joyce," cried Mr. Clutterbuck, "I am heartily ashamed of you. You have taken counsel with the sansculottes. As Shakespeare says, you have eaten on the insane root that takes the reason prisoner. To suggest that the question of fees warps the judgment of any man practising in legal circles is an insult, sir, to a great profession. You must see that for yourself. In a calmer mood you will be the first to express your regret that you should have uttered such sentiments."

At this moment Mr. Slybody re-entered the room.

"Mr. Prior would be glad if you would step into Court as soon as possible, sir," he said.

Mr. Clutterbuck rose. "Duty tears me away, Waterloo. I much regret that you did not take me more into your confidence, before your rash and foolish action. Happily, as I have written you, what you have signed is invalid—mere waste paper. It does not affect the interests of the Fullerton estates one iota. The guardians of those estates go on their way unaffected, still struggling to protect the interests committed to their care by the supreme wisdom of the Courts of Law of this land." He shook me by the hand and was gone. I followed his example and took my exit, making my way back to the "Golden Cross."

The Brighton coach was due out in a couple of hours. I secured the box seat, paid the lawing and anon was flashing through the countryside on my return to Cuckfield. I sat next to old Jerry, who had tooled us to London when the Regent occupied the seat I then had. We talked of horses for ten or fifteen miles. I was not an ignoramus on that subject and Jerry's asides were frequently illuminating. We drifted at length, as all travellers did at that time of day, toward the problem of the coming of steam locomotion. As we did so I inwardly ejaculated, "Breakers ahead." Jerry's rubicund face put on a purple hue. The old man gave me, as we say in Sussex, "a dish o' tongues."

"Butter my wig," he cried wrathfully, "if they blarsted steam kettles won't just abaout be the ruination o' England. And all for what? To give they muckgrubber Jugs* a charnst o' fingerin' the Lunnon goold."

"But," I said, "you finger the London gold yourself and, as for the Jugs, why you are one too, aren't you?"

"No, I bean't," he made answer. "My feyther were a Udimore man and me mother were an out-and-out furriner. Her feyther had a mill up on the Downs, Epsom way."

Seeing the lie of the land I beat a hasty retreat. The white spectre of Gatton House was looming up and the memory of our surveys to and fro the Merstham meadows came upon me, like a distant echo from the hills. I had not been away many days from the "Joliffe Arms," but so much was crowded into those days that old scenes

* Brighton folk.

appeared to fade into the middle ages of one's life. Anon we pulled up at the inn and I bustled in to make inquiries of my chums. I could not help assuming the stranger tone, as of one just returned from a voyage overseas. Life was running on with them, it seemed, just as if there were no such things as tragedies, no such folk as land thieves in the world. I left word that I should be back at my work in a day or two and so clambered again to my perch beside old Jerry. In spite of a dark day's gloom my spirits rose. We had passed the shortest day, I told myself, and imperceptibly the vista of the Christmas season of better cheer was looming up for us all. Youth and the doldrums are eternally at strife. As we clattered off the rhythmic music of the horses' hoofs wove itself into a song. I mused and was silent. We sped on as the dusk of evening wrapt the woodland ways, and in due course pulled up at the "Travellers' Rest" at Cuckfield, where Jerry and I parted company as sworn cronies.

CHAPTER XIV

NEXT morning Zebra was fresh as paint as we tracked the now familiar route across country to Fullerton. Somehow I arrived at an unpropitious moment. Uncle John was at home, and when I told him of the risks and chances of our fortunes and how I had overcome them, he surprised me by a quality of his nature which had never been revealed to me before.

"You foolish boy," he exclaimed, "you have half ruined us all. Why did you plunge into such a medley of confusion without consulting those most intimately concerned? All you have done is to spoil our chances of extricating the estates. You have made confusion worse confounded."

Thus is it ever with the reformer. I was utterly taken aback.

"I had arranged everything," he added. "The mortgages were to be quietly paid off and taken up afresh in friendly hands and now you come along clouding counsel and disturbing all my plans with this officious interference, unauthorized if not illegal."

Here was a pretty mess. I had been labouring my hardest, to earn the treatment of a mischief-maker in the end. Uncle John paced the room excitedly, as if beside himself. Our mother coming along the passage just then, he called her in.

"Look here, Mrs. Joyce," he exclaimed. "This precious boy of yours is bent on being our undoing." He briefly told the story of my delinquencies.

"I must say, Waterloo," quoth our mother quietly, but with a quiver of anger running through her words, "I am amazed at your folly. If you had been a man of mature years you would have realized the seriousness of the pitfall into which the estates might thus be driven. Mr. Hardy has come to our rescue. All would soon have been secure and now this fresh gratuitous complication is forced upon us and by a son of mine, too."

I began to feel like Job when his candid friends touched him on the raw every time. It really was too bad. They did not even give me credit for good intentions. I hinted as much.

"Good intentions?" cried Uncle John hotly. "We all know the final application of good intentions. What shall we say to good intentions when their effect is like to be to bring the house we live in about our ears?"

I was beginning to grow excited in my turn. I was as a man who has devoted infinite pains to win his spurs on the field of honour, to have them stricken off as a felon.

"It is no use to stay here and listen to this abuse," I said. "I shall ride back to Nutfield straight away. I daresay they will at least be fair to me there."

"Don't be a fool, Waterloo," Uncle John interjected. "You have led us into this mess and you must do what you can to get us out of it again."

So at length we sat down to a meal, all very ragged in temper, save only Victory, who rather sided with me, or at least tried her hardest to hold up my end of the argument. It was quite true, she said, that things had turned out better than could have been expected; supposing they had not done so, the bladder of our fortunes must have been pricked on the thirty-first of December, if I had not patched up some sort of an alternative. The defection of our mother at this critical moment in our fortunes cut me to the quick. Whoever might judge me harshly I thought she at least would have stood by me. I began to see how hasty I had been, how credulous, how impulsive. Still a crash loomed imminent and I had stayed—or essayed to stay—the despoiler, to the best of my judgment. How could I have taken counsel when we were up against an abrupt time limit? It appeared impossible to convey to the home circle the hopelessness of trusting for real extrication to the Clutterbuck faction. Every twist in the path as I saw it at the time was beset with the dragons of peril. I had taken the bold course and ridden straight for them, neck or nothing.

In the end I stuck to my resolution. With ruffled plumes, I mounted Rattler and rode away to the north with black care for a fellow horseman. A few days now would not make or mar our Fullerton fortunes, as Uncle John had definitely determined to accept Mr. Hardy's

offer and end the present suspense once and for all. I took a solitary ride save for that importunate shadow perched behind me.

Would Margarita be at the Grange? What had happened after I left Canterbury? Was Dick home yet? What of Charlotte? The more I thought of her and her mother the deeper sank the glamour of the girl's pathetic eyes. We had sung *Te Deum* together in the cathedral. Praise and hope and the deliverance of man from Fate, the retiarius, that force we know not of, forever casting about us his subtle net—all that was the triumphant burden of the great hymn. Why then should I be restless, why cast down?

I had shuttled back and forth so often that I knew the short cuts along the route. In spite of this fact it was late at night ere I reached the "Joliffe Arms." Thereafter my chums and I sat round the fire and talked into the small hours. There were a score of dropped threads in connection with the survey to discuss with Quodling and Tosh. The Chief had been down to Merstham. He had asked many questions as to my absence, the reasons of which I had of course advised him before leaving. He was a real Chief, one who raised no fuss, swung to neither extreme as optimist or pessimist, absorbed all the salient essentials of the problem in hand—one for whom the whole panorama of operations assumed an ordered sequence. His faculty was that of a general, who, by a hidden instinct, evolves the massing and control of a campaign. He possessed the god-like quality that moulds order out of the ravelled skein of chaos. I skated lightly over the affairs of the estates. There had been, they told me, no tidings affording any clue to the murderers, their whereabouts or motive.

Early next morning I made my way to Nutfield. The Christmas season was already upon us. At that time we Britons celebrated the great festival in the main by an orgy of gluttony. To the Englishman asceticism is an alien creed. He never loses a chance of carouse or festive cups. Inside a week ale and punch would be flowing in rivers, hecatombs of birds and beasts sacrificed. Rich and poor would, thereafter, slowly recover from the period of gorge which custom consecrated. In due course I ignored, as was my wont, Mr. Wheatley's injunction to

enter the Grange unbidden. I rang the bell as any stranger might and was shown into his sanctum. The first thing that struck me was a subtle elation in his manner.

"Glad to see you, Waterloo. A great weight has been lifted from us since you were here last. The threatened trouble impending over the estate has rolled away."

This news was surely double-edged. Was I glad or sorry? I could hardly say. All I could do was mutely to stare at Mr. Wheatley.

"Oh," quoth I at length, "then you won't want any assistance from outside?"

"No," he replied blithely, "by a strange chain of incident Mrs. Wheatley, when I laid before her the trouble facing us—your suggestion, I believe—found a way out. A cousin of hers is chairman of a bank which makes advances on land. They sent their secretary down here and in the end the bank stepped in. The fact is, Waterloo, Mrs. Wheatley has been *dea ex machinâ*. Not only has she found a way out of our dilemma, but the emergency has braced her nerves. It has recreated the jolly girl I married twenty-five years ago. You are almost like one of the family, Waterloo, so I can talk to you as I shouldn't do to most folk. Fifteen years ago Mrs. Wheatley fell under the influence of a gang of peripatetic self-styled evangelists. Their world was not mine. We drifted more and more into channels foreign to one another. I need say no more."

All this I already knew. The lack of charity which lay at the root of Mrs. Wheatley's creed was patent to me as a visitor.

"While I have been away I have not been idle, Mr. Wheatley," I stammered at length. "The fact is I, too, have armed myself with a means of breaking through the meshes of the net spread for us." He asked me what I had in mind and I told him.

"And you have pledged yourself to all this?" he cried, with heightened colour. Was he about to denounce my officiousness too? "This is a serious matter, Waterloo," he said, an underglow of excitement running through his words. "I really think, you know, you might have advised me before putting your name to a document so compromising. It must be obvious to you that I must guarantee this precious third mortgage you have so glibly

agreed to. Tell me, what shall I get for my two hundred and fifty pounds a year?" Assailed afresh in this fashion I began to feel pretty much like the man whom in Sussex we call "a fluttergrub," that is, a meddlesome muddler, a mudpie artist, one who can but be trusted to throw any subject he attacks into dire confusion. The only answer I could make to Mr. Wheatley was to say that the obligation I had entered into concerned myself alone and would be my personal liability. He shook his head.

"It cannot be, of course," was his reply. The drift of our talk had been so disquieting that I turned the subject by asking if Dick was back from Canterbury yet.

"There it is again," said Mr. Wheatley, somewhat testily. "Dick goes off for forty-eight hours. He's been away a week. No word has come from him. His mother is on the grizzle about him—as if a boy of his years was a baby in leading-strings."

I let Mr. Wheatley talk on, as I knew it would not be long before he told me of his own accord about Margarita. Sure enough it came out that Susan Storey was to go straight to Canterbury, *viâ* Dover, and that Margarita was even then taking the new way home.

The quickness of this route was, Mr. Wheatley said, truly amazing. Two days' coach journey brought you from Paris to Dieppe, twelve hours in the hoy or steam packet from Dieppe to that marvellous chain pier built by Captain Sam Browne out into the sea at Brighton, and thence it was only a few hours' run by coach to the point where, a mile or two from Nutfield, the Godstone road branches off. Before the coming of the pier, he added, the folk who travelled by this route had an exciting time when landing. As the hoy hove to off Brighton she fired her cannon and half the villagers turned out to watch travellers scramble ashore. The dainty London birds of passage looked upon this operation as a spectacle. Decked out in all the colours of the rainbow, as gay in plumage as tropical paroquets, they treated the landing of the spray-drenched travellers as a capital jest. They flocked down to the spot where Ship Street joins the seaside road. It was there, near a big groyne, that the home-coming hoy ran up to the top of the beach. The poor people aboard of her were often horribly bad from sea-sickness, green or yellow or mud-coloured. If a wave caught them

before they could manage to struggle beyond the run of the water, the folk of the polite world, watching their antics, would burst into a roar of laughter and bandy jokes of a type naturally resented by the human flotsam they were aimed at. Many a duel has been fought by reason of some unmannerly scrap of argot hurled, perhaps, at a delicate lady belonging to an English family returning from France, a lady prostrated by *mal de mer* and drenched to the skin with sea foam, in her efforts to reach *terra firma*. No wonder the French *émigré* of the gentler sort regarded our well-dressed snobs as a parcel of barbarians. Mr. Wheatley then proceeded to launch out at large on the great changes in travel of the last few years and predicted astounding developments, destined to eclipse our old notions, in the coming time.

The stream of English folk who then made the grand tour in shoals and flocked back to their native island by Dieppe had now, he said, an easier time of it. Sometimes steam packets ran, sometimes hoys. They both landed their passengers at the head of the Chain Pier. The London visitors were wont to turn everything in Heaven and earth into a jest. The longshoremen, whose living had depended on hauling the hoys into Poole Valley and getting the cargo out of them, called the steam packets "Bass' soap-boxes." The idea was then being mooted of shifting the service to our old home, Newhaven. I may, perhaps, be pardoned for introducing here a scrap of personal reminiscence.

It was not many years later that the change Mr. Wheatley foreshadowed was actually made and poor Captain Wingfield, the last captain of a Brighton steam packet, a soured old man, whose nickname was "Hard Times," held a stall in the market to the end of his days. He was cast adrift and, like the poet's Ancient Mariner, with his long grey beard and glittering eye, stopped every frequenter of the market who would listen to him, to narrate the wrongs of those who had been ousted from their occupation by reckless change. He would expatiate at length on the grand time, then dead and gone, when his packet, having beaten across Channel and picked up the village of Brighton, he would rouse the echoes with his signal gun; how he stood like a king on the bridge and brought his boat alongside the pier so neatly that she would hardly have crushed an

eggshell when making fast ; of the thanks and handshakings of the passengers hurrying ashore—contrasting all this splendour and glamour with a dreary market stall and having to make a living by haggling over the price of cabbages and leeks. It was no better, he used to say, than old women going goodenin' on Thomas's Day, beggin' for Christmas doles. Afore that he was Dutch cousin with 'alf the nobility and gentry o' England, as they come back from seein' the fightin' ground o' Waterloo. Later on the old man's widow, on whom his mantle descended, would tell her customers that he "was took with the infermation and 'adn't no 'eart to fight agin 'un. 'E wern't frouden like, but 'e just give up and that was the end on 'un."

However, as Mr. Wheatley and I sat and talked in the sanctum at Nutfield Grange, all these changes were hidden in the cloudland of the future. A voice chanted without ceasing, "Margarita is coming home." The stunning fact that filled me with rapture and elation and that burnt up all the sorry fancies of the last twenty-four hours, as if they had been weeds in a stubblefield, was this—the original of the portrait hanging on the wall, whose smile seemed to light up life's vista, would be amongst us perhaps to-morrow, almost certainly by the day after. I could not conceal the content the knowledge of this spread about my path. It strewed the way for me with flowers of fancy. I heard hosannas within ; visions and dreams would surely henceforth be my daily bread. If this fountain of joy leapt up at the bare news that Margarita was on her way home, how would my being be shaken when she stepped in bodily shape into her kingdom, no longer mere *eidolon*, but actual flesh and blood ? I declare magic is not dead, in spite of the apostles of the commonplace, who are for ever belittling our human heritage, seeking to sickly o'er its romance. The silver lining of our clouds, those mar-hopes would have it, is but lead, a weight to sink all fairy rainbow tints in waters of oblivion.

Now as I sat and latent music thus sounded in my ears, the present moment with its problems and dreads floated away. Mr. Wheatley was still talking earnestly, but he conveyed nothing to my brain. I was as one in a trance, until he cried : "Why, Waterloo, I declare you are half-asleep." Then I shook myself out of my dream-world and apologized for seeming obtuseness, giving as an

excuse the fact that I had been travelling almost incessantly for days on end.

Four days hence Christmas would be upon us. In spite of recent jarring notes, I must be back at Fullerton to help keep the great festival in our Sussex fashion. I steered my way to Merstham through the frosty night, the stars glittering like a maze of fireflies. To-morrow would be Tuesday, next day I must turn my horse's head south, so that on Friday I could play my part as squire, casting aside gloom and dolour, making the day one of mirth and rejoicing. Every English landowner, as I knew full well, has his task assigned him. My duty was to serve rather than passively to enjoy.

Anon I lay awake in my quarters at the "Joliffe Arms." In the stilly night came visions and Margarita was their text and parable. I bethought me of those strange processions of animals that were wont to perambulate the petty sentry box of a room wherein I slept long, long ago. Such dreams for sure must have played their rôle in a previous existence,

"When that I was and a little tiny boy,
With heigh-ho! the wind and the rain."

Now, even as those memories fluttered like night moths about the casement of the soul, I found myself standing on the pier at Newhaven. The hush! hush! of the waters lapping on the strand and the pageant of a winter's night swept upon me with absolute conviction. An unknown constellation hung in the heavens. As I stood entranced, gazing, a bright particular star waxed in splendour, for it was, I realized, travelling earthward. The orb gleamed, looming in intensity, until it hung above my head in blinding glory. Then forth from it stepped—so it seemed to me—the inhabitant of an unperturbed planet, a world wherein the discords of earth are resolved. This visitant flashed exultant at my side on the pier head. It was Margarita's very self. I had learnt by heart the trick and magic of her portrait. For one brief moment of ecstatic triumph we faced each other. Though the pall of night lay heavy about us her image was as plain to me as if the midday sun shone in his glory. A second later I was wide awake. The vision had vanished. 'Twas of the stuff that dreams are made on, yet did it bring a sense of

comfort and assurance such that I awoke in the grey dawn with an abounding self-content within.

The morning was absorbed in survey work. Early in the afternoon the London coach rattled through the village, and, as soon after it had passed as I could decently screw my courage to the sticking place, I tramped through the lanes to the Grange. When I was ushered into the hall my heart sank a little. For the first time I felt almost like an intruder. There was a subdued sense of *abandon* in the air. The housemaid who opened the door beamed upon me. I heard the notes of a musical box tinkling in the drawing-room and the sound of unrestrained voices. Some domestic festival was toward, that was obvious. All this was so confusing in that usually cloistral abode, that I felt like beating a retreat. I told the housemaid I thought I would retire and come back a little later. At that moment Dick burst forth boisterously, to lug me into the presence. I had never seen him so elated.

"What, Waterloo?" he cried. "You are in the nick of time, *mon brave*. We have a visitor from overseas. You must be introduced without more ado."

Will it be believed that at this moment, when the realization of many a week-long hope was about to be attained, I hung back, shy as a schoolboy thrust among new school mates? Nevertheless, Dick seized my arm and led me forcibly into the room. There stood Margarita. All my fancied shadows paled before their original. Smiling, self-possessed, she beamed on all alike. Dick introduced me as a chum and I shook hands with the goddess, even as if she had been but mortal.

"Margarita was telling us about her journey home," quoth Mrs. Wheatley.

"Oh! it was just the usual *promenade*," replied Margarita. Her voice, I noted, sounded like a song at sunrise. "It was all *comme il faut*. In the middle of the Channel some of the passengers knew for a fact that a specimen of *Serpentinus maritimus* was sporting not far away. When we reached the spot where the beast was supposed to be wallowing leviathan turned out to be about half an acre of floating seaweed. On the Chain Pier was the Duke himself. In spite of their *mal de mer* our invalids gave him a rousing cheer."

"My dear child," said Mrs. Wheatley, "pray remember

that you are in England now and talk in your native tongue."

"Nay, nay, Mother," interjected Mr. Wheatley merrily, "what's the good of an expensive overseas training to pick up the language of our foes, if the girl sheds it in the twinkling of an eye, like a snake casting its skin?"

"Mr. Waterloo, is that your real name?" asked Margarita, turning to me.

"No," I answered her, "plain Waterloo, if you please."

"Why, Marg," cried Dick, "surely I've told you in my letters of Waterloo Joyce?"

"Your letters?" exclaimed Margarita, with a ripple of laughter, merry as the gurgle of a mountain stream. "'Dear M., There's no news to tell you, except that Troubadour came in second at the Godstone steeplechase and I've a new chum, who sings a lot better than Your Dickybird.' That's the sort of letter I get from you. Don't try to persuade us that you've told me all about—let's say Monsieur Vaterloo." She turned and made me a little mock curtsy, in a manner so captivating that it fairly intoxicated me.

"You must tell us about what happened to you after we parted at Canterbury," thrust in Dick.

"It's a long story," I said. Having to explain before this radiant being matters, which now seemed almost trivial, was embarrassing. I felt shy and abashed. "What have you yourself done since that morning, which now seems ages ago?" I asked.

"Oh, a lot," replied Dick briefly. I thought he almost smacked his lips over some reminiscence. "Quite a lot. When I left them yesterday morning Susan had just got back."

"Poor souls," I murmured, "I hope they are beginning to recover from that terrible time."

"Ye-es," Dick said, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets. "Charlotte at any rate is more herself. Mrs. Storey has been wonderfully cool through it all, you know. Susan has come back to a blank life. She and her father were all in all to one another. I suppose time will heal the wound."

"The story is too sad and strange," quoth Margarita. "Susan and I have been *intimes*. She has rattled on a thousand times of the good time coming when she and her

father would—as she used to say—‘invade Sussex and conquer Kent.’ Now some *brigand* has laid her father low. If not for plunder, what could have been the object of a deed so horrible? ”

The conversation ran on in little sharps and flats, sometimes starting a ripple of laughter, anon sinking to the borderland of sadness. The Wheatleys had old stores of cherished memories to revive. The Storey tragedy was the skeleton at the feast. Phœbus, I heard, was great at prophecy, but so far the mystery enshrouding the story was unrelieved. There seemed no excuse for me to linger, but Margarita’s reminiscences of her Paris days and the liquid beauty of their narration rendered it difficult to tear oneself away. Whenever I hinted at retreat Dick laughed the suggestion to scorn and so the golden afternoon began to wane. Light was dying in the sky.

At last Mr. Wheatley insisted on Margarita giving us, as he said, “a taste of her musical quality.” Nothing loath, she sat down at the piano. The Hebrew prophets thundered anathemas at the stubborn folly of the men and women of their day. Could they have discoursed to them through the divine artistry of music, would the besotted heathenry, which regarded itself as the salt of the earth by reason of creed and dogma duly recited, have had ears to hear the message of the divine? Probably not—tom-toms and the clatter of cymbals would have earned the meed of their applause, let spirit plead with spirit never so wisely. Margarita gave us Mozart and Beethoven, Chopin and Gluck. The dear old formalists showered upon us of their magic. “All the daughters of music shall be brought low.” That, then, is the senile goal to which we mortals tend. No wonder, to the seer who spoke the words, “Vanity of vanities, all was vanity.” But what is the message of the immortals who live for evermore? Beethoven, half-mad, stone-deaf, has a different tale to tell; so, too, has Chopin, pacing the road that leads to the dusty death of faithless love; so also Mozart and Gluck, who wander hand in hand about the child garden of the world, babbling its divine melody. The wind bloweth where it listeth. These folk were born of the spirit.

Margarita had a wistful contralto voice, nobly trained. How the memory of our “White Hart” efforts paled before

the sheer delight of listening to her singing in the waning light.

Margarita wheeled on the piano stool.

"I have at least a silent audience," quoth she. "What can be more desolating than, in the midst of, say, a romance of Chopin's, to hear *sotto voce* a tirade on the price of *salades*, in terms of *centimes*?"

Clement Marot's epigram—though written in 1544—if I had only then known it, would have expressed that which I lacked the gift of tongues to tell.

"How fair those locks which now the light wind stirs!
What eyes she has, and what a perfect arm!
And yet methinks that little laugh of hers—
That little laugh—is still her crowning charm."

Nothing would serve but that Dick and I should pipe our songlets too. Dick's was a good honest boyish bellow. For my part, the sorrows and woes of the world's toilers ever rose up before me as I sang. I had seen their patient endurance at first hand. It was with me no sentimental levelling down to an alien environment. I had been brought up to watch the struggle for daily bread—for dear life—a struggle in which the weak stumble and fall, the strong march over the fallen, blatantly self-assertive. I had seen souls of fire who tend the sick and wounded on the battlefield of humdrum every day. I had heard men talk glibly of progress. Whither? The world, say they, is growing better with the march of time and education. The next war would, I knew, shatter their theories in the dust. As soon as war memory grew faint, similar glib talkers would begin afresh laying in words the foundations of a new Tower of Babel, destined, according to their theories, to carry men and women nearer to the heavens than did the last tower.

At length we trooped in to supper. Christmas greetings spoken and pledged in a bumper of port, I wandered away into the pitch black night, my brain and senses in a whirl of wonder and yet with a novel sense of self-abasement. How dare I aspire to win Margarita's affections? She was far above me in every attribute. There was no trace of personal ambition in my thoughts. All that had shrunk away like a guilty thing surprised before the vision revealed by the music I had heard. No, the fulfilment

of the highest within me was striving to become articulate—the lower perchance striving to persuade me that this phantom of delight was, after all, mortal and therefore to be wooed and won, by me too, the least worthy of such ennoblement.

Next day I was up betimes and thus it befell that I cantered up the glade of Fullerton Park by midday. The home atmosphere had veered from north to south. The disagreeables of a few hours ago had vanished like a witch on her broomstick. Our mother was the mother of ten years ago. Trafalgar was expected hourly from Stanmer Park, Rodney had arrived from Lewes overnight. He had grown a fine stalwart fellow, with down on his upper lip, which he nurtured with all the arts of the apothecary's shop. Victory plagued him mightily on the moustache he hoped to get. He was certainly uncommonly proud of it.

