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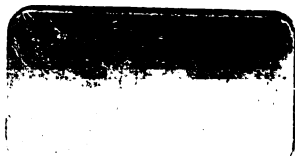
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