The Christmas bells broke out fitfully. Great doings were in store. The weather was keen and rare, with a drifting flake of snow now and then. At Fullerton we prided ourselves on our breed of Southdowns. Our head shepherd, Tuppen by name, was a shaggy old fellow, who had roamed the hills for over fifty years. He kept his sheep lore to himself, save only that he imparted it to his son and heir, a stripling of forty—"jest a gurt boy, zur," as he was wont to describe him. Get him into a tuneful mood and Tuppen would chant you old ditties by the score. There was one we were certain sure to hear on Christmas night. It declares "A zhepherd lives as 'appy as ever a prince or king." 'Tis a fine ballad, racy of the soil. The opening lines I remembered from having listened to them often at Newhaven. They run thus :

"Zeng, bo-oys, zeng, a zhepherd's as 'appy as a lard,
An' a zhip's the vinest crittur ol' England can afo-ord,
An' ef you lis'ens fer awhile, the trewth I zoon 'ull tell 'e,
'Tis clothin' to the ba-ack, me bo-oys, and linin' to the belly."

On Christmas morning in our church Mr. Pooss gave us an appropriate and learned discourse. We had wise saws and modern instances and scraps of the Fathers. The villagers listened stolidly, as a matter of duty. It was all in the order of things, as handed down from one's fo'fathers. The hall was cleared early in the afternoon and our local mummers trooped in, giving us floating relics of veritable miracle plays from the childhood of the world.

In uncouth fashion we had "Jarge and the Woundly Worm," "Jack a-climmin'," processions and roundabout melodies, garnished with interminable rigmaroles recited in broad Sussex. The chanties resembled nothing so much as a dog running after its tail, to the accompaniment of a jingle of rhyme worthy of a village tombstone. Morris dancing—the Tomfool clouting everyone within reach with his bladder—and mock sword play, which recalled the hobby horse combats of medieval jesters, led us to the "veast." This was the climax of the day's doings. The quantities of roast and boiled and the number of gallons of home-brewed which disappeared at the "veast" were truly amazing. The entire company rose at last and recited that age-long song: "'Ere's a 'ealth unto our measter." Its performance was probably paralleled by the roustering merriment in the Saxon camp which preceded the Battle of Hastings. I had to respond, wishing all tenants and their families unto the third and fourth generation every possible happiness and Christmas bounty. The audience by this time was beginning to mellow with the meat and drink and it awarded me a rousing cheer. Then to the setting of village sackbut and psaltery we all joined in country dances—even Mr. Hardy, our mother and Mr. Pooss taking their part in the sturdy merriment. While the dancing was in progress the proceedings slowly flickered out in incoherence. As the men folk "done their bit" and passed into the stage of mumness and sheer oblivion, their womenkind spirited them away home. Thus by slow degrees the silence of exhaustion settled on the Hall.

No doubt the modern moralizer would shake his head over so lame and impotent a conclusion to a great festival. Let him, however, prove his superior grit by something beyond words. These hardy sons and daughters of toil were carrying on the tradition of their forbears. They constitute that solid backing of Anglo-Saxondom, the endurance of which never accepts defeat, supplying those qualities of self-governance by reason of which our race has achieved freedom for thought and act. As I called to mind the days of unrequited struggle endured by our Sussex hinds, who was I to pose as a mentor of superior merit? These poor folk won through their annual holiday tipsily enough. They showed a stolid front to adversity and hardship for the rest of the year. God bless them one and all.

CHAPTER XV

THE presence of Mr. Hardy in our councils allayed all jarring notes. He brought home to Uncle John the fact that, though I had, perhaps, been boyishly foolish, I had at least earned the merit of action. Had he not happened to have loose cash available just then, Mr. Hardy said that my solution of the estate difficulty would at least have pulled us out of the mire. As things had turned out no harm had been done to anyone. All I had settled with the gamesters in London amounted to this—if the Major and the rest of the pack of rogues had ostensibly come to our rescue when the mortgages were due for redemption, certain exacting new covenants would have had to be faced. That eventuality not having arisen, the entire house of cards had fallen.

Our mother was very sweet over Mr. Hardy's version of the situation. She even went so far as to express her regret that I had been unjustly hustled when visiting Fullerton a few days before. Uncle John frankly begged my pardon and made the *amende* so completely that the vision of contentment, which a few sharp words had scared away, floated back again. How thankful I was. I could have faced almost anything save domestic discord, which is the meanest form of civil war.

Victory justified her name, for she gained the mastery over us all by her *bonhomie* and saucy sallies. Rodney and Trafalgar had grown well-nigh to men. Our mother had seemingly travelled back into the girl—so full of youth and spirit was she. Her eyes sparkled with merriment. She veritably caracolled with delight, abounding in that charity of soul which is the savour of the divine within.

The atmosphere was congenial to confidences, and, ere Boxing Day was past, I had described to the ear of our mother alone and with reticences and fathomless gaps of silence the miraculous story of the perfections of Margarita. Our mother listened with the sympathy of motherhood.

I must prove by deeds my worthiness to win the pearl of pearls, she said. She bade me stick to the last of the business I had chosen for myself. "Wait and serve" was the summary of her creed. Now as I pondered over her dicta, they failed to satisfy. "Serve"—yes, I said to myself; "wait"—no. I could not keep my confidence long from Mr. Hardy, but he put matters quite differently to our mother.

"You know the saying," quoth he. "The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. So is it with the kingdom of love, my boy. A word in your ear. The woman loves to meet her master. Her true vocation is obedience. She veritably respects the strong hand and the will behind it. No woman worth her salt really regards the male who is content to play second to her first fiddle. Our Sussex phrase 'master' is the quintessence of accumulated experience."

This was a novel theory. It appeared to me to smack of the savage, but then, I pondered, perhaps after all the primitive man had human nature on his side. To apply the prescription to such a being as Margarita seemed mere sacrilege.

However, my confidences with our mother and Mr. Hardy were asides. I had to play the rôle, strange to me, of host. Rodney and Trafalgar's tongues were as broadly Sussex as the backs of the Downs—so said Mr. Hardy. All four of us—for Victory was keen as were we boys in the life of the open air—scouted the hills and bottoms from morning to night, sometimes on horseback, more often afoot. We came home ravenous as doubtless were the wandering neolithic folk whose barrows dotted the hill-tops. Sometimes our mother bore us company. We dropped back at a stride to those days of long ago when we were not the pampered votaries of fortune, but lived, as do half the rest of the world, from hand to mouth. In country sports and pastimes a week soon sped away. The gibes and catchwords of unforgettable prime days buzzed about us once again. To hear our talk one would have deemed those old days the most truly happy we had ever known. Rodney and Trafalgar had experienced naught save puny shocks of the growing pains of love. Their withers were unwrung. Victory was heart-whole. The pageantry of the great passion was to her but a jest

the cause of raillery. Our mother kept all these memories hidden in her heart. She winged them with hope.

Thus, when our holiday was done, we three boys sped each his several way, Trafalgar to his farm, Rodney to his simples, I back to the making of railways, back too to silent service, to glamour and magic. It was borne in upon me, when wistfully visiting the Grange, that my world and Margarita's were wide apart, perhaps drifting wider. When I entered her presence, my self-assurance fled. I was wont to stumble and stutter. At other times I moped in silence. The cheery camaraderie between Dick and myself, the noisy good-fellowship at the "Joliffe Arms" after the day's work was done, were pretty well forgot. Our Saturday sing-songs at the "White Hart" had changed their atmosphere for me. I no longer roared blithe ditties, but chanted the most blood-curdling, die-away sentimentalities in my repertory. I began to grow lean and melancholy.

"Why, Waterloo," cried Dick one day, "you have donned the inky cloak with a vengeance. Whoever she is, she is not worthy of this transformation scene."

I longed to tell him the great secret, but held back in dread lest, should he fail to respond, my quest might suffer wreck before ever I had ventured forth into its mysterious ocean. As I live afresh in memory those unreal days and nights, what a queer topsy-turvydom they recall. Life was a game of hide and go seek, of pitch and toss. The cruel job was there was no receptive ear into which I dare pour my confidences. I had to hug the phantoms of my secret soul and possess that soul in such patience as I could summon to my aid. My visits to the Grange fell off in frequency. Dick was forever urging me to come. I would gladly have taken up my abode there for good and all, and the task of refraining myself from giving expression to the endearments which lay beneath the conventional surface of things was a task well-nigh beyond me. The pity of it was that Margarita was so evidently unconscious of the vain desires which struggled within me for utterance. She looked upon me as Dick's friend, passable enough doubtless as a casual companion. There was not a trace of the unplumbed mystery of mysteries on the horizon of her mind.

We heard from her a thousand quaint stories of French

economy, of the irrepressible *diablerie* of Parisian sentiment. Society across the water was in a flux, Margarita told us. It was like the seashore after a typhoon or a submarine earthquake. Revolution had shaken the bases of human existence. What men call civilization might at any moment revert to a Bedlam struggle of wild beast passion. Savagery, curbed under the grip of Law, would thus spring afresh at the throat of civic order. No man could foresee from day to day whether France—and perhaps with her all Europe—would not go down in an orgy of bestial chaos. The men who proclaimed most loudly the pureness of their intention and the cleanness of their hands were the supreme mischief-workers, for they gathered about them the froth and scum and filth of mankind and knew how to work such fantastic extremists into frenzy. They sowed the wind, they would reap the whirlwind. Their plea that, to bring salvation to a state, conventional standards must first be shattered, and cosmos then built anew upon a foundation of chaos, was to the more sober a tale told by an idiot. All forms and modes without unit reform from within were surely mere dust and ashes. The fires of Hell once lit, the world would inevitably be drowned in blood for half a century. We in England had heard latent echoes of the creed of the foreign anarchist, nay more, there was a moment when the sorry plight of our labouring folk almost persuaded me that the divine law was to do evil that good might come. I began to recant my errors. Margarita was a prophetess new-inspired.

Thus the weeks slipped silently away. We were on the borderland of romance. I was afraid to disturb its mirage by revealing the passion struggling within me. The entire machinery of life hung balanced on a knife edge. A keener perception of its finer issues hovered like a cloud in the offing. As an antidote I plunged more and more deeply into the work nearest to my hand. The mortgage trouble had died away and our affairs at Fullerton and the Grange now ran on a level keel. My wild raid to London, Major Markland, his gang and their quack panacea had to all appearance left not a wrack behind. All had sunk into oblivion. I encountered Phœbus now and then on his rounds and asked from time to time if he had tracked the murderers yet.

"The Lore that 'as let 'em bide, sir, 'ull know 'ow to 'it when 'itting time comes," he replied oracularly. I heard vague rumours of the Storeys. There was some talk of Susan coming to the Grange. Meantime Dick was bent on seeing the wonders of Brighton and, yielding to my urgent suggestion, at the same time agreed to pay his duty at Fullerton Park. He went, he saw, and he came back after a fortnight's absence sober as a judge. The mirth had gone out of him. We heard from him about the great folk who flocked to the Chain Pier, of the roystering racket of the young bloods from town, who went to Brighton as to a Mecca. The legends of the late king when Regent hung like a miasma about the place. The west winds that raced across sea and downs could not expel its deadly odour. The pagodas and minarets he had reared, the gardens of the Steyne, the big squares of houses then being built on the East Cliff, the new roads and sea promenade which Dick described to us were turning the village, as we boys first knew it, into a half-fledged town. I could not make out Dick in his new-found sobriety one little bit, but then I was sinking more deeply absorbed than ever in my all-consuming inner pageantry.

As the days lengthened the cold strengthened. The roads rang frost bound. Youth is selfish. A hard winter truly spelt misery to the cottage folk, but we youngsters were all agog at the prospect of skating on the lakes of Gatton Park. These were the only sheets of water handy to us. Dick, Margarita and I were to make up a trio for the morrow morning and, when the dawn rose grey and misty, my blood danced at the thought of spinning hand in hand with Margarita, or it may be of showing off my paces before her. In hard winters we boys never neglected a chance of tracking our way on home-made skates over the dykes and backwaters of the Newhaven marshes. We had the country-bred lads' ardour for the sport, and thus acquired a mastery of it surpassing that of the amateur townsman. Dick admitted himself a novice. At Margarita's Paris seminary the scholars had been wont demurely to disport themselves, under supervision, whenever a little private lake adjoining the school was *gelé à pierre fendée*.

Arrived at the Gatton lakes, I had the exquisite pleasure of helping to fix Margarita's skates. The act promoted

me to the seventh heaven. Two minutes thereafter sufficed to demonstrate the aptness of her French pupilage, for she sailed away with the grace of a seabird on the wing. Now the lakes in Gatton Park are the home of jack, who batten on shoals of coarse fish and eels, lurking in their reedy shallows. The lakes are fed by springs oozing perennially from the greensand. In the summer-time the sward surrounding them and the cool glades of beech and chestnut round about might be the home of dryads, what time the dawn dapples the gateway of the light. The whitewalled house gleaming above and the vistas of tilthage spread below far as the eye can reach then make up a picture of quiet English content. On this our joyous morning the rooks cawed dolorously, for times were hard with them, food was scarce. A heron rose stiffly, disturbed at his matins by us three intruders.

"Tra-la-la," warbled Margarita, lilting the refrain of a little French *chanson*. It was a favourite of hers, a very lark's song of delight, and she soared up to its last phrase, a delightful scrap of tremolo. The low sun gave us a taste of his quality. Our hearts were attuned to his gladsome message—"I bring you mortals a white day fresh from the bosom of the Eternal."

An hour sped away in the joy of motion, the delight of showing off my metal, the keen air and the rapture of Margarita's presence. I had cut figures, spun along under various disguises, reviving old tricks and devising new. Dick was slogging along soberly as a tyro. Margarita was careering fearlessly a hundred yards away, when a piercing scream roused me to a sense of present danger. Margarita had ventured too near that portion of the lake kept unfrozen by springs. She had shot into the icy water. For a second I was stunned at the appalling catastrophe, but the next moment called up my wits. Dick and I plunged madly to Margarita's aid. Alas! any attempt to reach her directly would but break away more ice and render the chances of her rescue hopeless. We were without resources to give aid. The terror of our cruel helplessness was terrible. Were we to stand and watch the dearest life on earth slowly sucked down and extinguished by the piercing cold? Her torture was so dreadful that Margarita could not stifle a cry of forlorn despair. "I am sinking," she moaned, clutching wildly

at the encircling curb of ice, which broke. She was perishing in a deadly grip. I tore frantically to the hither side of the lake. Between Margarita and the sward was a narrow belt of rotten ice with reeds and rushes enmeshed. Her cries were over now, the end at hand. Her colour had fled, and as I scrambled along the edge of the lake she sank. There was the limb of a tree entangled in the frozen jungle, fringing the mere. I drew myself on to this branch and swarmed along it, careless whether I shared Margarita's fate, if only I might reach the spot where she had been struggling a moment before. I was half immersed, the bough swayed and tottered under my weight. Now I had reached the outer edge of the ice, at the instant when Margarita's body, still, her face ashen grey, rose silently to the surface. I seized her wildly and struggled fiercely to lift her out of the water. It was surely futile, for she sank back more than once, emitting a horrible gurgling sound each time. Then by a last supreme grapple, which almost rent me in twain and brought frightful pains about the heart, I succeeded in poising her on the timber. I could never have brought her to shore had not Dick clambered out and somehow—God alone knows how—helped us both.

Margarita lay at last on the turf, a dead thing. Now at Newhaven we had often rehearsed the measures to restore those plucked from drowning. I was myself at my last gasp, ready to swoon with a deadly pang at the heart. Nevertheless emergency recalled the latent energies of will. I forced myself to go through the motions of the limbs as I had been taught. Dick and I were fighting with death, as it were in bodily shape. Meantime, our shouts and screams had brought a park hand to the spot. A hurdle was snatched up from a sheep cote hard by. We laid the rigid body of Margarita upon it and made frantic haste to carry it to the house. There it was swathed in blankets. A messenger sped on horseback to fetch Thereat, and Dick sat by in dread and fear to watch what should befall. I insisted on continuing the operations I had learnt to be the means of restoring the action of the lungs. A flicker of life kindled our hopes, and as Thereat entered the room Margarita gave vent to a moan terrible in its inarticulate misery. Thereat was instantly alert in every nerve.

"She is alive," he cried, "but may slip through our fingers yet."

By the grace of God that awful stroke was averted. A few hours later, wrapped in blankets, pallid as a corpse, but able wanly to smile upon us, Margarita was conveyed to the Grange. The death grapple was yet to be long, for the mortal powers were shaken deep almost as their source. By desperately slow degrees, vitality crept back and a week later, a wreck of her once buoyant self, the Margarita of old days began to swim again into our ken.

On the first afternoon when she was permitted to sit up, I was privileged to see her and hold her hand in mine. A glimmer of humour flitted about her wonder-haunted eyes.

Quoth she, "Cross-patch, draw the latch, sit by the fire and spin."

The word had been passed that nothing was to be said calculated to recall the memory of the fearful peril escaped. I was nervous of venturing on dangerous ground. Margarita's moods changed like an April sky.

"I wonder if I shall ever be able to touch the poor old piano again," she sobbed. "Oh! Waterloo, I owe my life to you. That dreadful time, can I ever lift it from my thoughts?"

What could I do? I would have given just then all I possessed for the faculty of using the power to charm away the ills of mortality upon the wings of harmony, to bear them to forgetfulness, to guide the troubled soul into the way of peace. In the nick of time Mr. Wheatley came in upon my dilemma.

He was changed indeed from the Mr. Wheatley of old days, peevish and self-centred. The lifting of his money anxiety had mellowed him. He had a news sheet in his hand.

"Do you know Zachariah Outlaw, Waterloo?" he inquired.

"Zach Outlaw?" I said. "As well as I know my own pocket."

"Listen to this," he went on, reading from the paper. "Fullerton Park. The bailiff on this estate a day or two since had occasion to look up a labourer named Zachariah Outlaw, who had been an absentee from work for two days. He found Zach and three companions busy finishing the contents of a thirty-gallon cask of beer.

'Why haven't you been to your work?' asked the bailiff. 'Well ye see, zur, it's loike this,' says Outlaw. 'This 'ere bar'l be a borrod 'un and the man as it b'longs to 'e wants 'un ba-ack, so me and my mates 'as been busy emptyin' on 'un, so as the owner shouldn't be disapwointed loike. The job is 'most done now, zur.' "

It was only a silly little yarn, but it set us all laughing and, as Margarita laughed, the colour crept up into her cheeks. How I wished I had the gift of compelling sorry thoughts to fold their tents like the Arabs and silently steal away by trifles such as this.

"Now then, young man," sang out Mr. Wheatley, "time is up. Margarita will be singing the old songs in a week's time. We won't let her off one of them. 'Farewell,' quoth she, 'and come again to-morrow,'" he quoted gaily. So I took the hint and departed mightily uplifted, for I thought I saw the sun of love shining through the clouds of dire calamity.

Never a day passed now but I trudged up the hill to the Grange. The current of Margarita's recovery ran up and down like the roads over some of our Surrey hills. To-day she was reported "almost herself"—to-morrow the old haunting dread had crept back to palsy her will. Time is forever serving apprenticeship to his several tasks. When the vital powers are at their springtide he comes as the great physician. When the inevitable beckons us on toward the winter of our discontent he approaches as the doomsman.

It was determined at last that Margarita should spend a month at the mushroom town of Brighton. A fight against south-west gales newly-launched from the bosom of the Atlantic, or a gallop across the Downs in the teeth of a north-easter, is a tonic fit to scatter Hamlet's catalogue of the ills that flesh is heir to. There was a quaint thatch-roof cottage not far away from the inn where, according to tradition, Charles II. lay concealed before his escape from Shoreham. Mrs. Nye, a nurse in the Wheatley family when Margarita was a tiny child, was married to a Brighton fisherman and lived in this cottage. The quarters had the advantage of being rough and homely. To dispel sorry fancies it was essential to Margarita that there should be a new outlook, that the ordered chain of old association should be severed. Nye made a hard

fight of it on sea and land for a living, just as we had done in the old Newhaven days. His cottage was as neat and cosy as quarters on a yacht. You went in at a low-browed door ; the main living room, given over to the Wheatleys' use, was a step down. The stairway up to the bedrooms was little more than a ladder. The bedrooms themselves were mere ship's cabins, garnished with seamen's trophies. They were clean and spruce as a new pin. In rear of the house was a patch of garden. Fruit trees stood no chance there, as the scourge of the salt-laden gales cut them to ribbons. Behind a cunning fence of tamarisk Nye managed to coax the soil into something like productiveness. Celery was his last word in horticulture. The ground was now trim but barren.

I have said little of Mrs. Wheatley's part in our slowly-evolving domestic drama. A transformation was apparently overtaking her. Her distress at Margarita's state was acute, but the aggressive dogmatism of old seemed to be wilting away—under an eclipse. In its place she had developed a brooding melancholy which was helping to depress Margarita. When it was finally decided that Mrs. Wheatley should remain at home, the Brighton contingent being only Mr. Wheatley and Margarita, there was, I fancy, an undercurrent of alacrity in Thereat's assent. His dictum was that the old nurse would make a good foster parent, he ventured to say.

Preparations were now forward for the construction of the new railway, when sanctioned, in bits here and there. The consequence was that Quodling, Tosh and I were no longer limpets anchored to one spot, but in the saddle a good part of our time. The enterprise was humming into stir and movement. Startling events were on the wing.

The youngster who feels himself making history in ever so small a fashion surely adds a cubit to his stature. There is no sauce so potent in the savouring of life as a finger in the pie of a national undertaking. Whatever the years may bring or take away, the silent witness of a great project, successfully consummated, is a possession which envious tongues can never steal from him who has been even a subaltern on the job.

Now and again in the next few weeks, Dick and I were destined to board the Brighton coach at the "Joliffe Arms" and to swing off southward ho! Never were we

so cheery, our spirits so brimming over as when those visits were in the air. Young Joe Chatfield—a stripling of fifty-five or so—the driver of the Meteor Coach, recognized me. He knew the part I was taking in bringing on the deluge that was to drive the stage coach off the road—not only so, but destined too to change the fibre of our English breed of folk. Half the rattling cheer, the rough joviality, the democratic blending brought about by coach travel was to evaporate. The road had helped to mould the English character. Young bloods of coaching days delighted in the wrenching off of knockers, in prize fights, in what may be comprehensively styled rowdiness. To drink was the accomplishment of a gentleman, not to drink the badge of a milksop. Such had been the attributes of the men who won Waterloo. We were to grow softer in our manners, more cosmopolitan in our tastes. Who should say on which side betterment lay? Not Joe Chatfield, certainly. With “the quality” sitting alongside him, the old man smothered his true sentiments and greeted us almost as if he were a cheery champion of coming inevitable change. When his steaming team was pulled up on the sea front amid a knot of loungers, Dick and I were off in a trice to Owner Nye’s cottage, a stone’s cast away.

Looking back on this period of Margarita’s convalescence, it smites my consciousness with a sense of irrevocable pity. The days spent at Brighton were idyll. Margarita was fast regaining her normal vigour. Occasionally our mother and Victory would be of the party and then the cup of bliss would be full to overflowing. I had not long watched Dick and Victory together before I realized how the land lay with Dick. Victory had a touch of the primitive savage in her blood, and her swift transitions of temper puzzled him. Whether she was heart-whole it passed my comprehension to discern. Dick was her slave, elated by a hint of the west wind of her favour, in the depths of woe when her north-east mood awoke. Margarita took Victory’s ups and downs as in the nature of things. She herself revealed no hint of the inner texture of those passing moods which flit across the horizon of a young girl’s fancy, as clouds across an April countryside. Mr. Wheatley was almost gay. The lifting of the load of impending misfortune had transformed him. For two

or three days Mr. Hardy, who appeared to be still hovering about Fullerton, was with us.

On this occasion we made up a merry excursion to Stanmer Park. The crisp glory of a morning of wintry splendour set the blood of every member of our company a-spinning. Take the prime of the four seasons' weather and which holds the gage? Here come the four sisters. Who shall award to one more than another the high palm of beauty?

The drowsy clamour of the rooks in the grey dawn calls up a misty wonder that hovers lovingly around the passes of the Downs. From mead and rippling brook young voices chant. Day's angels are abroad unveiled. A soaring lark climbs the mountee, scattering as he mounts the incense of his praise, the rapture of his song, stranded, warp and woof, of joy and sadness. "'Tis day, 'tis day," is breathed upon the wings of life. Each blade of grass is dew-beaded. From hedge and shaw murmurs a chorus of welcome of up-springing light. Thus is the coming of the Spring Sister. What we mortals call night has been but for a nodding moment. The sun, like an ardent lover, is awake, impatient to run his course. A mantle of mist clings about the slumbering earth. Across the wavering corn a whisper travels—garden, coppice and mere wake from their trance and all the world is gay once more. That is how the Summer Sister comes into her kingdom. The clusters of the hop hang heavy. The bearded barley is laid low. Over all things creeps a sense of satiety. Hedges are swathed in the glory of fair weeds. It is the season of ripeness, of flaming blossom, rank and exultant, of tasks accomplished. Half the birds are mute. A semi-tropic splendour is God's signet ring on the finger of the Autumn Sister. The wailing of the lapwing and the scurrying flight of troops of starlings, the sun sunk low—an errant lover—morning cloaked in a reluctant pall of sleep, the frostbitten earth hard and ringing to the tramp, the sharp tooth of the keen air bidding the pulses keep time with the tune of its martial music—this the season of will bent at high effort brings in its train faith in death for motto, the triumph of struggle, the fierce energy called forth by strife. Thus the Winter Sister stands revealed.

In spite of laggard daylight our hours spent at Stanmer

were the climax of the Brighton *rendezvous*. Mr. Hardy and our mother talked and laughed together like a brace of young lovers, so that I began to see visions and dream dreams. Trafalgar met us and showed us the Home Farm, and the dairy and bragged mightily of the model husbandry in which the young lord was engrossed. Then as we wandered in a bunch about the church and its precincts, the young lord himself ran into us. He greeted me as an old acquaintance and set us all at ease in a trice. Our party struck him as so merry that he said, "I should think you've found a tiddy-'obbin's nest and are laughing at the young 'uns." Nothing would serve but that we should see the Kneller and Reynolds pictures in the house and the Cromwell relics which had come to the Pelhams by marriage. The Protector's copy of the Bible, with notes in his own handwriting, was specially interesting to our mother.

"What a strange medley that man's mind must have been," was her comment.

The young lord insisted on our sitting down to a meal, of which Stanmer cheese and apple dumplings were prominent items. He was proud too of their home-brewed ale. We tramped back across the hills to Brighton as the short day waned—a day of tranquil delight to us all. An intimate note seemed to be springing up in the intercourse between Margarita and myself. Dick was content because Victory was kind that day. Our mother, as I have said, had almost recaptured her winning grace of yore.

The troubles and sorrows of life come not as single spies but in battalions. We were already hugging to ourselves the delusion that, now that Margarita had passed beyond the period of convalescence, no evil could betide us, save only those pinpricks of existence which serve as the text for a jest. Alas! a blow aimed at the heart of our gaiety was about to fall, like the all-dreaded thunderstone.

The coach brought a whole sackful of mails a day to Brighton now and, by going to the shop of Trim the grocer, where these letters were sorted out, we could generally get our own more quickly. Margarita, Dick and I, tramping over the Downs from Rottingdean on one ill-starred Friday, heard the blast of the coach horn. By the time

we reached Trim's shop, any letters for us would, we guessed, be ready to be picked up. True enough. We retrieved one letter for Mr. Wheatley, one for myself from Tosh. I opened mine and silently read its contents with a grin of satisfaction. It was just a spate of banter. At the "Joliffe Arms" they had fathomed the secret of my absences at Brighton. I had to run the gauntlet of time-honoured chaff. Whether Margarita had any inkling of the cause of my chuckles I don't know, but both she and I reached the lodgings with heightened colour and an irrepressible elation of spirits. I handed Mr. Wheatley his missive and went off to consult with Pitchfork, in whose hands lay the survey of the terminus of the coming railway. There was much discussion going on as to whether or no the gradients should be so laid out as to bring the rails down nearly to the level of the sea. - Either Mahomet must go to the mountain or the mountain to Mahomet. There were two schools in the ranks of those engaged on the survey and discussion between them ran hot just then. The subject fascinated me. I never tired of poring over imaginary routes and argufying as to their respective merits and demerits. I foresaw that this little town of Brighton, which a year or two back was a mere fishing hamlet, was destined one day to become a world-city, by reason of the fact that London and its nearest point of coastline were like to be the goal posts of business and pleasure to English folk for many a long year.

We stuck at Nye's Corner, as our quarters were named, to the practice of dining at five o'clock. Although we had argued and re-argued to our heart's content as to the best lay-out of the railway and finally remained each side of his own opinion still, I had perforce to hurry off to be in time for the evening meal. Light had gone out of the sky and there crept over me a dumb sensation of human futility. What little creatures we mortals truly are, our lives a tiny fraction of time, a bubble on the surface of the waters of oblivion, waters ever hurrying on and onward to the salt-estranging sea. Nevertheless, I entered Nye's cottage with a jaunty step, whistling the latest scrap of inanity which had caught the people's ear—"Pop goes the weasel" was the rage just then, if I remember rightly. I took off my winter coat, hung it

in the passage and passed into our tiny sanctum where, around a fire of crackling logs, we were wont to sit of an evening, while one of us read aloud the latest book or play which had taken the town by storm.

The moment I set foot within the room I realized that some calamity had befallen us, a calamity too deep for words. Mr. Wheatley sat in one corner of the room, his head buried in his hands. Margarita sobbed at the fireside and Dick stood, the picture of woe, his hands thrust down into his pockets, gazing fixedly, but with unseeing eyes, at the model of a tea clipper perched on a sideboard. This model was, I may say, the pride of Nye's heart, and Dick and I often studied it together. Not a syllable was uttered as I entered. I perceived at once that the grief, whatever it was, went down to the depths. Dick at length seemed to rally a bit, for he beckoned me out of the room. We put on our hats and wandered away into the night.

"What is it, old man?" I asked. "We can face it together, you and I, Dick." He pressed my hand and walked on a few paces.

"The mater," he said, and stopped.

"Dead?" I cried.

"Worse than that," he said. I paused and waited. "She has died by her own hand." I durst ask no more. "How, when and why we don't know. Waterloo, whatever has happened, you will never allow her memory to be assailed, will you?" I caught his hand in mine.

"Her memory will be as dear to me as my own mother's," I said. "Shall I tell you why, Dick?" I added impulsively. "I have dreaded to do so before for fear of scaring away a beautiful vision, a vision which holds me day and night. It comes into my thoughts waking and fills my dreams sleeping," I added breathlessly. "That vision is Margarita, Dick."

He walked on without a word said for full two minutes. We heard the hoarse rattle of the shingle as the waves swept up the rampart of the shore and dragged the beach down. Till hearing dies—perhaps into the beyond—that everlasting dirge will sound in my ears, emblem of the eternal flux and wane of all things, symbol and voice of the unchanging which from hour to hour casts up, casts

down. Even so are the creeds men fashion surely moulded by the restless fretting of the waves of time.

We walked on side by side—how long I do not know. I verily believe each of us was almost unconscious of the other's presence. Then Dick lifted his head, as if waking from a trance. He put out his hand. I grasped it.

"With me, Waterloo," he said, speaking still as one in a dream, "the vision is Victory."

In the awful stillness of that winter night, the chorus of the waves beating time to the pulses of our hearts, filling the background of imagination with measureless hopes and fears—hopes higher than the heavens above, fears deeper than the Hades beneath the shows of things—we twain plighted our boyish pact.

CHAPTER XVI

PERFORCE we all hurried back to the scene of domestic disaster. Tragedies such as this repeat themselves from generation to generation. The poor lady's reason had been upset—that was beyond dispute. In the night the household was aroused by her cries and moans. She died, before daylight, of poison, self-administered. Living in her own world of shadows, she had evolved an image pitiless, remediless, the product of the Moloch creed which had been absorbed into her being. Thousands glibly render lip homage to that same creed, but by their actions disown it. Mrs. Wheatley left a vague and cloudy screed addressed to her husband. His sorrow was too sacred for feeble platitudes of condolence.

After the inquest silence descended on the subject and Time, the consoler, was left to lay the ghosts of the mind. Mr. Wheatley moved about his house with a wistful melancholy. It was pathetic to watch his efforts to throw off the incubus of dark memory, which had wound itself about him like an atmosphere. For the time being he was a broken man.

Dick, who had hitherto looked forward to the rôle in life of a country gentleman, one busied in the affairs of his estates and active in county matters, now developed an ardent desire to take up some definite profession. It was too late, he said, to start lawyering or doctoring and, moreover, he had neither the nimbleness of wit nor the ambition to excel in a humdrum professional career. After much cudgelling of brains it was determined that his father, who had once again money resources at command, should purchase Dick a commission in a cavalry regiment. *Pourparlers* with the War Office were set on foot and Dick, in the prospect of an active career, began to recover a little of the light-hearted buoyancy of old days. His was a mercurial temperament.

"The die is cast, old man," he told me. "I have

crossed the Rubicon and, between you and me, it's not much wider than a duck pond. The Fates have ordained that my days are to be spent licking country yokels into shape as food for powder. I shall have to try to dodge *ennui* in the barracks of some country town. If a first-class war breaks out, life will be worth living for a bit. But to be candid, my profession in these piping times of peace promises to be little better than licensed idleness. I envy you your job, Waterloo, that's a fact."

It could hardly be said that he was entering upon his career with zest. Nevertheless, I knew Dick to be a steady slogger when a definite goal was before him. Indecision is the curse of life and it pleased me that, as Margarita put it, Dick had ranged himself.

As for Margarita, the blow of her mother's death had stricken her sorely. Although well on the road to recovery from that terrible experience in Gatton Park, this fresh stroke smote her woefully hard. She reeled beneath it. Nevertheless, after a few sorrowful weeks, the joy of being up and doing possessed her once again. Her father needed the consoling touch of affection. Margarita rallied her forces. It was as though she stretched out her hand to one engulfed in a morass. Thus it came to pass that under hard necessity, the strength of her will triumphed. She foresaw that the household would be in confusion without a head. Clearly that position had now devolved upon herself. Her assumption of office was accompanied by a grand inner uplifting and, from its period, the wound of the cruel blow at her heart began to heal. Thus was death destined veritably to be swallowed up in victory. Margarita now moved about the house with a more assured tread. She won all hearts by her grace. By slow degrees the normal course of the daily round at the Grange reasserted itself.

As for me, I had set myself to grip the task of a pioneer. We were up and down the countryside and everything was ripening fast for the good time coming when an army of navigators would be delving in the slippery Weald and tunnelling under the chalk downs. The day would yet dawn, I felt confident, when our puny little scrap of iron way would be part of a vast spider's web of lines running north, south, east and west from London. Every thrill in that network of nerves would be a message travelling

to the great city. London would thus sit at the receipt of custom and take toll of the ebb and flow of the traffic of the world.

Harsh north-easters were ushering in spring, long-delayed. Our southern banks were studded with the stars of lesser celandine, that prophet of the slow process of the labouring year,

" Telling tales about the sun,
When we've little warmth, or none."

On rough, disturbed chalk land armies of coltsfoot thrust up a myriad spears—how fallen from the high estate of its forbear-tree which helped to store the world with coal. When we mustered forces at the " Joliffe Arms " of an evening, the lengthening of the days had become a stock commonplace.

Host Compton fussed up to me one evening on my return. " There's a strange body dropped down b' the coach, sir," he said. " I can't make 'un out a mossel. 'E fair queers me. My mistus she's in a regler quirk about 'un. 'E's trapesing raound and raound, to and fro everlastin'. Arter someone, I rackon. See what you makes on 'un, sir, and let me know."

In the smoking-room I straightway ran to earth the newcomer, who proved to be our wild actor friend of the " Fleur-de-Lis " at Canterbury. He sprang to his feet as we mutually recognized one another. I passed the time of day with this queer customer and asked him how he had fared since last we met.

" Ill," quoth he briefly, and began shuffling about the room. The man appeared unable to keep still for three consecutive seconds.

" Would you honour me with your company without, sir ? " he asked.

" Where do you want to go ? " I said.

" Whither I dare not go alone," he replied. " Young sir, I prithee bear me company. The shrouding night will cloak my dire intent."

" Dire intent ? " I queried. " What is it you are bent on, sir ? You ask me to go with you. How can I help you ? "

" Our mission may bring vengeance in its wake to those you love, sir, and ease to the smart of my heart," he

answered. "My purposes are fair. I wish to speak to you on the spot of that foul murder and the light will just serve for my end."

I ran upstairs and slipped into my pocket a handy little life-preserver. At the "Joliffe Arms" we each carried one of these weapons and called it our "nut-cracker." The English railway pioneer of our day was up against opposition both active and passive, such as is only to be met with nowadays in wild regions of the earth—ferocious dogs, waiting bulls, the hue-and-cry of irate farmers and their satellites, the shrill clamour of women, who declare that every innocent countryman was going to be robbed of his means of livelihood. Mankind after all is pretty much like a gaggle of geese on a village green. Let one member of the pack start sibilation and the heavens above are stormed with the chorus of their folly.

Without the actor stalked at my side in silence for a few moments. I noted, however, that his stilted stage manner grew less pronounced.

"Be frank with me," I said, "tell me all you know. You will not regret it, I assure you."

"May I touch your hand, sir, in token of a sealed pact, a bargain between us? My confidence is to be sacred."

"No," I replied, "in these matters silence gives consent and consent has an ugly title in law."

He thrust his hands deep into his pockets and shot ahead of me in jerky strides.

"What you say is reasonable enough," he murmured at length. "It is obvious that were I now to withhold what I know no folly could be conceived greater. I should have roused your suspicions, to leave them unallayed."

We sped on at top speed. There was that blend of newness of life in the keenness of the air which we all experience when the promised land of spring begins to loom in sight. We soon drew near our goal.

"My name to the world is Montmorency," quoth my companion. "You may or may not have heard, sir, of my Romeo. The first critics of the day have pronounced it worthy of the Augustan Age of the English drama. It is not for me to sound a trumpet before my exits and my entrances. The world must judge. I appeal to Cæsar. Still, the artist knows to the marrow of his bones when he

has cleft the white. 'Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?' he declaimed. "When this atrocious wickedness was on foot," he continued, "I was on circuit. We were to play at the Assembly Rooms at Reigate—a poor wooden O, sir, but it had to serve. We had arrived overnight and, as is oft my wont, next day I was breathing the morning air and watching the dappled sky at sunrise. These early rambles rarefy the wits, give vigour to the lungs. At this spot we have now reached a solitary horseman passed me, giving the time of day cheerily as he rode by. There is a bend in the road here, as you see, and I thought to strike across the dewy mead and recover the road a few yards ahead. My track lay through a patch of woodland and immediately thereafter I was ware of two men lying in ambush. My footsteps were noiseless on the turf, the men were intent on their design. Here for sure was a scene pat from the master hand. I stood mute and watched, hidden in the brushwood. The morning was still, the clapping of the wings of the rooks sailing overhead, cawing in chorus, could be distinctly heard. The beat of the horse's hoofs rounding the bend seemed to me like the blows of a hammer on one particular nerve. The two men now resembled hounds straining at the leash. A mute drama was about to be unrolled before my eyes. Then I caught the glint of a weapon in the hand of one of the crouching assassins. At that same instant the steady clatter of the horse's hoofs swung round the bend. There was a report and the rider fell to the road like a stone. The second man had also fired. His shot was as an echo to the first. The horse reared, wheeled about and galloped furiously away. The murdered man, who had groaned but briefly, now was still. Who can describe the horror of my position? What could I do? Before me parleyed two ruffians with weapons in their hands. They had already committed murder—for them 'returning were as tedious as go o'er.' The penalty for two murders is the same as for one. Were I to reveal my presence, what should hinder them from putting a bullet through my head also? Even on the stage have I never had so terrible a part to play. One of the two assassins was a big portly man with a loud full voice, the other a broad, square figure, somewhat gloomy and morose of aspect. I took him for a soldier returned

from the war. 'Oh, then began the tempest to my soul.' Whiles I stood debating and quaking within, the two murderers were coolly rifling their quarry's pockets. 'Sapristi!' quoth the big man in his oily voice. 'The dog has dodged us after all, Eduardo, my chick. The ducats are not here. There is nothing on him but half a score of yellowboys in this poke of his. Well, we'll leave him a couple to pay the Styx ferryman and pouch the rest. They'll help to clear the reckoning, I reckon. So now let's cart this worms' meat to decent burial,' he chuckled. They picked up a fallen bough, carried the dead man upon it swiftly up that slope and deposited him on the hillside yonder. Meanwhile was I—'bestilled almost to jelly with the act of fear'—still crouching in my cover. On the hill they appeared to search through the valise and pockets of the dead man afresh. They did this hastily and in trepidation, then returned to the spot we stand on. They had picked up a shard of earthenware on their way down. With this shard they scraped up dust and sand from a heap such as that one yonder and strawed it over the bloodstains. Whiles they did this I noted that the smaller man had lost some fingers. The big man was talking very loud, as cheerily as he dare, the smaller fellow cursing their luck and casting furtive glances about him, in dread of any traveller who might wander along the road. Thus we three figures stood out like a living proposition of Euclid. I said to myself, 'The Q.E.D. will be the gallows for these jailbirds.' At this moment of terror I was shivering and quaking, as you may well imagine—what with the rawness of the morning air and the horror of the scene. An unpremeditated sneeze seized me on the instant. I tried to smother it, but the sound came sharp enough nevertheless. 'What's that?' cried the lesser man, whom I called to myself second murderer. 'That?' said the first murderer, 'that's a fool of a fieldfare chacking for his breakfast.' 'Not a bit of it,' Number Two cried, 'there's someone in hiding. We're betrayed for sure.' They threw the shard into the ditch. One skirted to the right, the other to the left and 'ere the brinded cat hath mewed' they had pounced upon me. I thought my last hour was come, for they led me out as to execution. 'Stop his squalling with a bullet,' said the big man—Murderer Number One—and sharp's the word, *mon brave*, or we

shall have some keeper body after us, sure as God made little apples.' Murderer Number Two fingered his pistol to administer to me the *coup-de-grâce*, when on the skyline a man appeared. He was ploughing the upland. I could see the glance of both the brigands turned his way. They were trading on the off-chance that I had not perceived the man too. 'I've done enough bloodshed for one day,' says Number Two. 'If you'll swear to us by the honour of your mother and the safety of your immortal soul that all you've seen is forgotten for ever, we'll let you off. Mind you, one whisper of it and you're a dead man. Our bloodhounds will track you, if they have to go to Hell to find you. Your life will not be worth an hour's purchase if this execution leaks out. We cannot tell you why. Time presses. The man had to die. We are the avengers of Fate. That's all. Do you swear to hold your peace, or shall we make you hold your peace for good and all? If you don't hold up your right hand before we've counted ten, you're a dead man.' Both murderers put their pistols to my head, one on each side, and they held me fast between them with their other hands. What could I do? I was shivering and shaking and, when they got to eight, I cried 'I give in.' 'Good for you,' said Number One. 'Here's a sov. for your silence, and we wish you good-day.' They wheeled about and tramped off, leaving me in most admired disorder. I thought of the lonely wayfarer lying dead on the hillside, of 'the deep damnation of his taking off.' Truly I had dropped into a trance. When I came to myself the two murderers had made their exit from the scene. The morning was misting over. I was as a man in a nightmare dream. I hurled from me the sovereign, the price of blood, and five minutes later was trudging back to our headquarters at Reigate, 'a sadder and a wiser man.'"

The born actor speaks in a language of movement and this weird artist's gestures conveyed to me far more than would the mere impressions of his words. I saw, under the subtle instinct of his craft, the tragedy re-enacted. The waning light helped to deepen its setting. Once again that panther-like pair lived before my eyes; the stricken man's fall was visible; the whirlwind decisions of desperate men flashed into view, the headlong scamper from justice. A criminal of the type of these murderers

is a predatory beast of prey, a reversion to the dormant brute hidden under the veneer of civilized humanity. One generation may succeed another, "the line stretch out till the crack of doom," but the inherited ferocity of men's primeval savage ancestry will, nevertheless, stalk the earth afresh, in deeds of horror.

The record of this barnstormer, who styled himself Montmorency, brought to my assurance the conviction that the men who had perpetrated the felony of poor Storey's taking off were folk whose hands I had touched in friendship—that one of them was the Regent, the other Major Markland. I stood for a moment or two aghast at the discovery which was to me incontrovertible. The sun had dipped his flag behind the rampart height of Red-hill Common. By mutual consent we wheeled about on our track. What was I to do? I surveyed the situation in silence, communing with myself. The primary necessity was to do nothing that would give the alarm to the criminals, whose intelligence was, doubtless, quickened by reason of the danger in which they stood every hour of the day and night—the haunting dread that through some unforeseen rift the eye and hand of the Law might pierce their disguise and bring to them the expiation of their crime. No lapwing has a keener scent of danger than the hardened outlaw of society living on his wits, prepared at the first hint of discovery to run to earth or bolt to alien skies. Doubtless these men had warrens into which they could slip, channels through which, by the aid of friendly pariahs, they might hope to find their way to some foreign Tom Tiddler's Ground, wherein the writ of King William would be a dead letter. I turned to the companion at my side.

"There must be no blowing of the gaff," I said.

"Having told you all, I follow your cue," he replied.
"Vows bound by force are self-absolved."

Instinct convinced me that absolute silence in the locality was the first requisite. We must both wend our way to London and avoid travelling together. Old jail-birds as our quarry doubtless were, they would have watchers cunning as the sentinel rook to spot risk and, in the flash of an eyelid, would be off. Once raise the wind and they would flit as do bats to their hiding places. "Just fancy," I said to myself, "Phœbus bursting with the

tidings of my great discovery. It would be a method of publication second only to that of instructing the Reigate town crier how best to scare our wary birds." As the shades of night fell I hammered the matter out on the anvil of my wits.

"You agree to follow my advice implicitly?" I reiterated.

"I do," Montmorency answered.

"Very well then," I made reply, "I go by to-night's coach to London—to the 'Golden Cross.' To-morrow you come up by the early coach. Where will you put up?"

"Let's say the 'Green Dragon' in Fleet Street."

"Right. Expect me there in the afternoon to-morrow. My plans meantime will be cut and dried. We will have the assassins by the heels before the week is out."

Host Compton received us mysteriously on our return to the "Joliffe Arms." I told him that his visitor was an old acquaintance of mine and I didn't fancy he would stay at the inn many hours—meantime he (Host Compton) could make his mind quite easy, as the man's flightiness was all part of the actor's craft. He was working up a new part for the stage, that was all. Mine host grew a trifle suspicious when I further informed him that I was called suddenly to London that night. However, we railway folk were so meteoric in our movements that the incident passed without comment.

When I arrived near midnight in the bar of the "Golden Cross" Mistress Betty hailed me with effusion. A few choice spirits still lingered in her sanctum. One of these was telling the company reminiscences of Mrs. Abington, the famous lady who played Lady Teazle at the first performance of *The School for Scandal*.

"She was a shyder if you like," quoth he. "Imagine a filly that hasn't left the stable for a week, her heels flying up at every scrap of paper by the roadside and there you have the Abington—tricksy, touchy, for ever starting a squabble about the fit of a bow or some such trivial nonsense and yet at heart as staunch a little lady as ever stepped the boards."

Over a "toothful of negus" in the corner of the bar I cross-examined the old fellow about Montmorency. He grinned.

"D'you know what his real name is?" he queried. "It's Zedekiah Dodge. He's just the Abington in breeches—a regular hop o' my thumb. In the green room his nickname is the Flea and the joke that always greets him is 'the wicked fleeth when no man pursueth.' But don't misunderstand me. The man for all his panics is a sound actor and a worthy peer. Here's to his health. You must join us in the toast, my dear," he added, turning to Betty. "I give you the Flea and may he hop for another thousand years or so."

"Oh, him," replied Betty tartly. "That little capering scrub, that's always spouting scraps of his mug of a Romeo. He's a harmless counter-jumper enough. Here's to him and you all, gents, and it's good-night all, for I'm locking the door out into the street in five minutes from now by that clock."

A good-natured hubbub arose at this announcement and a chorus was raised against the hard-heartedness of "our Betty," from which I gathered her pronouncement to be a regular nightly formula. The "strays," as Betty termed them, then unwillingly took their departure, and not many minutes thereafter I lay in darkness and pondered over the strange task awaiting me on the morrow.

There was no soul in the great city of whom I could seek confidence or counsel. Peel's new police force had its home in Scotland Yard. I would make my way thither early in the morning and tell my tale to the officer in charge of the Storey case. On the arrival of the early Brighton coach I intended to stroll down to the "Green Dragon" and, with a runner, interview Montmorency. Each unit in the trio must reach the rendezvous casually, so that there should be no chance of our collusion putting up the wind and scaring the gentry we were after. It was a formidable job for an ingenuous lad such as I. Like Agag, I had to tread delicately.

Next morning I pushed against the stream of eastbound folk past King Charles's statue and drifted into the back-water of Scotland Yard, where the newly-styled "Peelers" held sway. Although my stroll was the simplest thing in the world I felt like a conspirator, scanning the faces of passers-by anxiously, acting as if every one I met was bent on finding out the secret locked in my breast.

On passing as directed into an office containing half a

dozen uniformed men hard at work quill-driving, one of these came forward and asked what was my pleasure.

"I want to see—what shall I call him?—the Head Runner," I replied. The man looked queerly at me, turned about and remarked to a companion, *sotto voce*, "Upper storey to let."

"What is it, sir?" said the individual addressed, in his turn coming forward.

I sank my voice to a whisper. "I have a clue to the Storey murder and want to see the officer in charge of the case," I told him.

That formula was open sesame. Not another word was uttered. I was beckoned along corridors and up and down stairways and finally ushered into a tiny room, where I was left to kick my heels for perhaps five minutes. Then the individual who had conducted me reappeared, bade me step that way, opened a door into a large and gloomy room and vanished.

Facing me at a desk near the window sat a queer old weazened man. His face was weatherbeaten, crisscrossed with furrows, impassive. His only features with any apparent vitality were his eyes. I was in the presence of a man before whom the stoutest-hearted ruffian in London would have quailed. To me, of course, he was a nameless officer of the Law. Afterwards I found that he was the famous Keys. Every community has its own particular constellation. This man, if I had only known it, was Grand Llama amongst our detectors of crime.

He made a slight movement to indicate that I was to take the witness chair alongside his desk, picked up a quill, opened a knife to repoint the pen and grunted one word: "Well?"

The salutation was distinctly disconcerting. I hummed and hawed and hesitated. "I hardly know where to begin," I said at last.

"At the beginning," came his response, in an impersonal voice. It was as if a mechanical figure spoke. I plunged off hastily.

"I needn't tell you how Mr. Storey's body was found. It so happened that a party of railway prospectors under my charge found it and the murdered man turned out to be the intimate and legal adviser of a close friend of mine. Almost simultaneously with the murder was due

the date of the expiry of certain notices served on this friend, Mr. Wheatley of Nutfield, and on my guardian Mr. Fullerton of Fullerton Park, for the repayment of mortgages on the respective properties. There was at that time no apparent connection between the one incident and the other. I ought to have told you that some months prior to the murder, when visiting London on the affairs of our estate, I was decoyed, drugged and robbed in Wentworth Butts by a man who had travelled up with us on the coach. Your runners said the robber was a man called 'The Regent.'"

The mechanical figure at my side lifted his head at that, arched his eyebrows and said: "Ah!" A glimmer of closer observation irradiated his eyes.

"Now a fortnight before the murder one night I was returning to my inn near the scene where the deed was perpetrated. I heard footsteps approaching and stepped aside. Two men passed me and after a few moments' consideration I recognized from his voice that one of those men was The Regent. I gave pursuit, but could not discover the men's whereabouts. Immediately after the inquest was over, Mr. Wheatley's son and I rode off to Canterbury where Storey lived. A terrific storm came on that night and at the 'Fleur-de-Lis' was an actor who declaimed bits of Shakespeare—snatches describing wild scenes of thunder and lightning and murder. He broke out a second time and we were aroused from sleep to listen to his tirades. Next morning he crept away by the coach and I watched him leave. No apparent clue was forthcoming from the information gleaned at Canterbury. Mr. Storey's head clerk thought it possible that the murdered man might have had on his person a sum of three thousand pounds or securities representing it. The whole business was shrouded in baffling mystery."

At these words the great policeman seemed to bestir himself, like a horse who hears the lid of the cornbin open. A flicker of amusement played about his mouth, but died away into impassivity. I went on with my tale.

"I left Mr. Wheatley's son at Canterbury. On my way back from there I fell in with a man who said he had fought in the Peninsula and who called himself Major Markland. While we were at dinner together I noted that he had lost two fingers of his left hand. We got

confidential"—again the summer lightning of mirth flashed up and died away from my hearer's eyes—"and I told him of our dilemma both at Fullerton and Nutfield. He gave me an address at Islington and stated that, through the good offices of himself and the man named on his card, the mortgage difficulty might perhaps be disposed of, if I would come and see him there. I went straight on to Fullerton and from there to London. Then I drove out to No. 17 The Common, Islington, and was introduced by Major Markland to a Mr. Ales Fidge. The lawyers who had served the notices were Cohen & Levi and Cutting & Cute."

The automaton at my side actually began to show some signs of vitality at this remark. He leant back in his chair and seemed interested in a smudge on the ceiling, which I saw to be the remains of an antediluvian cobweb.

"What was Fidge like?" he queried abruptly.

"He was a tiny man with a big head. He had a sort of rubber face, that twisted into all sorts of shapes and lines."

"Well, what happened then?" he asked.

"Oh, this man, Ales Fidge, at first appeared to think we had no chance of getting out of the clutches of the Jews, but at last offered to try his hand at extricating us. Acting on Markland's advice, on my return to London I said nothing to one of my guardians—the one who had been appointed by the Court. In the end I signed two letters making myself responsible, when I came of age, for two fresh mortgages, both on my property, the condition being that the mortgage calling-in notices should be withdrawn. In doing this I got into dreadful disgrace, not only with my London guardian, but with both the friends I was trying to help. However, apparently, when all was said and done my act meant nothing, for, being a minor, my undertaking was invalid. By a fortunate turn of events both at Nutfield and Fullerton the estate difficulties were overcome. Friends stepped into the breach. Things then dropped back into everyday routine. No more was heard of any of the parties I have told you about. It looked as if the crime was never going to be brought home." My auditor grinned. "Yesterday, the actor whom we boys met at Canterbury turned up at the 'Joliffe Arms' at Merstham, where I live when on duty. He recognized me at once and, at his urgent request, he

and I set out to the scene of the murder. His stage name, it appears, is Montmorency. I have made inquiries and find that his real name is Dodge. He told me every detail of how poor Storey was done to death and described the two murderers. He was, it appears from his statement, an accidental witness. The villains who did the deed threatened him with instant death if he disclosed what he knew. He has been silent ever since by reason of this intimidation. He will be in London this afternoon. Meantime, I feel in my bones that the murderers are the man called The Regent and the man who calls himself Major Markland."

"Are you looking out for a job, sir?" asked the pontiff on the throne beside me.

I glanced up inquiringly.

"We'll put you on the staff here, if you want to take up our sort of work," he went on. "Why, my lad, with a year or two's study of the seamy side of this city, you'd make a live detective. I can't say anything much higher than that, can I?" He rose and shook me by the hand. "We've lagged your Wentworth Butts friend already. He's serving ten years' apprenticeship as a stonemason at Portland." Then he opened a bureau at his side and pulled out a bound book. As he turned over its pages I saw that it was illustrated by daguerreotypes and sketches, some of the latter uncommonly rough, but all more or less possessing individuality. At length he found the page he wanted. There in black outline sure enough stood out the presentment of The Regent. A couple of pen and ink sketches made assurance double sure.

"That's one of the men," I cried. "I'd swear to him anywhere."

"Would you like to hear what we have to say?" grinned the policeman. "Names—Lord Markby, Sir Allan Fitzhugh, Bryan Dubois. He's done three years for defrauding a widow out of her livelihood, four years for forgery and fraud. He has slipped through our fingers twice—once for printing flash notes, the other time for robbery with violence." He hunted through a few more pages. "Now for the other man. Is that him?" he asked. There was a crude pencil drawing of two men seated on a bench. In spite of the poorness of the draughtsmanship I recognized Major Markland and Ales Fidge.

"Which do you call Fidge?" asked the detective. I pointed him out. "We know him for a coiner, although so far he's been too foxy for us. However, we shall have his brush one of these days, sure as death and quarter-day. He's an honest artisan, you know, who does all sorts of fancy metal work. Some of it is really and truly as fine as anything in the Tower. His trade name is Bonthron Brothers. The other man is wanted now for conspiracy to defraud. He got out of a bigamy charge by a fluke. His names are—Colonel Walker, c.B., Sir Anthony Slingsby and Captain the Hon. Valence de Vere. So you see, Mr. Joyce, without knowing it, you have been in very distinguished company indeed. What time does your actor friend arrive?"

"He'll be at the 'Green Dragon' say about two o'clock," I replied. "I suggest we meet there. Do you think his movements will be shadowed?" I asked. The great man appeared to ponder.

"Better meet at the 'Brass Door,' as we call it, in the Strand," he replied. "It's a regular actors' haunt, and I'll have a private room booked in the name of Tompkins. You and he had better drop down and ask for Mr. Tompkins's room and wait for me to be there at three o'clock. I shall go in by the side entrance, as we know the landlord. He's one of our old hands and as silent as Newgate. Three o'clock, then."

He shook hands and bowed me out. The man who had at first appeared the image of apathy and inertness had grown wideawake. A big *coup* was on. If he pulled this stroke off silently and swiftly there would be one more professional triumph to be added to his score. I wrote a note to Montmorency, telling him the rendezvous was to be at the "Bras d'Or," and Scotland Yard promised to dispatch it by hand to the "Green Dragon." I then went out into one of the lanes at the back of "The Yard" and threaded my way into Whitehall. I had four hours before the appointment to while away.

CHAPTER XVII

AS I passed out of the alleys into the main thoroughfare of Whitehall, I was aware that there was an unusual stir. The footways were thronged and the talk tossed from lip to lip was either that of jest or execration. Some *festa* or *émeute* was in the wind. "Dogs! curs!" ejaculated a well-dressed ruffian as I passed a knot of loiterers. "I'd serve 'em as they do the parish prentice lads when they beat the Richmond Terrace bounds."

"How's that?" queried one of his companions, laughingly.

"Thrash 'em till their bones ache," was the reply.

This cluster of folk had the bibulous eye which proclaimed them sots and topers. Probably, I mused, their occupation was to soak their noontides to pot valiancy, to tipple till ripe for roystering frolic in the small hours.

As they spoke, the cause of the hubbub approached. To me the scene was one of unrelieved tragedy. It was a medley procession of half-starving country folk. Hunger and misery were branded on the faces and borne in the gait of many of these poor wretches. The cosmopolitan revolutionary was absent from their ranks. A more terrible parody on our boasted civilization could, I thought, not be conceived. The abjects slouched along bearing crude banners in their midst. "The bread to live by" was on one of these. A sleek parson at my elbow commented on this in words that roused fury within me. I forget the exact phrase he used, but it implied that the sounding brass of his ministrations was, as a panacea, the be-all and end-all of human need. "Bread, not stones" was inscribed on another banner. Many of them bore mottoes which showed that the pastors and masters of rural England were content to snatch the moment's profit, regardless of its nemesis. "Curse the machines," "Smash the Looms," "Shall we tamely

starve?" were samples of the most mutinous, and these appeared for a few moments only. They clearly were incitements to breaches of the peace and the Scotland Yard men promptly demanded that they should be given up. As I watched the crowd this demand was sullenly obeyed and the banners handed over. This herd of callow humanity was evidently spoiling for any mischief under the sun. The ink on the great Act of political emancipation was hardly dry. This was—so its authors fondly predicted—to free the servile and break the bonds of English serfs. How? Forsooth, by giving them a voice in the slippery promises made at the hustings. Nevertheless, here in the heart of the capital city a ragged regiment of famine-stricken conscripts, of veritable *lazzaroni* paraded their sores and called down upon the land of their birth the malediction of Heaven.

I felt that the end of an epoch was at hand. The wretched were blindly seeking to destroy that which should be their salvation from economic thralldom. England was emerging out of her pupa condition—she would soon cease to be in the main an agricultural community. Her roots were destined no longer to be pot-bound. The frightful struggle for life of the Great War was a memory. The race for emancipation was begun. "Loose him and let him go" was the sentence of the highest wisdom. In reply came a babel of tongues, some bent on mere anarchy, others on rebinding the cerements of the tomb. Brutal repression would react in inarticulate mob fury. Between the two forces that England, which all save dilettante cosmopolites honour and revere, the motherland of patriots, was like to be torn in sunder.

The country people thus parading Whitehall trudged stolidly along the roadway, shepherded by a handful of the men of Scotland Yard. Here and there was a slatternly woman carrying a miserable babe. From the ribald talk of those in broadcloth about me on the pavement, another massacre of the Innocents would not be unjustified in this our year of grace. Weary ages of oppression had brought scant quittance to the tiller of the soil. In the "Vision of Piers Plowman" the stark problem is stated in all its deadly starkness. The poet sees no respite to the hind of his day this side the grave. As summer heats succeed to the terrors of winter even so will it be,

he thinks, for the hapless toiler in the glebe in some misty future world.

“ Joye that never joye hadde
Of rightfull jugge he asketh.”

Poor consolation truly. The walnut stores beneath its bitter bark a kernel of comfort. “ Patience,” cries the poet, “ some day, like the walnut, you will reap the harvest of hard toil, in want-begotten indifference to the pitiless rages of the winter’s wind.”

“ For though it be sour to suffre
Thereafter cometh swete.”

Such gospel was to my present mood mere mockery. The scoffing crowd about me and the folk who marched hopelessly along the highway were object-lessons. First of all, as the owner of lands on which men and women dumbly toiled, it surely behoved me to see that their lot should stand on a higher plane than that of the beasts that perish. To three out of four of them the printed page was mute hieroglyph. On the other side of the shield was the vision of a muttering storm of revolution which would leave mere blackened acres and the remnant of a starving population, roaming wolf-like over a wrecked countryside. I clung to my championship of the ancient motto—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. In that surely lies the only hope of awakened democracy—to every man the man’s rights, the man’s responsibility. The phrase “ Equality ” I translated as meaning equality of opportunity. The poor man should have the talent of education placed in his hands. If he chooses to wrap that talent in a napkin, the Commonwealth cannot be held to blame. Our mother’s favourite dictum, “ the mon’s the goud for a’ that,” came home with redoubled force.

I foresaw moreover that in the awakening of England, the railways were destined to play a prime part. Old England was *in articulo mortis*. Much of her ancient picturesque glamour was destined to disappear. We should become the makers of the world, possibly in a different sense to that which depicts England as the nursery of mighty poets dead and gone, the forgers of the thunderbolts of the gods in verse. Arts and industries are, I mused, keys to unlock a new Golden Age. In their train may spring up a hundred evils. As the sylvan beauty of our rural places is like to be blackened with the smoke and ugliness of

factories and the begrimed men who toil within them, even so may the simple rural idealism of bygone ages be tarnished by sophistication, by the soot and clatter of the town. No unalloyed Utopia is possible in the scarred realm of human progress. Enough if, in spite of cowed inquisitors, like Galileo's earth, "it moves."

Now as I stood on the kerb at Whitehall and watched the stream of miserable folk straggle past, hunger and wretchedness stamped on the features of many of them beyond the power of acting, it will be evident that I was growing into a turbulent young rebel against convention and its lack of charity. My upbringing had taught me that the undercurrent of unrequited squalor which I knew to be the lot of a vast proportion of land workers was veritably a fact, not, as so many of our self-complacent flapdoodles of the city would have the world believe, mere fable. The man who toiled from dawn to dark during a long life, when his powers failed him had no refuge save the workhouse.

In my rhymester days I once wandered into a village church. On the table of the vestry lay the death register of the parish, and the latest entry was that of a farm hand aged eighty-three, his place of residence "the sick-room of the Poor House." Could any epitaph be more simply pathetic? I set up as sonneteer on the incident and below are the lines I wrote. How much better, I now moralized, would it have been if I had sought to rescue one such human derelict from the utter solitude of his bare pauper end.

AN OLD STRUGGLER.*

Beneath this knoll rest unrecorded bones,
 Bent by a load of dim, requiteless toil.
 "He drove straight furrows;" vassal of the soil,
 His prize scant fare, racked limbs, unheeded groans.
 A hard-won epitaph! the fresh-turn'd sod
 Awards the mortal palm of easeful death;
 Nature time-worsted fought for scanty breath,
 The spirit fled from nature up to God.

Now lies poor Lazarus at another gate.
 Perchance, after life's tragic mystery,
 A soldier quitting pitiless bivouacs he,
 From weary dawns of unrelenting fate
 Has found as bourne a mansion of the free,
 A benediction on mute souls that wait.

* An old Irish peasant thus described herself to Sir Walter Scott. The phrase caught his fancy and was frequently on his lips.

The procession gone, Whitehall resumed its usual buzzing self-complacence. Here and there young blades clustered and cracked jokes about the labourers' pitiful show. I strolled onward to the bridge at Westminster. Beyond it on the Surrey side lay marshes and fields, Lambeth Palace, and here and there a mansion or a farm. Noble buildings looked down upon the London side of our famous river, the river that enshrines the splendid story of our race. In musing mood I stood and recalled the varied happenings of the day, until the clock of St. Margaret's Church struck one. Then I woke from my reverie. I must snatch a meal at the "Golden Cross" and thence find my way to the rendezvous at the "*Bras d'Or*."

The bar of that old hostelry turned out to be a snuggerly such as English cities hold the patent of—low-browed, leaded paned and dark on a dull winter day. It looked uninviting enough as I entered it. A crooked rambling stairway led to a murky room above, and on both floors were ancient cubicles of the horsebox description, each with its bare table for viands, which were borne in hot and hot by a ragged regiment of waiters, every one of whom gave the instant impression that they were taking part in a stage performance. As a matter of fact both guests and attendants were habitués of "the boards." The serving men had in past days strutted and fretted their hour upon the stage. The house had then perchance been wont to roar acclaim. Now that day was over, its sun set. The men whom they served were in their turn, some of them, the idols of the moment. Not all, however. Here might be seen the out-at-heel comic man, with his indescribable air of self-assurance. The pampered parvenus who flocked around him were apt to play the supercilious.

"Hullo, Nunkle," quoth one of these young blades to a seedy veteran as I passed him. "How goes it, my Rip van Winkle?"

"To the tune of 'Margery Daw,' young sir," answered the old man sourly. "Babes and sucklings," he muttered to himself. But the younger man had a glass of steaming negus before his companion in a trice. The unstinting brotherhood of the Stage made comrades of them all.

Behind an intrenchment of glasses and pint-pots at

the counter of the bar was a damsel who, for all her juvenile appearance, was evidently able to hold her own in the hurly-burly of words. She kept the orders for liquor going unflaggingly, in spite of the constant stream of badinage and reprisal bandied about her. I was somewhat shy of accosting this very self-possessed young person. She met me, however, more than halfway by inquiring if I would have a drop of Morning Dew or a teaspoonful of soothing syrup. I dropped my voice almost to a whisper.

"I want Tompkins's room," I said.

"William," cried the imperious young lady, "show this gent to No. 5. Give us a call on your way out, sir," she added graciously. William accordingly led me up the creaking stairs along a corridor and down another flight of steps almost as steep as a ladder. Round the corner at the bottom we came to a door, which he flung open. I was the first arrival. A genial fire was burning. William, still with the unmistakable stage air, promptly stoked up the fire, threw on a log of wood and struck an attitude.

"Do you know Mr. Montmorency?" I asked him.

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot?" cried William. "Why, sir, I've played the Fool to his Lear many a time and oft. 'Sleepest thou or wakest thou, jolly shepherd?'" he chanted. "Ah, here he comes," added William, as the door opened and our Canterbury friend appeared. "How now, Nunkle?" he ranted on. "'An thou canst not smile as the wind sits thou'll take cold shortly.'" As he said this, Keys himself slipped in stealthily. All William's eloquence evaporated with the entrance of the great man. "Can I serve you gents with any refreshment?" he asked.

"Not just now," was the reply. "We'll ring if we want you."

William thereupon withdrew hastily. After a decent interval, Keys opened the door to reconnoitre that no eavesdropper was about, turned the key in the lock, drew up his chair to the fire, took up the poker to administer a dig into the vitals of the blaze, snuffed vigorously and said abruptly, "Now, sir, what is it you have to say?"

The actor for all his wealth of words did not know how to begin.

"I saw this frightful murder committed," he blurted

out and then, in freshets of talk, repeated the story pretty much as he had told it to me. Keys appeared to be watching the spurts of flame which leapt up at every application of the poker. When the narration was over he said quietly :

“Do you know, young man, that I could slip the barkers on your wrists here and now, as accessory ? ”

The actor's fright at these words was palpably real.

“I accessory ? ” he stammered. “Why, my dear sir, I was an involuntary witness.”

“And have held your guilty peace ever since,” quoth Keys gruffly.

“Because I was in danger of sharing the dead man's fate,” said Montmorency.

“No defence whatever in law, sir,” snapped Keys. “However, if we can lay the culprits by the heels and you render us all the assistance in your power, your offence may perhaps be condoned.”

The idea that he had rendered himself liable to all sorts of pains and penalties appeared to shake the actor's nerve. He made profuse promises of affording aid in bringing the murderers to justice.

“This is Wednesday,” said Keys, as it were by way of soliloquy. “We shall have one of these gents on our hands by say Monday or Tuesday at latest. Where are you playing now, sir ? ” he asked Montmorency.

“I am engaged in an entirely new melodramatic spectacle coming out at the Coburg,” the actor replied. “Let me give you a bit of news in advance, Mr. Keys. The theatre is going to change its name, sir. 'Tis to be the Victoria in a few weeks' time, the name of the little princess, you know, who may be Queen of England some day. Long may it be first.”

“Aye,” grunted Keys in his gruffest tone, “as bonny a lass as you'd find this side the Border.”

“The piece we strike off with will be that with which the Royal Coburg was opened in 1818,” went on Montmorency. “It is entitled *Trial by Battle* ; or *Heaven defend the Right*. A grand Asiatic ballet is to follow and after that a harlequinade from Milton's *Masque of Comus*, which I fondly believe will set the town on a roar. There are tricks, changes and metamorphoses such as the public have never seen before.” He spoke with his usual

assurance now, warming to his subject. "We have extra patrols secured for all the roads and bridges and the route to the theatre will be a blaze of light, regardless of expense."

"If I want you in a hurry, where can I find you?" asked Keys.

"At No. 9, Paragon Place, Bloomsbury," replied Montmorency.

The master runner timed his exit as abruptly as his entrance. Montmorency and I suddenly found ourselves left to our own devices. I had made up my mind to take the night coach back to Merstham, but meantime proposed to the actor that he should dine with me at the "Golden Cross."

"Yes," he said, "if you will first honour me by attending our rehearsal."

We accordingly rumbled in a hackney coach across Waterloo Bridge and, plunging through derelict and half-built slums, finally alighted at the entrance of a huge building, in shape resembling a seaman's chest, having the words, "Royal Coburg Theatre" in bold lettering on its façade. The performance afforded me an eerie and novel sensation. I was one of perhaps a dozen spectators in the front stalls. The footlights left the stage half in shadow and the tiers and rows of seats whereto, as one of the actors had said, "the lower orders rush in mobs and in their shirt sleeves, frantically applaud, drink ginger beer, munch apples, crack nuts, call the actors by their Christian names and throw them orange peel and apples by way of bouquets," were gloomily empty and silent. After much grunting of trombones and screaming of fiddles, a bold bad buccaneer entered with an attendant gang of villains, sea-booted, ear-ringed, bearded like the pard, the very stuff, as all the world knows, of which smugglers are made.

"My barque is bounding in the Orfing," he cried. Thus was the ball of infamy set rolling. A beauteous Orfing, fit mate for the boldest pirate, was, it seemed, waiting to be carried off. The plot deepened. The buccaneer, depicted with much realism by Montmorency, was for stalking "the light on yonder hillside" then and there, seizing the mydan and putting to sea with his pirate bride without more ado. However, the gang finally decided upon a carouse and singsong before proceeding to ex-

tremities. A convenient cask was broached and the songsters of the band reeled off a succession of rollicking ditties, conveying sentiments of the most atrocious character. Meantime, the inevitable informer of the party sneaked off to give the alarm. The cask emptied and a dance executed round their bonfire, the smugglers were next seen scaling the hillside, still troling bacchanalian choruses. They reached the cottage. There the maiden, for all her appeals, was seized and a scarf deftly wound about her mouth to stifle her squeals. Finally, at the critical moment, as success was just about to crown the bandit's bold design, spurts of fire sprang out from ambushed National Guards. A battle royal ensued, much pictorial language was employed on both sides. After prodigies of valour the pirate chief was pinioned by the hero, who turned out to be not only captain of the National Guard but also the betrothed of the Orfling. The informer then came forward to express many pious platitudes, which were evidently more trying to the bandits than their bonds. A final grand spectacular tableau followed. The National Guards in their turn performed complicated dances and sang a medley of patriotic songs, while in the distance a vast eruption revealed the fact that the smugglers' craft, lying in the offing, had been blown to bits by preventive officers. The curtain thus appropriately fell to fireworks and much clatter of the band.

"Dang me old lee scuppers, it brings tears into me eyes," quoth a voice close beside me. I recognized the speaker. It was that big man Thackeray, whom I had met at the "Whistling Oyster." As for me, I could not make out if we auditors were intended to laugh at the stuff or regard the inexplicable shows and noise to which we had listened as serious. I laughed a good deal as I waited for Montmorency. It set me moralizing as to what 'Ciseman Love would have had to say to all this rant and fustian.

Our dinner at the "Golden Cross" dispatched, the night coach duly deposited me at Merstham and on the following morning my first thought on waking was under what pretext could I revisit the Grange. I had been absent for three whole days, an immense gap of time, now that the excitement wrapped in their folds had subsided. I had picked up in the Strand an illustrated edition of "The Giaour." We were all Byron worshippers in the thirties and

accordingly I trudged off immediately after breakfast to present my treasure to Margarita.

How sharply that morning walk comes back. The year was young and callow and the nip in the air tasted like a draught of wine, sending the blood spinning to the brain. The sombre woods of Gatton were beginning to feel the wooing of the virgin sun. The legend of the sleeping princess awaiting the coming of the prince of life to kiss her into newness of being was being re-enacted for the millionth time. Are not the old stories the best? To him that has eyes to see the sovran wonder, the swelling of each bud and twig is a miracle, ancient as grey Time, young as a baby's babble. The future lay before me rosy in hue. Had I not a land stake in the county, was I not hovering near the confession of a love destined to transform my whole being? I recalled the dreams which at my first glance had woven themselves about the portrait hanging in Mr. Wheatley's sanctum. Those dreams had surely come true. Like he of the parable, I had found the pearl of great price and was ready to barter all I had, save honour, in the quest to possess it. Things celestial and terrestrial were for me trembling in the balance. Could I but pluck up courage to ask the question which I longed yet dreaded to put, its answer would seal my fate for good and all. The old doubts and questionings and pleas for delay reasserted themselves. I must abide the vigil and do my devoir as a faithful knight. There was no easy road for the knight-errant.

In this composite frame of mind I breasted the hill and finally presented myself at the Grange. Dick was away; Mr. Wheatley seemed absorbed and rather distraught. He was poring over some document in his office. Margarita was doubtless engaged in domestic affairs, for there was no sign of her. I cursed my folly in coming at so inopportune a moment.

"We haven't seen you lately," said Mr. Wheatley, rather coldly I thought.

I replied that I had been suddenly called to London on business and had only returned late the night before.

"You're a good deal away on business, aren't you?" asked Mr. Wheatley abstractedly. I told him that we pioneers in the world of travel were apt to be fly-by-nights. It was an evasion of the facts, but what could I do?

Absolute secrecy as to the hunt for the murderers was an obvious necessity. Mr. Wheatley did not seem to make it easy for me to remain. He was glancing at the paper on his desk, as if I was rather in the way. I rose to take my departure.

"I picked up this copy of one of Byron's poems in London," I said, "and was wondering if Margarita would accept it."

Mr. Wheatley went to the door of his room and called his daughter. She came forward, evidently not knowing that I was in the house. Now the moment she appeared I could not but perceive a change in her manner. Red spots sprang to her cheeks. She stood dubious. There was a lack of sympathy about her which cut me to the quick.

"It's vastly good of you," quoth she, but without enthusiasm in her voice. She picked up the book. "The fact of the matter is," she said, "I've had a copy of this same edition given me already." It was a flat rebuff. I stammered apologies and regrets, stuffed the book into my pocket and, as soon as I could do so without abruptness, took my departure.

Heavens! what a tumult of passions surged within me as I sped down the hill. Half an hour before I had traversed the same road elated at my own importance in the world, a conceited young booby, quite certain that the Fates would stand cap in hand to run my errands. Now I was terribly disillusioned. At the first blush, I inwardly declaimed against the variability of the sex. "Inconstancy, thy name is woman," I cried. Then the folly of tarring all women with one brush came uppermost in my mind. I could not believe Margarita inconstant. As soon would I throw that charge at our mother. But then I remembered of our mother that she had joined Uncle John in his hue and cry against my folly. Even she was not exempt from the foibles of her sex.

What was I to do? There was nothing to do but to spend and be spent in the business of the hour. My whole thought and energy henceforth must be devoted to the works of the new railway. Then my duty to Fullerton was a real call. I could not neglect that. As to the folk at the Grange, my mind was made up. No more calls for me, until I was asked to make them. It was a positive affront that had been offered me. I had made

myself too cheap. Well, that mistake should not be repeated. Thus I stormed and raged within, until, by the merest chance, I met Tosh and Quodling still busy on the inevitable survey of the line.

"Hullo, young 'un," sang out Tosh. "The chief's been down. He's a good deal upset about your constant absence from the job—asked what new move was in the wind now. We had to tell him we didn't know—you hadn't enlightened us."

Then Quodling struck in. "I told him—as we all know—that there's a lady or ladies in the case."

"In fact," punned Tosh with a grin, "that you are Missled, young man."

At this very primitive jest they both laughed and a chainman with them turned away to conceal his mirth. I was furious.

"What right have you," I cried, "to blackball me? If I were permitted to tell the cause of my being called away you would be the first to apologize. As it is, you have done me irreparable harm by your gossip and malice."

"Come, come, Joyce," said Tosh soberly, "don't be a fool, my boy. The chief's only comment was, 'Boys will be boys.' You know perfectly well that neither Quodling nor I would knowingly do you a bad turn."

I knew it as well as they, but the evil demon who seemed abroad that morning put more hot language on my lips.

"Mighty fine talk," I shouted. "I'm sick and tired of all this back-biting. You know as well as I do——"

"What is it we know?" asked Quodling. "Nothing except that you disappear like a will-o'-the-wisp, so far as we can tell without rhyme or reason. If you can't trust your old friends and let them know this mysterious cause of causes for suddenly leaving them, are we to blame? Your great friend Dick Wheatley was in ignorance too, just as we were, and he's as much puzzled as we."

So then, these so-called friends of mine had been canvassing my movements and rending my reputation between them, a spiteful business all round. The fact of the matter was I hadn't a friend in the world. I turned on my heel and strode away. Now as I did so a familiar prompter whispered in my ear, "Don't be a fool. You are the spoilt child of Fortune." I spurned the voice. A pretty

thing, forsooth, I cried to myself, that a man should have to satisfy the curiosity of Tom, Dick and Harry before obeying the dictates of duty. If I had been in a position to ease the itch of their curiosity, why should I have done it? I was in the mood to gather up my few belongings at the "Joliffe Arms" and take my way back to Fullerton, never to return. At Fullerton there was the estate to look after. I was at least my own master. I would not brook this eternal curb the other fellows sought to impose upon me. As for the chief, of course I couldn't blame him. Whispered insinuations are the bane that causes half the world's troubles. Men are the most suspicious of animals. The best of them would sooner believe evil than good of a fellow man. We mortals are a petty breed. Where should I go now and what do? If I went back to the "Joliffe Arms" Tosh and Quodling would be there in the evening and the same interminable wrangle would begin all over again. There were men I had met in London who would have drowned their troubles in the flowing bowl—gone home and got gloriously drunk, in other words. That is surely a coward's way out of a difficulty: "O that men should put an enemy into their mouths to steal away their brains!" As for me, I would face the music and retain my sane senses.

Arrived back at the "Joliffe Arms" I stormed and raved it out to myself. Margarita was not worth all this fuss. Tosh and Quodling were good enough fellows in their way. We had been intimate in the past. Had they been true friends they would have stuck to me through good report and bad. They would not have been the first to spread scandalous stories based upon their own surmises. They would at least have given me the benefit of the doubt. It was clear that we couldn't go back to our old footing. The curse of wry words is that the world can never be the same place again after they have been uttered. I had broken with the past. I should have to strike out a fresh channel of interest and regard. My present frame of mind was too disturbed to settle to anything so commonplace as current work. I would tramp to the Down top and wrestle it out there.

As I ascended the road by Gatton Park, bitterness held possession of my heart. Some cynic has chuckled over the fact that this earth of ours is but a satellite to a

fifth-rate star. We, the midges who buzz our little lives out upon it, cannot, it seems, even exercise the gift of charity. We must belittle and sting our fellow midges.

Now it is a singular circumstance that, as I mounted the hill and imbibed great draughts of the cool nectar of spring air, my ferocious mood began to take wings and fly away. All surely was not lost. When I was enabled by the march of events to reveal what had really happened there would doubtless come a reaction, a regrouping under the kaleidoscope. The gossipmongers would have to confess their gratuitous mischief-making.

Anon I stood on the summit of the Down. All the world now knows the view from that coign of vantage. Cobbett has pronounced it the finest on earth. As I gazed across the Weald to the misty outline of the South Downs our famous Sussex landmark, Chanctonbury Ring, loomed up. Away to the west Leith Hill stood out majestically. At my feet was the Vale of Holmesdale and eastward the Kentish plain. What is the standard by which we gauge the beauty of a landscape? If it be that of a sweet companionable earth, the habitation of men, then I say boldly our Reigate peak may brave comparison with the snow ridges and silent splendour of any mountain height. A wisp of blue smoke from a yeoman's cottage tells its own tale. In spite of that sorry procession which I had witnessed in Whitehall but yesterday, who does not know a score of cottage homes which are not only picturesque without but beautiful within? Why I myself had lived in such a home and I declare that at that very moment it ranked higher with me than Fullerton Park. As I drank in the familiar beauty of the panorama, parks and churches and wooded knolls and the broad acres which in their season would glow with the gold of harvest, the sorry fancies of the morning took flight. I was merely a novice in the game of life. I wheeled about and tracked my way through the park back to the "Joliffe Arms."

"There's a gent inquirin' fer you, sir," was Host Compton's salutation, as I passed through the bar. "'E's bin waitin' 'alf an hour and is 'avin' a drop o' ale and a snack o' cold beef in the parlour."

Thither accordingly I followed him. "You are asking for me, I hear," I said.

"Mr. Joyce, I want a word with you," he replied. "I

come from Mr. Keys. We've got the Regent and I have to ask you to put a few things in a valise and ride off with me top speed, sir. If we're smart we shall nab the other gent clean and clever. Give him a day—aye, or half a day—and he may slip through our fingers. Get a meal, pack up, have your horse saddled and let's be off."

I surmised that there would be a crop of fresh gossip at my second disappearance, but that couldn't be helped. The duty of immediate action lay plain before me.

My new companion was a volatile talkative customer, and as we trotted side by side through the High Street of Reigate he told me about himself. He was known, it seems, as Constant Leo, as his friends were in the habit of reversing the order of his names. I called him Mr. Constant, at which he waxed merry. He wanted me to address him as Leo, but I stumbled at doing that, for if I had done so, I argued, I should have had to let him call me also by my Christian name. I did not quite appreciate a runner calling me Waterloo. He kept up a running fire of chatter, passing the time of day with everyone we met along the country lanes we traversed. His knowledge of our main roads was like that of a book. The faculty by which he was able to track his way almost amounted to genius, as I soon found out.

I told him he would have made a good Redskin trapper. Now I grew more accustomed to his physiognomy this high cheek boned, hatchet-faced man might veritably have come of that breed.

"The last job I was on on this road was a twister, sir," he said at length. "It was highway robbery and that's getting a deal scarcer than it used to be when I joined the force. Black Billy was the man I was after. He could change colour like a chameleon, was as cunning as a jay. The sport was almost like running down an old dog fox, who has given the hounds leg-bail a score of times before. I got wind of him at Dorking and nabbed my gentleman in an old tumbledown barn near Ockley—where the great battle was fought, you know, sir. It was as pretty a catch as ever I made. He'd stolen a goose from off the common—not the common from the goose like the nobs, as someone has said, sir. A stray feather or two and some tracks near a brookside skinned my eyes for me. I said to the lad with me: 'He's foxing

in the shed yonder sure as doomsday.' We fanned round like your friends the Redskins, then rushed in upon him. He showed fight and blazed away with a brace of pistols, but we had him all right. 'We've come to cook your goose for you, Billy,' says I, 'it'll save you a vast o' trouble, sonny.' Well, he took it like a sportsman—said we'd copped him fair and square. He told me he'd have feathered our nests all round if we'd but have given him a dog's chance to slip the noose, but with me on the job he knew that lay was no good. Poor old Billy, he did his rope dance like a Briton—game to the last." When we reached Dorking he turned to me and said: "Now we're going to follow the Stane Street, sir. You railway chaps fancy yourselves. Why, you're mugs to the Romans who laid out this road, sir. How they did it God knows. They nipped over the shoulder of the South Downs just at the right spot. Then they struck as near a bee line as makes no odds for this place, just easing the corner by Leith Hill to get away from the bad ground there. Lord! how I should have liked to see 'em on the march. I sometimes wish I could get out to Botany Bay and have a run up country after the kangaroos. It must be pretty much the same sort of game as the Romans played. They rubbed the fur of those old Britons up the wrong way—Boadishia and that sort of thing was a bit too rough, distinctly so," he added musingly. "How does it go, Mr. Joyce? You ought to know, sir. I learnt the lines at school—mighty fine lines, fine as I've ever heard, sir.

' Rome, for Empire far renown'd,
Tramples on a thousand states;
Soon her pride shall kiss the ground'—

"Umpty-ump—something ending in gates."

"'Hark! the Gaul is at her gates,'" I repeated.

"Bravo, that's it—glad you remembered it, sir. The gall and wormwood is at her gates, eh?"

"How far are we going to-day?" I asked Constant.

"We must fetch Chichester to-night," he replied. "It'll mean rattling our nags a bit, but we must push on and get there. I can read Mr. Fox's little plan, sir, plain as the nose on your face. Down beyond Chichester there's a wild bit of country and he'll try to squat there, like a mallard in a dyke, until he can get some coaster or fisherman to slip him across Channel. Then he'll show a clean

pair of heels—come out as a Spanish don very likely, or pose as an Irish patriot. It's as silly a trick as any man can try. In those villages they know the appearance of every blackbeetle and cockroach in the parish. As for a foreign body hiding in one of these places he's simply walking into the lion's den to try it on. The city's the place. I wonder at an old hand like him not reckonizing that. The fact is that's how I've got wind of where his earth is likely to be, but delays are dangerous; he's slippery as an eel, silent as the grave. You may beat the covert within half a dozen yards of him and my gentleman will lie as mute as an alligator."

Beguiled by a flood of talk such as this, the day spun on. We pulled up at Pulborough for a draught and snack and my companion pointed out the famous artificial mound near the church, where the Roman fort stood when this route was one of their main arteries of communication. Soon Amberley Castle hove in view in the distance. Here and there we saw a heron from the Parham woods winging its cumbrous flight or standing still as a mute at a funeral, until the chance of spearing some hapless fish by a lightning stroke arose. The light was dimming a bit when we wheeled away to the west beyond the valley. Soon we were climbing the Downside. The vast canopy of impending twilight appeared to lift as we ascended. We put our horses to their best pace until we reached the old monastic ruins, which stand as a mute testimony of ancient faith in love defying the cruel hand of time to cancel the bonds of Nature. Lights were beginning to twinkle as we clattered at last into the medieval city of Chichester, led our nags into the stables of the "Dolphin," handed them to an ostler and strode to the inn bar to order dinner. It was not long before Constant was out again in the stable to see the horses properly tended.

"I've known rascally ostlers steal the oats from a hard-pressed beast after a heavy day's going," quoth he. "One such rascal I served with his deserts only last week. I made him bring a fresh measure of oats, then a pail of water—which went into the manger—then a second pail—which went over him. He swore by all the saints in the calendar he'd have my blood, but, when he heard who he was talking to, my gentleman grew wondrous civil all of a sudden."

CHAPTER XVIII

THIS was the first time I had enjoyed the cheery hospitality of the "Dolphin" and the attentions of William the waiter. My companion smiled a little wanly when I told him so.

"Lord! how I wish it was my first visit," said he. "I've been up and down this corner of the earth long years like the old gent of Scripture. The fizz has gone out of it all for me. It is to me like this bottle of cham would be to-morrow if we left the cork out. Don't neglect the first fizz of life, Mr. Joyce. There's nothing half so sweet, sir. Well, here's to you, sir, and success to both of us." He dropped his voice. "May we have our man by the leg this time to-morrow."

William fussed up to our table. "Hope you liked the soup, gents," quoth he. "You know the saying, gents. Arndel mullet, Chichester lobster, Shelsey cockle and Amerley trout. Take my tip, gents. 'Ave the trout and the lobsters."

"William the Conqueror was a muddler to you, Will," cried Constant. "You give us the best dinner you can compass, my boy. We leave the job in your hands."

Thus we feasted royally and the wine and viands mellowed us mightily. William cunningly hinted about a thick slice out of a three-year-old Southdown leg. Then he brought us an invention of their chef in the matter of sweets, a custard and lemon cheesecake that melted in the mouth. We rounded off the meal with cheese from the uplands, butter from the lowlands, the crust of a cottage loaf and a glass of '15 port.

"William," said Constant, "you've brought us a meal fit for kings and emperors."

"I thought you was a bit of a connooser, Mr. Leo, sir," replied William. "This gent I've never had the

honour of serving before. 'Ope to do it 'eaps and 'eaps of times yet, sir."

"Know Fullerton Park?" queried Constant.

"Rayther, sir," said William.

"This gentleman *is* Fullerton Park," the runner told him.

"You don't say so," replied William, retiring with becoming awe.

We had fresh horses in the morning and sallied forth in the early dawn. Overnight my companion kept his counsel as to our movements, but at starting he said we would follow a faint clue down Sidlesham way. That track we were setting out for was, I soon found, a perfect paradise of birds. It did not take us long to strike across some marshy ground to a high road running south. The spire of Chichester Cathedral seemed to have the faculty, often revealed in a picture, wherein the eyes of the figure painted watch us from whatever vantage spot we look at its portraiture. As we wound our way first to the east, then to the south, there was the familiar figure pointing stilly to the heaven of heavens. The larks had learnt its message, for they soared in cloudland, chanting their divine song on the threshold of the azure canopy over our heads. We caught sight of an osprey winging high aloft, doubtless with some hapless fish wriggling in his hold. I wondered what the sensations of the fish must be, as he gasped his life out on so strange a voyage through the ocean of air. Probably both bird and fish were mere automata, I conjectured.

At the turnpike, where the road forks south-west and south-east, Constant spent a couple of minutes in the lodge.

"The scent is uncommon faint," said he. "We are like a blind nigger hunting for a black hat that most likely isn't there at all. I've a mighty good mind to wheel about and strike along the high road. Our gent's not going west, that I know. He's certain too to stick to the sea board. It's a foreign bolt he's after. He's either lying mute in one of these villages ahead of us or he's off for Littlehampton or Shoreham. I don't fancy he'd be fool enough to linger about Pagham. The man knows the Regent is copped, you bet. That means for him, get underground at lightning speed, or be sent there when we runners choose.

He's like a fox hard-pressed." He paused. " We'll push on to Sidlesham, I think, and clear up this rent in the net, in case my gentleman should try to double back through it and so get to Emsworth or Portsmouth."

So we put spurs to our horses and after a few miles' gallop a shimmering inland sea loomed up. There was a cosy hamlet beside it, the tiled roofs of a vast mill dreaming quaintly in view on this morning of early spring. So placid was the scene that the water wheels might have been groaning at their task ever since Harold set out on his fatal voyage from Bosham yonder. As we reined up there fell upon our ears the subtle message of the flocks of ringed dotterel, for ever skimming on the border of the salt-estranging sea. We heard the cart-wheel creak of the guillemot, the prolonged whimper of the titterel wailed in our ears and the melancholy cry of the peewit. Is there any chorus to which the attuned ear returns with keener zest? In the din and dust of the great city I have heard the skylark's note with rapture; there has the dirge of the shore birds been wafted to me on the inner ear.

The miller came out at the clatter of our horses' hoofs.

" 'Morning, Stone," sang out Constant. " You remember me, I daresay. We broke up the Earnley gang together, you and I, five years ago come Midsummer. Don't you recollect? "

" Aye! aye! aye! " responded the miller with alacrity. " A' coorse, a' coorse. Well, Mus Leo, zur, whoam be you arter now, zur, if I may ma-ake so bold? "

" Anyone been down this way fishing lately, Stone? "

" Ony the sodjer gent, Mus Leo. Fine chap 'e were too. Heels? Lor' love yer, zur, 'e 'ad 'em out b' the peck. 'E were a chap for killing, 'e were, but 'is 'and worritted 'im, you know. 'E couldn't 'aul same as a two-handed man can."

" How was that, then? " asked Constant.

" Oh! 'e'd bin out there at the Wars and 'alf 'is left 'and were shore awa-ay loike. 'Owsonever, I never see sech a mush o' fesh as 'e'd bring 'ome. Why some da-ays 'e must 'a 'ad pretty nigh 'and to a seam o' flounders an' fry."

" Who did he go out with? " inquired Constant.

" Wi' Mus Crockham. I let 'en off a morte o' times

and Mus Montgomery 'e giv 'en a crownd every time I did 'en. I took the fesh on 'en at a figger that mor'n paid fer the da-ay's outing most da-ays."

"Is Crockham about?" asked Constant.

"Noa," said the miller. "'E's got a touch o' Old Lawrence to-dee. That be his pla-ace down by the ripe yonner."

"Thank you, Stone," replied Constant. "Crockham may put me on the track I'm after."

We tethered our horses to the mill porch, sauntered off and entered the hovel in which the amphibious miller's man lived—mud floors, a leaky roof, such quarters as no human being should inhabit in a civilized country.

"Good-day, Crockham."

"Good-da-ay, zur," replied the man, lying on a rough pallet bed. He was in the bright-eyed stage of fever following a bout of ague. I knew the symptoms well, for I had seen them heaps of times at Newhaven.

"Mr. Stone tells me you've been fishing lately," said Constant.

"Yessir, I 'ave," replied Crockham. "Wi' a furrin gent—a nice easy-spoken chap 'e were too. You wouldn't 'a put 'en down fer a furriner at all."

"He lined your pockets for you pretty well, I daresay," quoth Constant.

"Mus Stone, 'e never paid me when I were afloat, y' know, zur," replied Crockham cautiously. "Mus Montgomery sez to me one da-ay, 'e sez, 'What I should loike,' 'e sez, ' 'ud be fer to be blowed out to sea,' 'e sez, 'right awa-ay to Jersey or France,' 'e sez. 'You mus' be joaking, zur,' I sez to 'en. 'Noa, I baint,' 'e sez. 'You do-ant know,' 'e sez, ' 'ow it comes upon yer when ye've bin foighting i' furrin pa-arts and 'ow ye wants to get ba-ack to 'en. Whoy,' 'e sez, 'I want 'en so badly,' 'e sez, 'I'd fill ye a pint pot wi' go-olden guineas, if so be ye could get jest the right slant o' wind to work 'en for me,' 'e sez. 'What?' I sez to 'e, 'Me goo awa-ay fro my vance?' I sez. 'Whoy, Mus Montgomery,' I sez, 'my mistus 'ud think me drownded fer good an' all. Noa, noa,' I sez, 'you be a good fren',' I sez, 'an' I loikes 'e well enough,' I sez, 'but that,' I sez, 'is jest one peg too much to scerew 'en up to.'"

"He's left here now, I suppose?" said Constant casually.

"What moight you be askin' me fer?" queried the countryman, sitting up and eyeing us curiously.

"Oh! it's only this," Constant told him. "Mr. Montgomorency and I have had a bargain on together and there's something due to him which I should be glad to pay him, if I only knew where he was."

"Oh! that's 'en, is it?" answered Crockham. "Well, ef so be it's to do 'en a good turn I'll tell 'ee. 'E told me 'e must get ba-ack to France b' the fift o' nex' month. There were money waitin' fer 'en there. 'Is plan were to git over to Little'ampton. Ef 'e couldn't find a tramp or anything fer a French poort there, 'e were arter ma-aking Shore'am and arter that praps New'aven. 'E said 'is business were that nippy that it fair ma-ade a picker on 'en."

"Did he tell you how he meant to get to Shoreham?" asked Constant offhand.

"'E took the track to Bognor threw the dykes and then I guess 'e'd goo Middleton wa-ay, wouldn't 'e?"

"I daresay he would," replied Constant. "Thank you, Mr. Crockham. I hope you'll soon be yourself 'again. We'll get on, Mr. Joyce, I think."

So we struck across a rough country track, soon leaving the shallow waters of Pagham behind.

"Someone will bank off that place some day," said Constant. "Then it'll be good-bye to the swarms of sea-birds that infest it and good-bye too to a lot of the ague. That's another of its crops. Corn is commonplace stuff, but it's better than divers by sea and fever fits by land. All this coast is going fast as hot cakes. The old bishop's park, I'm told, lies under the sea a couple of miles out yonder. Well, thank God, somebody else has to settle these questions, not me. It's enough for me if I can lay a brace of scoundrels by the heels a week. How do you like your new job, Mr. Joyce? Come and join us at the Yard, sir. We want smart young fellows like you. The fact is the old hands are getting too old and the youngsters are not coming on that'll take their places. Unless a man has real love of his job he'll never make a first-rate runner. Now I tell you this work has a charm for me. I am stalking game all the time. Sometimes it's dangerous game, more often than not you half wish the poor rascals could slip through your fingers and get away. But then the rigour of the game lays hold of you. For the honour

of the Force you have to train all your guns on the one spot. Is there any satisfaction greater than when you have made your dispositions and planted your pickets and you close in step by step. The scoundrel you're after is as cute a dog as you may be. It's wit against wit, Greek against Greek. Then when you're almost giving up the job in despair there comes a shock. He's nibbling the bait. Now for a steady hand and all the coolness you can muster. An hour or two later—hooray! he's gorged the bait. He's wriggling like the Devil. Steady, boys, steady; don't lose your heads. Keep cool. Give him a trifle of line and play him. Then put the screw on gently and so by sharps and flats you handle your fish and land him at last. You don't wish the villain ill. It's your job, and a queer one at that, to cop him. I tell you frankly, I believe half these gentry are mere and sheer lunatics. The old talk of possession by the Devil is ridiculed nowadays, but it fits the case. Half the criminals are fools of the first water at the critical moment. In the old days they gave them the benefit of the doubt—they hung 'em out of hand. Perhaps it was the best thing after all, not only for the criminal but for the State. There are men—shoals of them—we have it on the highest authority, Mr. Joyce, of whom we may say it were better for those men that they had never been born. But they have been born, sir, all the same," added he with a laugh, "and you and I have the job of stopping their earths and setting the hounds to close quarters on them. Let's only hope we may nobble this chap's brush fair and square, Mr. Joyce."

"You're a philosopher, Mr. Constant," said I.

"So would you or any man be, sir, who had the least scrap of the milk of human kindness in him, facing the problems we crime-hunters have to tackle. I am for ever learning that I know nothing at all of the windings and twistings of the instincts of the men whose trails we track. Sometimes one asks—are these men sane? are they puppets pulled by a hand behind the scenes?"

The day was a glorious foretaste of early summer. The sky was an enchanting blue, dappled with patches of cirrus cloud. On the right hand the plain of the sea, to the left the misty Downs were as a vision of the perennial forces moulding the destinies of men. Somehow those early tramps of ours, when our mother propounded her

idea of a world lapped in universal good intent, came very close to me, as we followed our wavering track near the sea shore.

“ To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour,”

was the twilight fantasy of a poet of this very quarter ; it was noonday sobriety to our mother.

Of the multitude of the bird inhabitants of this sea plain I have already spoken. Here and there we passed a hurdle enclosure of ewes and lambs, cunningly bred Southdowns. The unkempt solitary shepherd watching them would eye us curiously, answering our salutations in sturdy Saxon, his dog standing mutely at attention. At one spot we made a detour of a few hundred yards inland and passed close to a cosy farmhouse. Before us lay a scattered hamlet.

“ That’s Bognor,” quoth Constant. “ Uncommon pleased with itself, it is, sir, since old Sir Richard Hotham got his Act of Parliament to turn it into a genteel watering place for the nobility and gentry. No common folk need apply, you know. That was his motto. Hothampton he wanted to call the place. It was little more than a cluster of smugglers’ huts before the county folk took it up. I suppose your iron tracks are going to turn the world upside down here as elsewhere, Mr. Joyce. City people will swarm into the country, country people into the towns and England will be just a stirabout of travellers. I am the last man to quarrel with quick ways of getting about. I should like to live in a portmanteau and follow in the wake of the Wandering Jew.”

We trotted unostentatiously into the outskirts of the village and left our horses at the New Inn. There we stepped into the bar for a glass of the ale for which it was famous. My companion began his cross-examination innocently enough by talk of the lambing season. It was a Thursday and market day. The landlord gave back little but grunting monosyllables.

“ You be furriners, bain’t you, gents ? ” he queried at length.

“ Not we,” replied Constant. “ This gentleman is

Sussex to the marrow of his bones—comes from Newhaven way."

"Do he though?" replied Boniface with suddenly aroused interest.

"I suppose you get all sorts and conditions down here now, don't you, landlord? 'Why, boys, why, should we be melancholy, boys?'" Constant chanted under his breath. "That used to be the song everybody sang in my young days," he added. "That's a wonderful fine glass of ale of yours, landlord. Give us another."

"Be you in the Army, sir?" asked the landlord curtly as he drew a fresh glass.

"Have you seen service?" parried Constant.

"Hem-a-bit, sir."

"You don't like the redcoats, then?" said Constant casually.

"They be regler tarrifiers," responded the landlord. "I've 'ad one on 'em 'ere—a shirky Mynheer Closh 'e were."

"What's he been after?" asked Constant, holding his ale up to the light. "Your ale's as clear as if it flowed out of a mountain beck, Mr. Warter," he added.

"Bin arter?" said the landlord gruffly. "Bin arter, sez you. 'E's bin arter me, dang 'im. Come 'ere for one night, 'e did, stopped fer fowerteen. Nothin' weren't good enough fer 'im. 'E must eat and drink o' the best—knowed Boney and the Dook—picksome as you please, me gentleman were, rumbustical as if 'e'd been the King 'isself. Give me a bit o' pa-aper i'stead o' cash when 'is toime were up. I sez to 'en, 'This 'ere pa-aper ain't no mossel o' good to me,' I sez. 'Why,' sez 'e, 'you ta-ake 'en an' 'and 'en to Dendy an' Co. an' they'll give 'ee golden sovereigns fer 'en,' 'e sez. Well, I sends 'en up to Chichester to Dendy an' Co. an' ba-ack 'en comes, shure enough. Jest wa-aste pa-aper, I rackon."

"Let's have a look at that paper of yours," sang out Constant alertly. The landlord bustled off to an inner parlour and came back with a bank draft in due form for £11 15s. od. The signature was Adolphus Bartlett. It was an order on Masterman & Co. to pay Mr. Jeremiah Warter the sum named on demand. Across it was scrawled "No A/c."

"Fower pun ten the scoondrel 'a' i' sovereigns, beside

'is lodgin' an' keep an' a pony shay to ta-ake 'en t' Arndel,' rapped out Warter.

"Put me on the track of that man and you shall have your money back and £5 on the top of it, if I catch him," said Constant, holding out his hand. The landlord took it somewhat dubiously, as if a fresh trap were to be set for him. Constant leant over the bar and whispered: "That man's wanted and I'm after him with a warrant."

"'Eney," shouted the landlord, going to the door of the inn. "You ride along o' these 'ere gents an' show 'em the spot where that fox got to hearth las' week—'im you druv to Arndel."

"'E?" quoth the ostler with great knowingness. "I'll be ready in a bra-ace o' sha-akes, zur," he added.

"'Ave a snack, gents, afore y' goo," the landlord interposed. "It's 'ungry hair this marnin' fer shure."

So nothing loth we sat down to a hurried onslaught on a round of cold beef. The ostler leading our horses to the door, we mounted, after paying the lawing and impressing on Host Warter that he must be as dumb as an oyster about our errand. We cantered away along the coast line to a little village called Middleton and then struck to the north. Constant was not long in worming out of our companion the story of the guest "as zerved 'is measter wi' sech sower sorce," as he put it.

"We'll get level with him yet," Constant told him.

As we ascended the Downside, leaving the flat country, a wide panorama of river and sea lay beneath us. Soon the grey old castle of Arundel and the little town straggling up the hill in its rear hove in sight.

"We are getting out of the ague country now, I reckon," said Constant.

"Ah! there do be a bit o' th' zhakin' zickness abaout, come ploughin' toime," replied 'Eney, "but Law! 'tis easy cured, surelye."

"How would you set about it?" I asked. Ague hovered on the verge of our lives pretty constantly at New-haven.

"Ye goo i' th' marnin' and ta-ake the noo-spun spoiders' webs. Ma-ake they into a ball an' swaller it. Yer ague 'ull goo fast enough." That was the ostler's prescription.

The scent of our quarry must, we argued, be pretty warm. On the way we had extracted from the ostler

beyond question the identification we sought. The man was wont to keep a glove on his left hand, but one morning, having thoughtlessly slipped off his glove, his mutilation and loss of fingers told their own tale.

On arrival at Arundel we were at one stride back in a medieval town. After putting up our horses at the Norfolk Hotel we strolled through the streets, streets bearing the foreign impress at every twist.

"That be 'en," quoth 'Enery, *sotto voce*, as we passed a gloomy old mansion standing back from the road and surrounded by a wilderness of mangy shrubs. Constant said he had a thirst come upon him suddenly and to quench it we promptly adjourned to a petty beerhouse at the corner—the "Watchman's Rattle" by name.

"Toothful o' Geneva," was 'Enery's response to the standard leading question of the moment. Constant had a nip of brandy; I stuck to Southdown ale.

"Is the Duke at home?" asked Constant.

"Noa, 'e tain't, but 'er Gra-ace be, I rackon," the landlord added with a grin. "An' 'ow be Mus Warter, 'Enery?" he went on, turning to our riding companion.

"'E's jest bin jostled b' a howdacious keymer," replied 'Enery. "I bowt 'en to Arndel la-ast Mondee—druv me gent in our shay."

"Oh, 'im," said the landlord, "I 'eard all abaout 'e."

"Which way did he go from here?" asked Constant carelessly.

"Parham way, so I be told," was the reply. "The Park be jest a ma-aze o' fuzz and 'olt. It were i' th' 'assocks near Bessie's Hoak that the runners chucked the 'ciseman's body to the jack an' heels i' th' gurt pond. Lor! what a elligence pla-ace it were, till my lard took th' roa-ads i hand. I mind 'ow two o' th' keepers foughten anewst the winders o' th' 'ouse and 'e 'as killed th' other were 'unged at 'Orsham fer the job. 'Is old mother boughten ti' body fro th' 'angman and showed 'un at saxpence a 'ead." Constant was sipping his brandy and let the host run on.

"Did you see this foreigner when he was in Arundel?" he asked.

"See 'en?" he replied, "us all seed 'en—a fine upstanding zort o' man 'e were. Come in and took 'is glass wi' th' best."

"Did he say which way he was bound for?" asked Constant.

"Not 'e," the landlord said, "but 'e were all the time to and through, everlastin' grizzlin' that our climut were ony fit fer polar bears and sich, whereas i' furrin pa-arts, sez 'e, it were always zummer. 'Ain't it awmost a pity as you didn't stop in that 'ere wonderful climut?' sez I to 'e. 'But,' I sez, 'seems to me,' I sez, the gruntlers as can plea-ase theirselves allus comes ba-ack to old Eng-land all th' sa-ame.'"

"You never said a truer word, Mr. Salt," Constant interjected. "The world's free to all. If these anti-British Britons despise the old country why in the Devil's name don't they pitch their tent in the land of promise they talk so much about? I daresay we poor mean-spirited cusses could manage to carry on without 'em."

"Amen to that, zur," replied the landlord.

Our liquor drunk, we departed.

"Can you ride with us Parham way?" asked Constant of 'Eney.

"Surelye I can, zur," he answered. "Taint everyone as knows his wa-ay threw the wilderness like. I've knowd postilions lose the track an' wander fer miles like a squerrel in a ca-age i' they woods."

A meal dispatched, we three were off again. We climbed the bluff overlooking Amberley Castle. At our feet lay a glorious panorama. Constant was bent on pushing on. He was beginning to be uneasy lest the quarry we were after might not already have slipped through the net somewhere and should thus give us leg-bail in the end. The noble trees of Parham Park below us made up a pageant of enchantment. Thither the colony of herons had flitted when their quarters were disturbed at Michelgrove. We descended the rough slopes of the bluffs and dropped into the plain. We crossed the river at Greatham bridge and so made our way to the Park. Not a soul crossed our path for miles. At length we happed upon a knot of men clearing up a spot where trees had been felled in the Fall. Constant put them through the mill of cross-examination cleverly enough. A furriner had passed that way three days afore but "'e 'adn't 'ardly nothin' to say to nobody."

"We'll hustle on to Shoreham," Constant mused. "There's no chance of Mr. Fox doubling back. He's

burnt his boats like a fool. He must go on and knows by now that the trail after him is hot. He's bound to guess that someone must be on his track."

He told 'Eney that when we reached the Worthing Gap he ('Eney) might wheel down to the sea and find his way right about home. Constant commissioned him to tell Host Warter that we were hard on the slot and would have the man who had done him brown as surely as sunrise would come to-morrow. The largesse bestowed when we bade 'Eney adieu made that staunch retainer our sworn ally for life.

I have no need to describe the rest of our route, for all the world knows it now. Suffice it to say that, as the shortlived daylight waned, we twain cantered within hail of the port of New Shoreham. Its grand old church loomed up on the starboard hand. The place was but a petty port with fifteen hundred seafaring folk clustered about it. It ought not to take us long to riddle out of this ant-heap community the one man we were after. We put up at the "Stranded Ketch," a dirty little beerhouse, and Constant's first aim was, himself in hiding, to find out how the land lay. Instinct told him that he was getting near his goal. He was as an old hound pointing at the quarry lying ambushed.

By his desire I sat in a tiny parlour behind the bar whilst he went to prospect. We had already ordered dinner and seen the horses properly looked to. When Constant returned to me it was with the manner of one mightily pleased with himself and he whispered in jerks: "Game of blindman's buff—getting hot, sir." A few minutes later we sat down to a square meal. A draught of Tipper ale brought me a touch of nostalgia. I saw afresh the ruddy faces of the brewer's men, the huge upstanding horses stamping in the brewery yard and to my ears came the clatter and rattle of the busy hive of folk who had rendered our town famous. The cheery bustle of Mus Tipper, his wise saws and modern instances, his quips and jests and the scraps of old Hudibras for ever on his lips had grown into myth and legend in my day. But, nevertheless, he seemed a veritable inhabitant of Newhaven still, so often were his sayings on men's tongues.

Constant helped himself from a bottle of spirits which, as he no doubt truly said, had surely never paid toll to

the King. After our meal, he advised me to lie low and not take part in the parliament of broad seesaw Sussex hubbub going on a few yards away. He said I should no doubt find something to amuse me while he himself had to go out on a visit to a friend.

His words came true for, in the ingle of the parlour, I feasted on three letters. They did not embody profound sentiment and all three together would not have filled a single page of notepaper. The first said Tom would be leaving this and returning to me the copy of "The Favourite Village," "which I have read with many happy thoughts." The next expressed the hope that I should be up at the house early next evening, as there was going to be a little carpet dance. The third said: "I found that epitaph we were talking about at supper last night. It is at Icklesham and runs:

' God takes the good—too good on earth to stay,
And leaves the bad—too bad to take away.'

The wording of the Brighton fisherman's chant when they cast their nets is this:

' God sends thousands, one, two, and three,
Some by their heads, some by their tails,
God sends thousands and never fails.' "

Those three scraps of Margarita's handwriting were the all in all I possessed. If anyone had tried to wrest my treasure from me I would willingly have met him with seconds at daybreak. In odd moments this script of hers was wont to be pulled forth and read and read again with ever-increasing wonder and delight. I called to mind the silly squabble which had sent me packing from her presence. I should have been wiser and quite safe—so I now told myself—to have given Mr. Wheatley a little of my confidence. However, I had acted for the best, as I thought it to be at the time. As for the present, I had a marvellous disposition to cry. How easily things go wrong and afterwards, perhaps for ever, the blue smoke stealing up from amidst ancestral oaks is no longer a beacon of homecoming delight but the reek of alien fires that breed but heartache and regret. As for me at this moment, was I not drifting derelict on a lee shore? Margarita and I had parted never to meet again on the old footing. The regard which seemed about to overshadow our lives as a

rock in a weary land had after all proved but a mere Jonah's gourd, withering in a night. In spite of the despair of it all I felt somehow nearer to Margarita as I sat in the parlour of the "Stranded Ketch" than I had ever felt before. The coals glowing in the grate had fallen into fantastic shapes. There sure enough gleamed those eyes of faith and candour, the outline of the one face in the whole world which was as a lodestar to my dreams. A troubled wave of loyalty and self-pity and dim foreboding passed over my whole being. One word—faith—became intimate reality to me as I dreamed away the ticks of the clock half in dread, half in the subtle joy of suffering. It was the faith symbolized by the grain of mustard seed, not that which schoolmen wrap in wordy screeds. Outside the hollow boom of the waves rolling up the shingle bank came home to me as a muffled roar. I mused how gladly would I adventure forth to pluck the life I worshipped from peril at sea, not setting my life at a pin's fee should emergency call.

As I mused, the fire burned, and in the midst of my self-torturing reverie the door swung open and Constant re-entered. He called for a bottle of '15 port, charged his pipe and, when the slatternly wench who tended on us had withdrawn, lit up and puffed in infinite content. Then he went to the door, peeped forth to see that the coast was clear and came back. Dropping his voice, he said: "We shall have our man for sure at daybreak. I went to see Mr. Ballance, a magistrate. We have had the village constable up to his house and found out all I wanted to know. At the first streak of dawn you and I, Toss the constable and two trusty farmhands, with Mr. Ballance himself, will steal out, surround the earth and draw the badger. Here's luck to us all, Mr. Joyce. See that your pistol is all right, for, mark my words, there'll be a bit of a tussle when it comes to the actual nab. Now we've had a long day and shall have to be up betimes in the morning, so we had better turn in. I'll give you a call and mind you be out in a jiffy when you get it."

CHAPTER XIX

THE night was boisterous without. What with the coming excitement of the morrow, the sad thoughts which had flitted through my brain like the ghostly procession before the eyes of Macbeth, I tossed and tumbled in the dark for awhile. Not for long, however. I was young, my wits were agile, I had been riding days on end. Constant's rattle at my door could not, I thought, have come five minutes after we turned in. Nevertheless, I was all alertness and scrambled out of bed in a trice. As I groped my way downstairs Constant came out of his room. The fire was still burning in the kitchen grate. He made it up, boiled some water and we had a cup of strong coffee apiece before lighting our pipes. Without there was a faint tinge of sunrise stealing over the sea. We heard steps outside and came out together into the balm of a starlit morning. A sleepless ostler accosted us.

"You be early birds, gents," was his salutation.

"Early worms to be snapped up by the birds," responded Constant cheerily.

Just then four figures loomed silently up—those of Ballance the magistrate, his two men and Toss the constable.

"'Morning, Robert," quoth Ballance to the ostler. "We shan't be long, I reckon." The ostler scratched his head. "Is it Dark Bill an' 'is lot you be arter, sir?" he asked. Evidently Dark Bill was a friend of his.

"We shan't be long," Mr. Ballance reiterated and so we tramped away. It was a weird sensation as we six moved off in silence. It reminded me of a scene on the stage, save that in the mimic traffic behind the foot lights dawn of necessity comes on too quickly. Every shed and cottage within a hundred yards of us was silhouetted in grey half-tones. When the rim of the sun began to climb above the waters the world would be flooded with light as by miracle. Our track lay over rimy turf and we

were making for the marge of a sheet of water amid a wilderness of pebbles—vast bastions of grey shingle with here and there patches of tamarisk growing on their flanks at random. I noted that one of the labourers carried a murderous ash cudgel, the other an ancient shotgun, which looked as if it might deal death to the user. The constable had his baton out, the other three of us were armed with pistols. After ten minutes' deliberate advance we wheeled slightly to the south. Our objective was plainly enough an isolated shed down by the water's edge. It was a low thatched building with no entrance visible on the land side.

As we approached it Constant made signs that our party should fan out in skirmishing order. He, Mr. Ballance and I were in the centre of the line, the others formed the wings. Now that our tread was on the loose shingle its sound could not be muffled. We therefore put on speed. I was the first to swing round the sea front of the cabin and thus approached the entrance ahead of the rest of the party. The door was ajar. I pushed it open and stepped in. On a rough pallet in the corner of the shed a man was stretched. He had evidently just awoke from sleep, for he was starting up. His figure resembled that of a wild beast when the hunters burst in upon its lair. In the gathering light I recognized at a glance that the man before me—hunted and harried in his blind efforts to escape from the enmeshing net—was he who had called himself Major Markland.

"Give in," I cried. "It's useless to put up a fight."

Markland rose with a curse and in his snarling lip and fierce eye was depicted the panther at bay. I still advanced, pistol in hand. Ballance and Constant had by this time entered the shed. Markland made one frantic movement of the right hand and there was a blinding flash. The dawning and the murmur of the sea, the wild contending emotions of men at strife, all things in Heaven and earth were blotted out.

* * * * *

Stellar darkness, no glimmer of dawn ; stellar blackness, gloom and the noise of rolling waters. I was passing to some bourne beyond the ken of mortal kenning. Human voices were mute, yet I heard the familiar music of waves

breaking on the shore, of waves contending in the hill country of the open sea. The spirit had sped beyond the portals of the flesh. I was disembodied ghost. Twinges of pain caught me in their grip. When a man has lost a leg he still feels sensation shooting through it. Was it thus with me? With me, I say, as if to the machine of the body were still linked the soul.

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A breath of air wafted from some garden of enchantment. The sound of a lark singing shrilly in the heavens, the touch of familiar fingers. I opened my eyes. After all, then, the spirit had not fled. I was still a prisoner on earth. There towered the grand old cedar, the glory of our lawn at Fullerton. In dazed fashion it was borne in upon my sense that I was being tended by our mother. Surely I must be at home, I argued. I pondered on this possibility till soon oblivion descended. She carried me away as the Greek goddess rescued her warrior in a *mêlée*.

Once again the curtain lifted. I opened my eyes. The larks were chanting now and Victory had been painting my lips with a cordial. Its pungent odour and the thrill it sent to the heart opened my lips.

"What does all this mean?" I asked feebly.

"Keep quiet," whispered Victory, "there is a nightingale about the lawn."

My morning passed in April sun and gloom—now I was awake and curious, anon I lay out of tune and mute. By slow degrees the sun bursts grew longer. Curiosity waxed more insistent. Ere the shadows fell I learnt what all this coil portended. I had been hit by a bullet in the chest. Luckily it had glanced a bit and missed a lung. I was as weak as a rat. The bullet had been taken out. I must lie like a log until my loss of blood should be made good, until the wound began to heal. Markland had been pinioned. As I lay to all appearance dead: "Sorry the young fool's blood is on my head," he said.

Throughout the long watches of the night weird figures danced on wall and ceiling and there were unseen presences flitting in the room. Our mother and Victory came like shadows. Their every movement thrilled me with a sense of benediction. Sleep hovered at first in snatches, then sank down an overpowering stupor.

When I woke the sun was up and all the world was gay. The orchestra without had risen from a few faint notes to a long-drawn pæan. Our blackbirds and thrushes were at matins before the business of the day started. I wanted to get up and be out amongst them. Youth was beginning to reassert its sway. What was the use of lying there when beads of rime studded every blade of grass, the cuckoo called sleepily? I had lost a deal of blood and had been knocked sick and dizzy. It was a miracle—so said our old doctor, according to the approved formula of his clan—that I had escaped with my life. A decimal fraction of an inch to the right would have given me my quietus. I took his word for the fact. The bullet had not given me quietus and there seemed no cause for behaving as if it had. I lay and pondered. After all the hustle and travail of our days of hunting Cain a sense of accomplishment was abroad.

“From over the hills and far away, one is coming, my dear,” half sang our mother’s voice. She herself had a lightness of step, a singleness of eye that struck me almost as new possessions. The morning was divinely fair. “’Tis the bridal of the earth and sky,” whispered our mother, “almost as much as it used to be when we climbed Mount Caburn, you and I together.” Then she flitted from the room. A few minutes later she returned, but not alone. She brought in Margarita. Margarita held out her hand. I took it and held it unrebuked. The angry mood in which we had parted at the Grange had slipped away from her like an ill-fitting robe. She was silent and I too happy to speak. Our mother had gone. How long I held her hand unhidden I cannot say. It was Margarita who first found words.

“I was cruel, Waterloo. Forgive me.” Her voice was low and in her eyes the light was kindled. We both saw it.

“Ah, my dear,” I said, and that was all. How it came about I don’t know, but her barrier of maidenly reserve suddenly broke down and in a trice we twain were chattering the boy and girl language, the universal language since the dawn of human life upon earth.

“Number Three is for luck, Waterloo,” cooed Margarita in my ear. “The first time you saved my life in Gatton Park. The second time you were with us at Brighton after poor mother’s death and now——”

"Now you return the compliment and save my life," I said. And then the universal language began all over again. Our mother came back to us almost timidly at last.

"Have you heard the nightingale?" she asked. I turned to Margarita.

"Have we?" I asked in my turn and, at the little shadow of a jest, we all three laughed.

"I have been listening to him too," quoth our mother demurely. "We old folk are not going to give you a monopoly of his song. Mr. Hardy and I"—She stopped and went to the window and gazed out, with a little sigh that was half a sob. It was one of the signals she was wont to give when "peace reigned in her borders" as she put it. Our mother won her way into every heart by just such little intimate endearments.

"There is really no excuse for me to lie here," I say. "Podger will fuss about with his draughts and potions. They are all Paul Podgam and he knows it as well as we do."

Just then Dr. Podger was announced. He came in like a cat walking on hot bricks.

"The top of the morning to ye, Doctor," I cry. "We were just saying it's time to shake off dull sloth."

"All in its order, Mr. Joyce. You are my prisoner now," he replied. The doctor was quite frisky this morning. There was quicksilver in the air.

"Well," I reply, "if you don't unlock the door I shall escape by the window, and that's all about it."

"To tell the truth you owe your life to a miracle," he answered. We were going to have it all over again.

"Decimal 0-0-9 of an inch," I say. "Oh yes, I know that. I shall be wanted to give evidence against the unfortunate rascals who killed Mr. Storey in cold blood. They will send a subpoena to fetch me and I shall be forced to go, whether you like it or not." I glanced round. Margarita had disappeared. Our mother's question was: "How many days before he can get out, doctor?"

"If no unforeseen complications arise—here we are Tuesday—say next Monday," was his reply.

"All right," I announce, "after Monday I shall be out, anyhow." And so I was. Youth and days in the saddle and the universal language set me on my feet again. Podger said it was a record case, a lightning cure; he always said that. It pleased him to say it. It did not hurt

us. However, when it came to actual navigation down the stairs and out on to the lawn, my legs did not answer the helm too readily. I felt uncommonly shaky. If it had not been for Margarita's arm on one side, Victory's on the other and the chorus which went on between them I should have fared pretty badly.

Our much maligned spring was all smiles and tears now. To-morrow perhaps we should have hail and sleet. Never mind. To-day we could give ourselves up to jollity. So we three did after the first few groggy moments were over. By and by our mother joined us on the lawn. The April blood was dancing in her veins too that morning, for she chanted scraps of "Peebles to the Play."

" ' He whistlit and he pipit baith
To make her blith that meeting.
' My honey heart, how says the sang ? '
There sall be mirth at our meeting.' "

But the virginal glory of the day soon recalled our mother to Herrick, her first love.

" ' Fair daffodils, we weep to see,
You haste away so soon ;
As yet the early rising sun,
Has not attain'd his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run,
But to the even-song ;
And, having prayed together, we
Will go with you along.' "

Hours of dalliance were destined to be but an interlude. The trial of the murderers would have to be faced ere long. Work up and down the route of the coming railway claimed the energies of all pioneers like myself.

Arrived at Merstham, Tosh and Quodling were mutely apologetic. Phoebus was bursting with importance. The murder *dénouement* had worked out precisely on the lines he had anticipated from the first day. He was mysterious, recalling cryptic remarks which proved his prescience. "We've lagged 'em," that was the note he sounded at the Bar of the "Joliffe Arms," continually. Events were shaping fast. Armed with a warrant the police had searched the office of Cutting & Cute, and of Levi & Cohen. These gentry were uncommonly shy birds. They

had ventured very near the net criminal conspiracy. Whether the Law would actually be able to bag them time would show. The game of the entire gang was patent. The Fullerton and Nutfield estates were some of its pawns. What they were after was a big coup—that of getting a wide sweep of county properties into their grip. If the Railway Bill became law, these properties would appreciate in value and they would reap a rare harvest. On the other hand, if a Railway Act should be again postponed they hoped to be able to blackmail the landowners to a round tune, still keeping their grip on the lands, which could not run away.

It was becoming evident from the stubborn fight put up by some of the landowners and the hostile vested interests that the Act to enable the railway to be built would be successfully resisted for a time, but this fact did not for an instant slacken our keenness in laying out the best route for it. The fight was for delay, the end inevitable. Dorking had a population of some four thousand, Reigate of but sixteen hundred. Moreover the spongy Weald clay to be crossed over Earlswood Common was certain to prove a costly bar to progress in that direction. For these reasons one school of pioneers strongly advocated the planning of the line through the Leatherhead Gap. Those behind the scenes kept cool heads, however, and the chief never wavered from his scheme of piercing the Downs at Merstham.

It was not till after my return to duty that I ascertained how the land lay between Dick and Victory. Our proud beauty had refused his advances. Dick was wont to take even petty lets and checks to heart and this blow, which he regarded as final, cut him deeply.

“Love is the most selfish of all pastimes,” quoth Tosh, a hardened bachelor. “It is a species of midsummer madness.”

An engrossing interlude now sprang up for me. The murder trial was to come on before many weeks were over, and after that probably the twin trial for conspiracy would take place. During this interval of time, I, as a principal witness, had perforce to revisit my old quarters at the “Golden Cross” again and again. Conferences and the marshalling of evidence filled up the intervals. The Regent and Markland had secured the services of Mr. Serjeant Macready to defend them. The Crown had

briefed the first criminal leader of the day. In face of the evidence the result of the trial seemed foregone.

At length the day arrived. I took up my station in Court with trepidation. The slow progress of depriving a fellow creature of life by inches under the thrust and parry of skilled advocates was the most horrible experience I had ever endured. The Regent and Markland seated in the dock, loomed up before my eyes as the puppets of a ghastly nightmare. The Regent tried hard to assume his old air of nonchalant bluff. Markland on the other hand cowered, sullen as a wild beast, cowed under the lash. Their counsel strove by every artifice in his power to break down the evidence of Montmorency. He made great play of the man's real name being Dodge and, in his famous sledge hammer manner, sought to browbeat the witness by implying that he was but playing a part upon the stage. If Montmorency's evidence failed the case collapsed—that was self-evident. However, the actor stepped down from the witness box, though mauled, having carried conviction.

As I took my place to give evidence I heartily wished the roof of the building would collapse or some catastrophe end the proceedings for good and all. The ordeal set my heart thumping. The impassive voice of the judge steadied my nerves a bit and I acquitted myself on the whole creditably. All the witnesses save and except Montmorency were little more than supers. In his subsequent remarks, Serjeant Macready made much of the fact that, while Scotland Yard had raked over every conceivable damning incident to bolster up the case against the two men in the dock, the verdict rested on the credibility of one witness. He endeavoured to prove that the Regent on the date of the murder was in Bath, at which the Crown Advocate muttered, *sotto voce*, but audibly, "Gone to Bath." Serjeant Macready instantly seized upon and made capital of what he termed "his learned friend's unseemly interruption." The Regent's alibi was sworn to by two witnesses who, however, both turned out to be old jail birds. Markland, according to his advocate, was an innocent spectator of the proceedings that day, having no knowledge whatever of the matter. He had been dragged to Court and treated as a felon without a scintilla of justification.

While all this by-play was in progress I noticed Phœbus enter through the swing doors of the Court with an air of vast mystery, accompanied by a little wiry man of the gypsy type. I recognized this man as Smallbones, landlord of the Beehive Inn at Meadvale. Phœbus earnestly whispered to the Crown junior counsel, who in his turn passed his remarks on to the leader. New and unexpected evidence was thus stated by the prosecution to be forthcoming, and the result was that, at the judge's direction, Smallbones entered the witness box. It turned out that he had heard nothing of the case until that morning. Being in London he had been attracted to the Court merely by curiosity. He instantly recognized the two men in the dock as having entered his house for beer and spirits on the morning of the murder. He distinctly remembered the circumstances because they had come in immediately the shutters were taken down and the big man, he said, carried on as if he had a pocket full of gold.

This diversion disposed of the case. After all the formalities of speeches, summing-up and the verdict had been performed, the final stage was reached. That gruesome touch of medievalism—the donning of the black cap—being duly enacted, the judge sentenced both men to death and then retired to partake of a chop in his private room. Witnesses and spectators drifted out of court.

Compassion was stirring within me. Constant's philosophical speculations came back with insistence. Were these miserable murderers automata? Their lives were forfeit, but why had their lives been? Why? It was a hard question and their wretched fate hung about me like an atmosphere. Twenty-four hours later I was summoned to a fresh conference. Markland had that morning confessed his participation in the crime and at the same time, dragged in the names of the solicitors against whom conspiracy proceedings pended. Was this stroke of his an endeavour to secure a reprieve? It achieved its object in some degree, for his execution was officially stayed.

As I sat in the parlour of the "Golden Cross," a couple of days later a messenger arrived for me. These mysterious messengers were almost a daily occurrence now. The man came with an order signed by a Sheriff, and by permission of the Newgate prison authorities, bearing a message from the Regent, begging me to see him before he was dispatched.

Terrible as the request was I dared not ignore it. As I entered the fearful oubliette through which thousands of men and women have passed to the assize of Heaven, I could not resist a shudder. The day was heavy and gloomy. The roaring traffic without gave place to a sepulchral stillness beyond the great iron gates. Almost in silence I was passed from one turnkey to another, through dark passages and corridors, until the condemned cell was reached. There, manacled, crouched the Regent. Warders watched him night and day. If I live to be a hundred the stealthy horror of the scene will never be forgotten by me. Sometimes I wake in the dead of night and its terror clutches afresh at my throat. The man was dead in the eye of the law. As I saw him, he was an object past redemption. He had been a lad of promise, a man capable of high distinction. His soul had cankered within him. Every evil passion had held high carnival therein. Behind all seeming shows remorse also had bitten deep. He was accursed of humankind. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." His fearful crime had not been committed in the heat of fury. It was cold and calculated devilry.

"You have come?" he said. "Is there no chance of a reprieve—a month, a week, a day?" At that moment, even at the climax of horror as I deemed it, there befell a touch which sent my pulse up with a bound. A hoarse strident voice could be distinctly heard chanting like some loathsome sibyl. "To be hanged by the neck till you are dead—dead—dead," screamed the voice. Then it burst into a crackling laugh. "Don't wait for me, Bella. To be hanged by the neck till you are dead—dead—dead." I recognized at once that some fiend in the outer world had taught a parrot to taunt and lacerate the anguish of unhappy prisoners in these cells of supreme distress. The haunted wretch turned upon me an eye of despair.

"At least say that you forgive me, Mr. Joyce. I treated you like a devil, sir. Say you bear me no malice." I assured him on this score and rose to go. What could I, an inexperienced boy, say to this arch-criminal?

"The mercy of God," I began, but at that moment the raucous chuckle of the horrible bird started its chant anew. My nerves were at their utmost tension. I hastily withdrew, daunted by the burning glare of the man's eye,

my ears assaulted by his muttered curse, which swept with its blight the sum of all human existence.

The conspiracy proceedings followed on the heels of this wretched man's execution and as a principal witness I had consequently to continue to mark time in London. The cases against the two firms of solicitors caused a big stir, for the incriminating documents secured by the police raids on their premises revealed a network of underground intrigue. Cutting was a truculent ruffian of the bruiser type, a man who carried the stamp of professional bully in his face. He was incapable of putting up a clean fight, being by nature furtive and unscrupulous. Cute, on the other hand, was a little hop-o'-my-thumb, plausible and humorous. This brace of master schemers professed ignorance of the operations of the Jew firm, who were disciples of the Shylock school of criminal artistry.

As the plots and counterplots of these rival rascals were unravelled the man Markland furnishing the links of evidence which wove them into a combined net of villainy, I stood amazed at my own folly. I had unconsciously wandered into the danger of being engulfed in a morass, from which extrication might have been well-nigh hopeless.

The legal difficulty was to secure evidence corroborative of that of Markland, who spoke with a rope round his neck. The proceedings against the two firms were combined in one Crown prosecution and forensic skill on the two sides was pretty fairly matched. That the alleged conspiracy was real and far-reaching no one could doubt who heard the evidence. The job was to bring the matter to the push legally.

The cause took five days to argue, the documents impounded by the police being voluminous. I was examined and cross-examined and re-examined, until I hardly knew if I were standing on my head or my heels. What bearing half the questions put to me had on the case I could not for the life of me see. When the speeches of counsel followed, however, I had but to admire the acumen with which the diverse strands of evidence were woven into one. The Court sat late on the last day to dispose of the case, the judge's summing up occupying more than a couple of hours. The verdict was an acquittal so far as Levi and Cohen were concerned, they having been rather more cunning in the drafting of their correspondence

than their rival actors in crime. Cutting & Cute did not get off so easily. A few unguarded sentences in one or two of their letters bared the organized fabric of a scheme of fraud to which they were parties personally. Their plea of professional exoneration thus broke down on several counts and the judge was enabled to advise the jury that on those counts the verdict should be that of guilty. Everyone in Court heaved a sigh of relief when a sentence of two years' imprisonment was passed on the pair. Ales Fidge had been brought in his prison garb from Portland, to give evidence. So far as I was concerned, it was a panoramic display of guilty plotting which I heartily hoped would last my lifetime.

I may complete the picture by saying that Markland's perfidy ultimately saved him from the gallows. He went to Botany Bay as "a lifer." For all I know to the contrary by this time he may be deacon of a chapel or manager of a Bank out there.

Uncle John and Mr. Wheatley had of course to be called as witnesses. We three put up together at the "Golden Cross." During the progress of the case there were fitful conferences with Mr. Clutterbuck and the family lawyers, but in the main we three were thrown into our mutual society. It was a time of real enlightenment and understanding for us all. What the future might have had in store for me but for these talks, long and earnest, in the parlour of the "Golden Cross," I can but surmise. To begin with, I appreciated, as never before, the rôle both of Uncle John and Aunt Maria in shaping my life. Little touches of close intimacy revealed the sleepless anxiety of both to fit me to fulfil my destiny, and, looking back on the years which had sped away since the *Mallard's* race for Newhaven, these before unnoted acts filled me with thankfulness and warm regard. Lots of matters which in my callow days I regarded as merely troublesome and irksome, I now saw to be dictated by an absorbing self-effacement in my welfare. If I failed to achieve the high hopes set before me, or at any rate did so by inertness or neglect, I told myself I should prove to be but a sorry rogue. The incentive to bend all energies of will and purpose on lofty endeavour, in order to acquit myself worthily in the state to which I had been pitchforked by Fortune, was strong.

Then too I learnt that the hints dropped by our mother were nearer fulfilment than I guessed. She and Mr. Hardy were to be married in the coming month. Uncle John, I thought, spoke a trifle wistfully as to this, as if hopes of his own were crushed by that climax. Moreover he perhaps foresaw himself drifting into a subordinate position at Fullerton, for he dropped a significant hint about being *de trop*—the fifth wheel of the coach. I took the first opportunity that offered to let him see how delighted his announcement of our mother's remarriage made me and to emphasize the deep and vital ties binding us all in one indissoluble bond. He was evidently pleased and affected by the warmth with which I spoke.

All our discussions came back in the end, like homing doves fluttering about their cot, to Margarita. She was dear as the apple of his eye to Mr. Wheatley. From hour to hour, as the beauties of her nature expanded, he dropped the rôle of father and assumed that of lover. As for me, when I awoke to day-dreams in the dim dawn, Fullerton Park came back in the mind's eye. That miracle—a spring day—stood tiptoe on our misty mountain tops. It is my faith that the gracious presences of the Immortals are abroad even as of old. I said to myself, Greek myths, according to our modern wiseacres, are merely fairy tales, told in the ear of childhood. They are the profoundest of all truths, for the mind of the child is as the mountain torrent fed by the heaven of heavenly invention. The images of Shelley's verse flitted mutely in dim procession. I rummaged in the limbo of memory to recall his words.

“ Art thou not void of guile,
A lovely soul formed to be blest and bless ?
A well of sealed and secret happiness,
Whose waters like blithe light and music are,
Vanquishing dissonance and gloom ? ”

The day crept on. Crude pictures on the walls, a bunch of dried everlasting flowers on the mantelpiece and the petty garniture of an inn room were slowly revealed. Let my thoughts wing their flight back to Shelley. To what does he compare the pearl of great price ?

“ A Lute, which those whom Love has taught to play
Make music on, to soothe the roughest day,
And lull fond grief asleep—a buried treasure—
A cradle of young thoughts of wingless pleasure.”

CHAPTER XX

WE met with another rebuff in the committee rooms of Parliament. The fabric of our scheme of works for a railway between London and Brighton was scattered like a house of cards. No one was surprised, no one was cast down. We picked up the fragments of our work and started at it all over again. Meantime there was a lull in our field operations and I was back at Fullerton.

The wedding of our mother filled up the picture for the nonce. Rodney and Trafalgar blossomed in unaccustomed splendour of attire. They had grown into fine stalwart men, straight as ramrods, tanned by wind and weather, with the fire of keen intelligence in their eyes. In our Sussex phrase they did credit to their keep. Victory had a touch of masterfulness in her manner. She was inclined to be a trifle overbearing and intolerant of folk slower-witted than herself.

By our mother's special desire the *festa* was restricted to our own family. No guests were invited and thus it befell that the Wheatleys were absent. That unhappy rift between Dick and Victory rendered this almost a relief. The villagers, however, were bent on spending a gala day. Our mother was almost the patron saint to these simple folk. Without a trace of ostentation—she being the soul of good intent—they came to her in great matters and small, as to one who never turned a deaf ear to their complaints. The young louts of the place touched or doffed cap as she passed them. Our little hamlet was soberer and less given to mischievous loafing than most. We had started small industries amongst the cottagers—bee keeping and metal work for instance—and clubs where good cheer abounded. It must be admitted that our beerhouse flourished. In every grade of life heavy drinking

was the order of the day. We had our faults, but we would never permit our neighbours to tell us of them.

Mr. Pooss performed the marriage ceremony in a somewhat lachrymose manner. The fact is, had he dared he would have aspired to our mother's hand himself. There are women to whom the whole world is kin. As for me, I could have fallen on my knees and worshipped as at the shrine of a saint, when our mother went radiantly forth the church on the arm of Mr. Hardy. The day's doings sealed the compact of years of quiet devotion. Maytide was in the air. The larks shrilled their message, for their song hung like a canopy of thanksgiving over our breakfast party assembled in a tent on the lawn before the house. In those days the drinking of healths was a great function. "I look toward you," was the phrase and there were wont to follow bobbing and lifting of glasses. As we were merely a family party our mother cut the breakfast short. Sports and dancing on the green and rough village harmony then set in with a flood. Our people sang lustily, certainly not out of feigned lips, even if not melodiously. Our mother and Mr. Hardy drove off at last in a chaise and four, with postilions to the leaders, to spend a day or two at Brighton and, when they came back, took their places as master and mistress as if resuming an old-time rôle.

I was graduating in the affairs of the estate, happy as the days were long, having a definite purpose in life and the power to give it shape. Sport had not then become such an all-absorbing interest in the careers of country folk as it has since grown. I clattered about the fields and meadows and learnt more intimately than ever the slow, salted wisdom of our Sussex hinds. No country can be swept off its feet by revolutionary crazes when in the main the common people cling obstinately to the philosophy of old tradition.

Letters came fluttering from Nutfield like the gentle rain from heaven. One budget bore a note from Dick, the sorry of countenance. He was being transferred to the barracks at Canterbury and still wrote in the depths of gloom. In my present buoyant mood I was inclined to laugh his dolours to scorn. In answering his letters I prattled on of ports and happy havens of content, as if such were the common lot of mortal man. Victory was passing through a crisis in her young life. The tragedies

of our village—and we were no more exempt from such than others—filled her with a poignant scorn of the frailty of humanity. She had not herself as yet been touched to the finer issues of her inmost soul. Our father had grown little more than a misty memory to us both. Our mother's remarriage she regarded with secret amazement. It was the pageant of a world not realized by this young Dian, heartwhole, self-confident. Victory's nature was one capable of concentrated passion, yet to outward seeming, of virginal coldness. That not impossible He who should win her must perforce be *aut Cæsar aut nullus*. There were for her no half-tones in the landscape of love. The idea of a conventional marriage roused her to scoffing paradox. Such was our Victory now that she had turned the corner of the twenties.

Rodney confided to me—somewhat lightly as I deemed—that Margaret Cooper, the daughter of a farmer well-known to us all on the Bishopstone hills, “had him on a string.” Trafalgar was apparently so far unscathed in his affections. He was a trifle phlegmatic in temperament. My own flights of fancy were an unknown region to his matter of fact sobriety. Thus we four stood at the moment our mother had taught us the lesson of the supremacy of love in the lists of life.

The months sped away for us at Fullerton without history. Each morning brought its tale of interests and occupations and night came on to round them with a sleep. We were on the verge of harvest when a letter arrived from Dick at Canterbury. That letter upset the even tenor of one at least of us. In it he announced that he had mended his broken heart by a transcendent discovery. Charlotte Storey was, he said, the one and only perfect being for him. He was in a desperate hurry to tie the knot and Charlotte had raised no objection. The news sank deeper and deeper into Victory's heart. Under it she faltered like a stricken bird. It was obvious that Dick had truly won her affection, although she denied the fact both to herself and the rest of the world.

Meantime the railway pioneers had not been idle. England was being engirdled with a network of imaginary lines on paper. Our undaunted Brighton railway promoters were waking up afresh. We were passing through an era of transition. When the Stone Age men began to dream

of spears of bronze, when bowmen turned their thoughts to villainous saltpetre, the world went on its way unheeding, but the curtain was about to be rung down for a transformation scene of which all the world was destined to be the stage. The tide was rising that, at its appointed hour, should set afloat imprisoned argosies of thought and new endeavour.

Dick and Charlotte were to be married in October. Our fresh railway plans must be deposited in November. A few weeks' work sufficed to make those changes of route called for by adverse evidence in Committee. I was to be best man at the wedding, and Trafalgar and Rodney were also invited to be present. The pure flame of Margarita's love glowed with fervour, rekindled at the torch of Hymen. As I mused under the starry canopy o' nights or watched the splendour of the dawn, the young-eyed cherubim were surely abroad amongst us. Who was I that I should have won the matchless pearl of pearls? I could but sorrowfully acknowledge my own unworthiness. What were all the baubles of the world for which men scramble and intrigue, in comparison with the heavenly treasure of such love? Stars and garters and broad acres and the lip homage of the fickle mob are not substantial things.

“ Their wealth is but a counter to my coin ;
Their world's but theirs ; but my Beloved's mine.”

As I trod the streets of Canterbury memories of Dick's and my own former visit revived. Thus, thought I, do ghosts perchance revisit the glimpses of the moon, reverse their hour-glass and watch afresh its ancient sands speed away. Our waiter at the “ Fleur-de-Lis ” had not turned a hair. He babbled o' three-year-old mutton as of old. When I reminded him of Montmorency the jest of the man's “ carryin's-on ” was alive still.

Mrs. Storey and the very stones of her dear old house, steeped (as Mr. Wheatley woefully phrased it in the punning method of the day) in the aroma of a storied past, were alike unchanged. Surely the homes of men and women have souls of their own. The grimmest day without is transformed within doors, when the atmosphere recalls tranquil joys and evenings of delight.

Into this domestic haven the mischievous god had crept.

I was by no means sure that a stray arrow from the urchin's bow had not whistled uncommonly close to our sober Trafalgar. Anyway, forty-eight hours or so after our arrival in Canterbury he and Susan were to all appearance mighty distant and stand-offish to one another. We had all spent those two days in wandering about the old city, when we were not sauntering round the Storeys' garden—that garden a bouquet of scent and blossom laid out with cunning simplicity. Its bowered walks were mazes of surprise. Dick and Charlotte were naturally inseparable and somewhat resentful of intrusion; Margarita's and my wits were wool-gathering; Mr. Wheatley and Rodney seemed to have developed strong mutual attraction: and thus it befell that Trafalgar and Susan were outside the charmed circle. Charlotte was eternally being called away to "try on" some mysterious garment at the hands of dressmakers, one of whom appeared to have taken up her abode at Foreland Lodge, others fitfully coming and going.

All this our unreal interlude culminated on the wedding morning. It was one of those rare autumn days when the year appears to throw back into the warmth of summer. We English are sun-worshippers. The quaint old streets that morning put on their bravest show. Little knots of folk eyed our cavalcade curiously from street corners. Shopmen looked up from the parcels they were cording and doubtless remarked on the neatness of our turnout. "Scrutton's are doing the thing well," we could almost hear them say. Charlotte looked a sweet and radiant bride. The tiny church was more than half full as we drove up. I had the vaguest notion of what my duties as best man were, but no one paid much heed to such petty details. A brother of Mrs. Storey gave away his niece. The whole affair had the flavour of a scene from a pageant, so inconsequent did it appear to me. The largesse which I scattered among the bellringers and other hangers-on, after the register was signed and the customary small witticisms were uttered, "brought down the house," as our friend Montmorency would have put it. Everyone, except the parson and his curate and the pew-opener, was inclined to be flurried. The memory of poor Storey's end had ensured the goodwill of the city folk watching the ceremony and thus averted the petty detraction which

so often hangs like a miasma over small communities. The Storey girls had been known, too, from childhood. No malicious tongue dare wag. Hysterical tears are supposed to be appropriate on these occasions, but we had none of this display, either on the return to the house or after the breakfast was over, or even after the oratory, which in the 'thirties was wont to flow copiously. The newly-married were bound for Dover and thence to Paris, to visit which city was then regarded as a notable feat.

Things are apt to fall flat at a wedding after the principals have left the scene. As for us at Foreland Lodge, we tramped off in a body by the Longport Road to Saint Martin's church. The effacing fingers of autumn were beginning to touch the countryside with their magic. The beauty of decay wrapped the famous little fane in wonder. We mortals are the puppets of time and space. The shadows were falling. It was as if mystery draped some imperial palace, away yonder where the cathedral towers loomed up into the stilly air. The russets and browns of hedgerow and orchard burnt as a parable of ends achieved. Lights at length twinkled here and there in cottages and, subdued by the patient wonder of the coming night, we wanderers wended our way back to Canterbury.

Next morning Mr. Wheatley and Margarita took the London coach and we three boys rode off, I to Fullerton, Trafalgar and Rodney to resume their daily tasks. The marriage of Dick and Charlotte had set my pulses spinning. Why should not Margarita and I follow in their wake and at once? Mr. Wheatley, however, put up his decided veto and our mother for her part backed that veto up.

"You are both so pitifully young," she said. "You must wait at least a couple of years, my boy, when you'll be about twenty, you know."

A couple of years! It was an eternity. As for the old-time lover who served seven years twice told for his bride, his was a story hardly edifying to modern ears. Margarita acquiesced in her father's dictum, in spite of the vehemence of my advocacy to the contrary. I told her plump and plain that the plea for delay was a bad beginning for both of us. This led up to the first of those tiffs which thereafter recurred from time to time. I felt like a brute whenever I precipitated such a scene. In the intervals we

indulged in billing and cooing, rhapsodies on my side, tears on Margarita's.

Happily, perhaps, for both of us, Fullerton absorbed a big share of my attention just then. The chief, moreover, determined to dispatch me to the Brighton end of the railway survey. I tremble to think of the cost of the Nutfield postbag. Who has not wondered at ancient packets of letters closely written and winged with inextinguishable ardour—on Dulcinea's side, perchance bearing the faint aroma of the potpourris of our grandmothers' day? From age to age we play our rôles and bravely re-enact our parts, as if love were rediscovered by each generation of men and women.

Our hard-hearted guardians stuck to their guns. Twenty-four months' delay! It was monstrous. Nevertheless, winter slowly gave way to spring and I, at least, was protesting still. Summer led on to autumn and the goal seemed almost as far away as ever. My new quarters were remote from Margarita. Who knows?—that may not have been an unmixed evil. We discovered phrases in our mutual letters to which we attached significances that led to little storms of rhetoric and so the speeding months jolted on, over rough and smooth.

Brighton, was, however, close to Trafalgar's and Rodney's quarters. Their love-affairs were ripening fast, whereas mine lay like the horizon of dim distances. Rodney took me to Bishopstone to meet Margaret Cooper. She was a buxom lass, who could milk and make butter and cheese with the best. There were no high-sounding passages between her and Rodney. I mused that perhaps their absence did not lessen Rodney's chances of a happy married life. I bethought me of *Campion's* song :

“ Joan can call by name her cows
And deck her window with green boughs ;
She can wreaths and tutties make,
And trim with plums a bridal cake.
Jack knows what brings gain or loss,
And his long flail can stoutly toss :
Makes the hedge which others break,
And ever thinks what he doth speak.”

As for Trafalgar, it befell even as I surmised it would. He and Susan Storey had been caught in Cupid's net. He had made two or three jaunts to Canterbury and had at last triumphed back to Stanmer jubilant.

Parliamentary inquiries backed and filled and we still had no authority to acquire other men's land against their will and to start our work. Tosh, for the first and last time in his life, waxed poetical.

"Parliament should take Hamlet's words for a motto," quoth he. "'Leave thy damnable faces and begin.'"

The whole world was tied and bound up, I argued, with useless markings of time. I was inclined to fret myself into a fever, for I was afire with love and ambition and the itch of achievement.

Discontent and plethora are twin brethren. The gods had showered their gifts upon me and I recked myself injured. As Touchstone had said, "we that are true lovers run into strange capers."

On the edge of the Fullerton estate lies a bit of chequered woodland called the Springetts, wherein in happier moments I was wont to wander enchanted. To right and left of it rise heights clad with noble beech trees under whose umbrageous canopy the undergrowth is sparse. A footpath wavers midway and a tinkling stream plays hide-and-seek alongside its track. The scream of the jay was rarely to be heard in the Springetts, though the chuckling note of the blackbird was not uncommon. On the far side of this covert one reaches a bit of rough common, overgrown with brambles. Now I rambled through the woods to this spot one glorious morning, but, when I had come into the open, a smart summer shower hustled up from the Weald. On the outskirts of the common was the cottage of a tenant of the estate. Timbrell was one of our older woodcutters and lived with a widowed daughter. I had dropped into his cottage for a chat many a time. The folk were after my own heart, for the third member of the colony was a picture child of three or four years. This little maiden was the favourite of us all. I seldom passed that way without some trinket or sweetmeat in my pocket. She was flaxen-haired, blue-eyed—a limber elf.

Passing through the long patch of trim garden leading from the path up to the house I knocked, seeking shelter from the rain. Mrs. Dale, after bobbing a curtsy, bustled about to dust the best chair in her parlour and to bid me welcome. Little Hannah promptly followed on her mother's heels for her accustomed memento. The child dragged along a toy train I had given her. Even in our

remote Sussex wilds the coming of the iron horse was heralded by grotesque caricatures of the locomotive. To a modern child my gift would be patently a clumsy counterfeit.

"Come an' pass the time o' day wi' Mus Joyce, me purty," quoth Mrs. Dale, and the little maiden toddled up and babbled the baby language of all time. I took her on my knee, gave her my watch to put to her ear and prattled half a hundred scraps of nonsense which we two held in common.

Now in the midst of this interlude and whilst the mother stood in silent ecstasy to watch us, a stranger entered the room.

"Come along, 'Meliar," cried Mrs. Dale, "this be our young squire, Mus Joyce. This be my niece, from Hefful, sir." An apparition took possession of the room and curtsyed with a native grace no art could match. To use the Elizabethan phrase, I was translated. She was simply the most lovely girl I had ever clapped eyes on. She stood on the borderland between girl and woman. Her figure was sylphlike—over the middle height. Her hair was dark and there was a trace of Spanish swarthinness in her complexion. Her cheeks and lips were ruddier than the cherry, her eyes a seraphic blue, her ears dainty and shell-like and her hands long and tapering. From the crown of her head to the soles of her feet breed was in her every line. She stood before me mutely and repeated her curtsyed salutation. For the moment I could find no words. By an effort I gently deposited Hannah on the floor, rose and offered this smiling wonder of womankind my hand. Her voice was of the full, ripe quality, which leaves an after hum like the tone of a bell filling the ear with the rapture of pure melody. Hannah was inclined to lift up her parable of woe and clamour for more attention from me.

What 'Meliar said to me and I to 'Meliar is not on record. Meantime the rain without was over and gone, the sun made every spray and bush in the garden gleam as if studded with emeralds. The chanting of the larks stole in at the open door. Hannah seized my hand and demanded that I should go with her to the hen-roost to bring in the eggs. Her mother chid her.

"Doan't 'ee goo fer to be rumbustical, 'Annah," was the way she expressed it. Then 'Meliar said she would fetch

them and I said I would go too. So we strayed down the garden path together. Mercy on me! what a beautiful creature it was that glided at my side. We loitered at the sweetbriar bush.

"There is no half-wild thing which can match this shrub, is there?" I said. "I don't know what your other name is, so I suppose I must call you 'Miss Amelia.'"

"Just plain 'Amelia' please, sir," she said, dropping her eyes demurely.

"Amelia, if you please," said I, "but surely not plain," whereat she blushed red as a peony and was silent.

Now at that moment a leaf-cutter bee alighted on a rose hard by.

"Keep quite still, Hannah," I said. "Don't put your head in the way of the sunlight and watch." We all three stood mute as statues, our heads uncommonly close together. The bee perched suspiciously on the leaf he had selected, flirted his tail for a second or two, seized the edge of the leaf and in a jiffy had his green threepenny bit gnawed off. Then he tucked it up and was off to start the mansionry of home building. As we stood thus close in a bunch, intent on the master-builder's task, 'Meliar's heart was beating at my elbow like the thud of a bit of delicate machinery. Her eyes were alight with wonder. She was the watching dryad. My eyes stole to hers—she dropped hers in maidenly reserve. The picture of the young woman and the child was, I thought, the sweetest bit of artistry I had ever beheld. The gathering up of the eggs from the hen-roost took, I fear, long to accomplish, but I had at last to bid my friends adieu.

As I retraced my steps through the wood towards home, I was in a composite frame of mind. Conscience told me I was playing with fire. I laughed sententious maxims to scorn. Was not I but waiting with impatience to wed the fairest and best on earth?

We had a spell of seraphic weather that summer. Merely to live and breathe the balmy air was ecstasy. I was out and about the estate as usual, but by some strange fatality my steps seemed by instinct to turn in the direction of Springetts Common. If I went on horseback, the horse took his own way thither. In a small country community everyone knows his neighbour's affairs better than he does himself. In the thirties folk were also apt to be less

reticent than they are to-day. My comings and goings somehow set vulgar tongues wagging. Was it to be a match between the young squire and 'Meliar? That was the chat of the countryside, although of course it did not come to my ears. Then they who delighted in slander spoke after their kind. Hadn't folks heard?—the young squire for sure had showed 'Meliar the cold shoulder—in our Sussex parlance, had “given her turnips.”

A month or so later, when I had just returned from a day or two at Brighton, Mr. Hardy took my arm after dinner as we promenaded the lawn together.

“The die is cast, Waterloo,” said he. “Your mother and I have come to the conclusion that the wedding day may be anticipated. After all, your father was no older than you are when he married and you are a chip of the old block. So if you like to fix the time at once, I will myself go to Nutfield and settle it all with Mr. Wheatley. I know you have been chafing at the delay. Tell me to-morrow when I am to fix it. We shall have to give a fête here, you know, on the day of days and on your home-coming there must be a festival which will go down in the calendar of our villagers.”

I retired that night in a perturbed frame of mind. A month ago this climax would have been as the coming of millennium to me. In the still watches of the night I heard our stable clock toll hour after hour. I reviewed every act in the strange eventful history of the ushering of Margarita into my life. I compared it to the waxing of the splendour of the moon. “*Absit omen,*” I cried. “No waning there. It is an ever-fixèd mark.” The pleading charm of 'Meliar rose up and rebuked me. Why had I let the child grow dear—for dear she was? The subtle fragrance of her nature reminded me of that day when we first met and wandered in the maze of sweetbriar bushes and Hannah held a hand of each of us, as if making the circuit betwixt us twain complete.

I rose with dawn. As I glanced in the mirror I noted that the lines were hardening under my eyes. Then I went down to the stable, led out and saddled my favourite mare Fly-by-Night and clattered up the Downside and so along the ridge of springy turf. The dew was thick, as if a heavy rain had fallen in the night. On the horizon loomed up Druid's Grove. It capped one of our neighbour peaks

and was a clump of wind-swept yews standing their ground with the stubbornness of old tradition linking us moderns to the dim ages of the past, whose story is but a patchwork of surmise. The rooks were wheeling heavily towards the elm trees in the vale. How many an hour had I stood beneath that elm canopy and listened to the wind blowing where it listed, setting the boughs creaking and groaning. Up from the water brooks a heron—a jack hearn, as we call him in Sussex—was beating up clumsily against the wind. The new day, the new life, the new heart were exultant and clamant within. I had struggled to the light, the night was over and gone. After breakfast I named a day a month ahead to Mr. Hardy. Mr. Pooss fussed about me like a hen who has reared a duckling. Our mother wrapped about me an atmosphere of love and, save for that qualm which I could not still, all the world gave itself up to jollity.

CHAPTER XXI

“ Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken ;
Or like stout Cortes, when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.”

OUR leaders had reached the Promised Land after years of endeavour. Parliament had succumbed. We had obtained statutory powers and armies of navigators were at work up and down the route of the railway to be. The stream of fifty coaches a day between London and Brighton still rolled on. Old stagers threw cheap sneers at the coming transformation scene, as they swept by gangs of men at work. The jarveys, you may be sure, raked up every bit of tittle-tattle that came their way and regaled the box-seaters with it. Fundamental change is wont to eclipse the world by stealth. The railway, our democratic leveller, sounded a trumpet before its advent and boasted openly of the triumphs it was out to win. Timid souls swore by all their gods that they would never adventure their necks in our new-fangled booby-traps. England was in a ferment. Skits and lampoons abounded. The world was adjured to burn that which it had once adored, to adore that which it had aforetime burnt. Those who preached the fire-new creed were apt to see within their grasp wealth beyond the dreams of avarice in every sallet railway project launched on a flood of words.

The year 1837 was the end of a régime, the dawn of times in hope. For nearly one hundred and fifty years a succession of sovereigns had strained the allegiance and played with the liberties of our people. Men of cool judgment and ripe wisdom marvelled at the loyalty of our race to the monarchical principle. 'Tis true we had sagacious leaders in peace and war. The Duke had held popular turbulence in check by the sheer force of his character

and personality. The sophisms of wild dreamers had never bitten deep into the life of our home political economy. We islanders piqued ourselves upon the stubbornness with which innovating change was wont to be resisted.

Now, however, reform had descended on the land by the simple law of inheritance. A young queen ruled over us. She was little more than a child when she took up the sceptre of the proudest people on earth. The nation rose by one impulse to do her homage. After ages will fail to realize the amazing outburst of personal affection which greeted her. Sordid ambition had no soil to grow in near the throne. With the sagacity of one long versed in statecraft she chose her counsellors and won all hearts by sheer self-effacement. We had veritably entered into a session of social reformation. In years to come historians will look back upon the Victorian era as the most fertile of recorded time in those changes by which a nation wins its spurs in the school of chivalry. The sovereign herself personified sweetness and light and none save the churl would scruple to do her reverence. Thus was the primary law of kingship brought home to every subject of the Crown. Victoria was the leader of her people. Literature, Music and Art sprang up new-inspired. Great industries came into being in every quarter. In the field of Law we lived, before her reign, in the dark ages. Let the curious set down the changes affecting the health and well-being of the people, in education, in sanitation, in the increased humanity with which criminals and outcasts—the afflicted in mind or body—were treated; let him note the advent of saner ideals of social progress, which had been largely delayed by the deliberate withholding of education from vast classes of folk who sat below the salt; then will he begin to comprehend the wave of national redress that swept over England, scouring out abuse. The popular attitude toward animals shifted its focus too, the foretime addiction to sports of brutality lost its savour. Our grandsons may deem that we who watched the dawn of the young queen's reign speak in extravagant language of that period of sudden exaltation. If they but turn back the daily records of our time, they will find that no written word can convey a tithe of the resounding acclaim which hailed the new régime. We had had no big war for over twenty years. It is true that our arms were rusting, but what

of that?—the ardour of the nation of shopkeepers burnt as undimmed as ever. Peace was reaping her harvests of victory. The stolid armour of our surly independence shielded us from a thousand oversea affronts, and the Duke, in spite of passing tiffs between his will and that of the people, was the hero of the hour, even as he had been when the curtain of history fell on the bloody field of Waterloo.

The elation of the time had its counterpart in the fortunes of us Joyces. In 1837 our mother and Mr. Hardy had withdrawn to their Kentish home and Uncle John was gathered to his fathers. He succumbed to a mysterious malady, which swept through the land like a pestilence, a malady which one of our cottagers—Mrs. Dale in fact—said the doctors called “the hens flew out of the winder.” Victory flitted from one home to another. In the prime of her days the unsatisfied craving of her heart was as yet unstilled. Who knows—if she had married Dick—whether easy achievement would not have brought disillusionment in its train? Her eyes had not the deep content of crowned love. If Fate threw her a second challenge and she but rose to the height of her nature our Victory might yet burgeon forth into the climax of her days. She had within her the making of a heroine, worthy of Shakespeare’s self.

Trafalgar and Susan now did the honours of Kingston Manor. Trafalgar had a farm of his own and his South-down flock was growing famous. He was hard as nails, keen at sport as at ploughing matches, without much trace of our mother’s love of the arts and their appeal, but possessing to the full the masterful manhood of our father, his power of command, his control of affairs. He had a little heir of whom both father and mother were inordinately proud.

Rodney was passing beyond the apothecary stage and already giving himself the airs of a Galen. Margarita and I had promised him a gold-headed malacca when he should be duly authorized to bleed and administer boluses. Margaret Cooper still made cheese and butter on the Bishopstone hills. She and Rodney hailed the coming day when they should go into partnership and set up in Brighton. All the ambitious young fellows looked upon the nascent London watering place as El Dorado.

Mr. Wheatley had suffered a relapse in spirits. In truth he was by nature rather wont to see the gloomy side of things. Dick was quartered at Castle Cornet in Guernsey and Charlotte had followed his fortunes to that island. Thus was Mr. Wheatley left stranded and bereft. I suggested that he should take up his abode at Fullerton, but this proposal he resolutely resisted. However, his visits to us grew longer and came at shorter intervals than heretofore.

Our pretty 'Meliar was married to a jobbing saddler and lived in the gloomy wilderness of Bloomsbury. There she blossomed like a rare garden escape. Hers was the placid temperament which rests thankful with the small mercies of life, never repining or turning longing glances at fruit hanging beyond its reach. She appeared perfectly happy with her commonplace husband, who sat stitching at straps and suchlike gear from morning to night. Two tiny cherub children trotted about their pent quarters and filled the house from matins to evensong with the hum of the hive, the peace note of motherhood. Now and again 'Meliar visited her aunt at the Springetts, filling that worthy dame with wonder at her matronly ways. 'Meliar was one of those rare mortals who seem always to fit their rôle in life to perfection. I was filled with fresh thankfulness every time I saw the unconscious rapture of her content.

And now I must tell of a surprise which befell us all. The Lord Lieutenant had given me a seat on the County bench and some of our more ardent tenants were publicly urging that at the next general election I should stand for our division of Sussex. My ambition did not lie much in that direction, save that I foresaw the lifeblood of the community like to ebb away if its rural population continued to dwindle, as it had for years past shown a tendency to do. What possibility was there of holding folk on the land, if the price of corn dropped below the cost of production? It was obvious that our threatened economic revolution spelt disaster. No industry could live on wind. Tithes and poor-rates were crushing the life out of our English shires, as surely as the hug of an anaconda. The appeal for a contented peasantry and the consequent welfare of the realm of England came home to my mind as an urgent call to every public-spirited Englishman.

At our local gatherings I had, in my homely way, said so and it began to be bruited abroad that "young squoire 'e do be comin' on fer the gurt talkin' shop up i' Lunnon."

I must perforce preface the strange happening I have to relate by saying that the Fullertons had in their day been knights of the shire. One morning then an imposing letter, having the words "Prime Minister" printed on the envelope, reached me. On breaking the seal I was amazed to read its contents. Should I agree thereto, Her Majesty was about to be advised to confer upon me the honour of knighthood, in consideration of my public service in connection with railway enterprise and also having regard to the long and honourable record of the family who had held the Fullerton Park estates, which estates were now in my possession.

I took a turn in the park before I showed the letter even to Margarita. The proposal came as a thunderclap. Then I remembered our mother's saying that she could not rest in her grave if no such honour came my way. After all, what did it matter to me whether I was called "Sir Waterloo" or plain "Mr."? My ego remained the same. Mr. Hardy happened to be at Fullerton and we held a family council. The result of this was that in due course I consented to bear my blushing honours thick upon me. Thereafter folk went out of their way to lug in that unlucky handle to my name, until in truth the skin veneer of precious metal over the sounding brass of it wore a bit thin. However, Sir Waterloo I was and Sir Waterloo I must remain to the end of the chapter. Time would surely blunt the edge of the constant repetition of the phrase.

The closing scenes of the drama of my life now remain to be recorded. I turn my thoughts back to that fair morning when Margarita and I took the irrevocable vows and Mr. Pooss purred about us as we stood pledged to world-without-end oaths. As for me, I was at that moment wandering in the land of far distances. The glamour of Romance played about me, as we went arm in arm out of church and the villagers raised a great shout of honest pleasure. Nothing in the world was real. The whispering twilight and the misty gulf of stars, the path of life winding away into unfathomed precincts beyond our mortal ken, memories, hopes like swallows skimming sheeny pools

of dear delight, the dreams and fantasies of us poor puppet folk this side the grave—such pageant scenes rose up in my mind, pulsating, quivering, through our early days of mutual homage.

Anon came the trivial round. Passion's trance had spent its force and we had to play our parts upon the stage of daily duty. I often saw myself now as the spoilt child of Fortune. Love is the crowning test and a matchless ardour filled my thoughts waking and dreaming. We twain held the supreme gift of the gods to ransom. Could the tide of earthly bliss rise higher than did our corporate longing? That was the question in the thoughts of both of us as I know full well, for I could read Margarita's mind like a book. Alas! we began to realise that by a law divine after flood tide follows ebb. Conceal it how we might from each other, the cruel fact came home that the level of the life dearest to me was, by imperceptible degrees, sinking on the gauge. Thus, just at the moment when our hopes ran brightest a killing frost seemed settling over all things. Dear heart! How brave she was. She made light of the symptoms which she knew would distress me, but love was not so blind as to fail to read the writing on the wall. The season was that of the autumn equinox, and mutely the sun sank a few seconds earlier each day. Surely that was a parable of the passing of our good days. Winter was creeping by deadly inches over our serene and happy moments.

We had had a cold and cheerless autumn. As I wandered through the tracks across the park, dank with decaying leaves, a fitful wind moaning through the bare poles of beech and chestnut, an eerie sense of desolation crept over my heart. How many a time had I cantered along these ways with an abounding certainty of life and achievement. Now at my side stalked a grim spectre for ever whispering in the ear: "Vanity of vanities. I, Death, am sovereign monarch of all things." How should I face the blank, interminable days without Margarita? What purpose was served by pretending that a level sward of happiness lay before us when veritably a black pit of despair yawned in view? Within doors I tried hard to assume a cheery optimism. Margarita, who normally loved fresh air and early tramps across the Downs, was more and more spending her mornings within doors. The

brightness of her eyes was fading, the charm of her complexion paling. Dr. Podger fussed and talked a good deal of nonsense about improvement of tone, but I could see no real ground for his easy-going assurance. The brutal truth was that the light of our eyes was dying by inches. Margarita was steadily losing weight and vitality. We spent a week at Brighton, but she possessed no longer the old-time zest. Where she would once have cheered or laughed, now she yawned. We came back, as it were, chilled to the bone by mute defeat. Our mother and Mr. Hardy flittered to and fro Fullerton uneasily. Their attempts at bravery were merely pitiful. Impending calamity was in the air. I hesitated to assume the rôle of alarmist. This nightmare of eclipse might perchance be but a passing phase, things might mend.

The sands of the year were running out. Autumn was hovering on the brink of winter. The robin for all his sturdy piping could not conceal the melancholy droop in his note. He finished curtly and, in his intervals of silence, seemed pondering hard times in store. There are valleys where the sunlight never penetrates. In these cañons the only change is that of comparative degrees of gloom. I roamed in such a cañon. I grew nervous of leaving the house for any length of time, not knowing what might befall. A shivering dread seemed abroad, so hour to hour was endured in apprehension. Christmas was drawing on apace. It did not bring with it a note of merriment as of yore. I used to wonder at the cynics who, when the season was over, talked of having survived its festivities. However, when Trafalgar and Susan and their small son and Rodney arrived at Fullerton we all tried desperately hard to throw off what Rodney termed "the inky cloak business," and partially succeeded in our efforts. Margarita's spirits flickered up. She rallied them by a strong effort of will, grew boisterous and finally broke into a tempest and torrent of tears. I was at my wits' end. Rodney drew me aside.

"Take her down to Bishopstone, Wat," he said. "I'll write Margaret to secure you quarters at the Tollers'. She knows 'em well. Take my tip, old man. Don't waste time. Pack your valise and go."

I pressed Rodney's hand and made up my mind to follow his advice.

The Tollers were more than willing to have us, and we accordingly journeyed to Brighton, starting thence in a chaise for Bishopstone one wintry morning early in the New Year. The sun flickered about us like a benediction. There was a touch of keenness in the air. Margarita sat warmly muffled at my side and beneath her wrappages we clasped hands.

"You don't know how I have longed to make this trip," quoth Margarita.

"Sweetheart," I whispered, "we are travelling together, you and I, toward the east, to

'the sweet o' the year,
For the red blood reigns in the winter's pale.'"

We clambered up the Kemp Town cliffs, now fast becoming built over in stately squares like Mayfair. Below us lay the Chain Pier with its shops and promenaders and a red-coated band playing rackets upon it.

"I declare this jaunt of ours is like stretching one's wings after being cooped in a cage," cried Margarita, with a little scrap of the zest of other days.

Soon bricks and mortar were left behind and we clattered over the rough hill track, now and then taking to the grass at the side to avoid the mire. For a time the sea view was shut out by a wall of Downland. Margarita grew quite excited at one break in the cliff line, whence the steam packet from Dieppe was to be seen, churning up the foam, making for the Brighton pier. The battering of her paddles could be distinctly heard.

"Wonders will never have done ceasing," said Margarita, with a sly twinkle of humour lurking in the corner of her eye. I was already in ecstatic delight at the transformation scene dawning over her.

Just at this period all England had run mad about a young writer named Dickens. "Pickwick Papers" had loosened every tongue. One could hardly meet an acquaintance in the street but he rattled you with a *bon mot* of Sam Weller, the world-famous inn boots. You had to cap it with a scrap of Stiggins or Weller senior, or your friend regarded you as out of the *ton*. Now this same Dickens had been to Brighton quite recently and the town was ringing with his sayings and doings. Charles Kean had been playing in *Othello*, Dickens being present. He

took keen interest in the production of *The Honeymoon*, which had had a run of ten days or so. You could buy a breast-pin of Brighton diamonds "as sold to Mr. Dickens." Old hands and wiseacres generally said the man had gone up like a rocket and would come down like the stick. He was bringing out a new book entitled "Oliver Twist." The monthly numbers of this book as they were issued hot and hot from the printers were greedily snapped up, and Margarita had pounced upon the last of the series in a shop just before we started for our drive. She furtively dipped into it with eagerness. What with the novelty of our pilgrimage and the mouthfuls of Bumble which she gleefully read out ever and anon, this was indeed a red-letter day.

In a fold of the Down is a tiny hamlet called Rottingdean. As I first knew it it consisted of the manor house and a few labourers' cottages. The polite world of Brighton was, however, overflowing even to this village. The sunshine held out bravely and we had not gone far beyond Rottingdean before Margarita cried: "What is that town yonder with its castle perched on a hill, like some robber hold on the Rhine?"

"That?" I shouted. "That, my dear, is Lewes, the Mecca and the county town of all true Sussex devotees." So I told her. I do not, however, record the score of pet phrases which passed between us. They concern no one but just our two selves. "Memory wakes up at sight of the hills we boys used to ramble over," I cried deliriously. "Do you see that great pyramid away to the right? That is Caburn. To the right of that again we shall catch Firle and the white walls of Seaford Head."

"At Paris," replied Margarita, "I had many such a vision of the dear old haunts left behind in England." Then she sang, in a voice sweet as that of a brooding thrush at sunrise:

"It's hame, and it's hame, and it's hame we fain would be,
Though the cloud is in the lift and the wind is on the lea;
For the sun through the mirk blinks blithe on mine e'e,
Says—'I'll shine on ye yet in your ain countrie.'"

"Aye, dear," I tell her, "we worry ourselves by conjuring up fancied evils. When we boys knocked about with fishermen and collier lads we were apt to look with

envious eyes on those born with a silver spoon in their mouths. In general, the silver spoon is a witch's legacy."

The day was a miracle of young delight. When we turned inland and the valley of the Ouse lay at our feet and I pointed out to Margarita the tiny cottage we used to live in and the church and the drawbridge and, on its hither side, the rampart of the Down for which we were bound, she grew almost as excited as I was myself. I did not think anyone would recognize me in the town as we drove through it, but not once nor twice we had to pull up while I shook hands with acquaintances of other days. I could not get away from that fatal phrase "Sir Waterloo," and all those who stopped us must needs be introduced to "Lady Joyce."

Under other conditions it would have been a triumphal procession. Now I was mainly anxious to reach the Tollers', so that Margarita's strength should not be overtaxed. We rambled on at length round the shoulder of the Down following the one-time wandering course of the Ouse and so we passed up to the cluster of elms at Bishopstone.

"The rooks are busy honeymooning and nesting," I said. "Do you see that beau ducking and posturing, like an old ladykiller on the Chain Pier? Now they're off on the wing. The lady leads him a pretty dance, doesn't she?"

"Yes," quoth Margarita, "they do imitate humanity abominably, Wat."

The Tollers gave us of their hearty best. We had the parlour that caught every movement of the low sun and, from the room above, the lowing of kine, the bleat of sheep and the cackle of the poultry yard floated up. Then, too, in the early morning hours the thrush tried over his spring notes and in truth made a sad hash of them. The blackbird chuckled as if the jest he had to tell was too racy to be blurted forth at random. Often we heard the great tit "sharping his scythe," as Sussexers would say, and a flowing chord of minor melody from wrens and hedge-sparrows went up. Plovers were wailing over lonely furrows, larks gave forth a perpetual torrent of harmony, and stray wheatears, the advance guard of the great army due to arrive in March, flittered and flirted unceasingly. Winter was waking from her long dream.

"We two will learn how to make history afresh," cried Margarita sturdily. How thankful I was it boots not to say. I could but render silent homage to the Disposer of our earthly lot and go on my way rejoicing. As that same phrase "rejoicing" recurred I remembered with a smile our old nurse Clements' dictum, which in the dim days had grown into a household word with us.

A few mornings later I rose while the dew lay thick and faint light came blushing across the sea. Margarita was sleeping peacefully as a child. I climbed the Shepherd's steps. Mercy on us! what a torrent of fantasies welled up within from dead days laid by in lavender. Early as it was, already black oxen were crawling with the plough. The shout of the goadsman came up, recalling sights and sounds as remote as the advent of man on earth. Yonder lay the twin piers of Newhaven, the white cliff gleaming above them. Away in the gloom the *Mallard* had adventured long ago. How long ago? It was but ten years, but into that decade had been crowded all the story of my life. The light was growing fast. I wended my way to the Tide Mills, a stone's cast from the shore. There sure enough was William Catt, leaving nothing to chance, looking after his mill hands, gazing too at the famous pear trees festooning his walls. After his cautious Sussex greetings given I followed the wavering footpath across the marshes to the "Buckle"—a name redolent of medieval history. On the crest above the inn the huts of the force amassed to oppose Boney's landing were crumbling to ruin. I passed thence to the white headland, mute save for the scream of the kestrel and the wail of myriads of sea-birds, for Seaford was asleep and silent as the grave. Away in the eye of the morning ranged forth the famous Seven Sisters, those saw-teeth of chalk headland which have cheered many an up-Channel, saddened many a down-Channel, farer by sea. Wheeling about, the valley of the vagrant Cuckmere lay in view. I remembered with a smile the many stories current of the honest miller of that quarter—one Mus Coombs. At Exceat bridge yonder he had a vision of his married life.

"As I were a-goin' acrass Excete la-ane to be married at West Dea-an church I 'eard a voice from 'Eaven a-sayin' unto me—Will-yam Coombs! Will-yam Coombs! if so be ye marries Mary Weller you'll allus be a miserable

man. And so I've allus found it. I be a miserable man."

Then I made for Blatchington and so back to Bishopstone, with a lighter heart than I had borne for many a day. I found the sun of content risen in Margarita's eyes. She was getting back to the Margarita of old days and her greeting was a subtle harbinger of pleasure.

"I have to ride across to Brighton," I said, when the Wednesday mail came in. "What will you do with yourself, my dear?"

"Do?" she answered. "Go and gossip with Margaret Cooper. She is as keen as we were about her wedding finery. She and Rodney have fixed it up for Easter, you know."

Now when I reached our railway quarters Tosh met me with a hundred things to talk over. We had a big force of men at work and the setting out of the tunnels was the problem of the hour. They had started a curved tunnel somewhere up near Liverpool and, after months of work, had discovered that it would not, as designed, hit the straight line at a tangent. The hapless setter-out of this abortion was the subject of merciless banter. Tosh and I had no fancy to emulate the Liverpool man's experience. I told Tosh of Rodney's and Margaret's forthcoming marriage. I really must retract what I once said of his one and only burst of poetry, for on this occasion he raked up another scrap of Shakespeare, quoting the melancholy Jacques: "'There is sure another flood toward and these couples are coming to the ark,'" quoth he.

"Tosh," I said, "you are a professional bachelor. Beware. You may be captured yet, my boy."

"The fact of the matter is," he replied curtly, "she's got me already, young 'un. Theodora is, I think, really without exception the most charming girl I ever clapped eyes on. She is a clipper, Waterloo. By the way, there's just one bargain I want to make with you on my own account. I'll take no refusal. Mind, I'm to be godfather."

THE END



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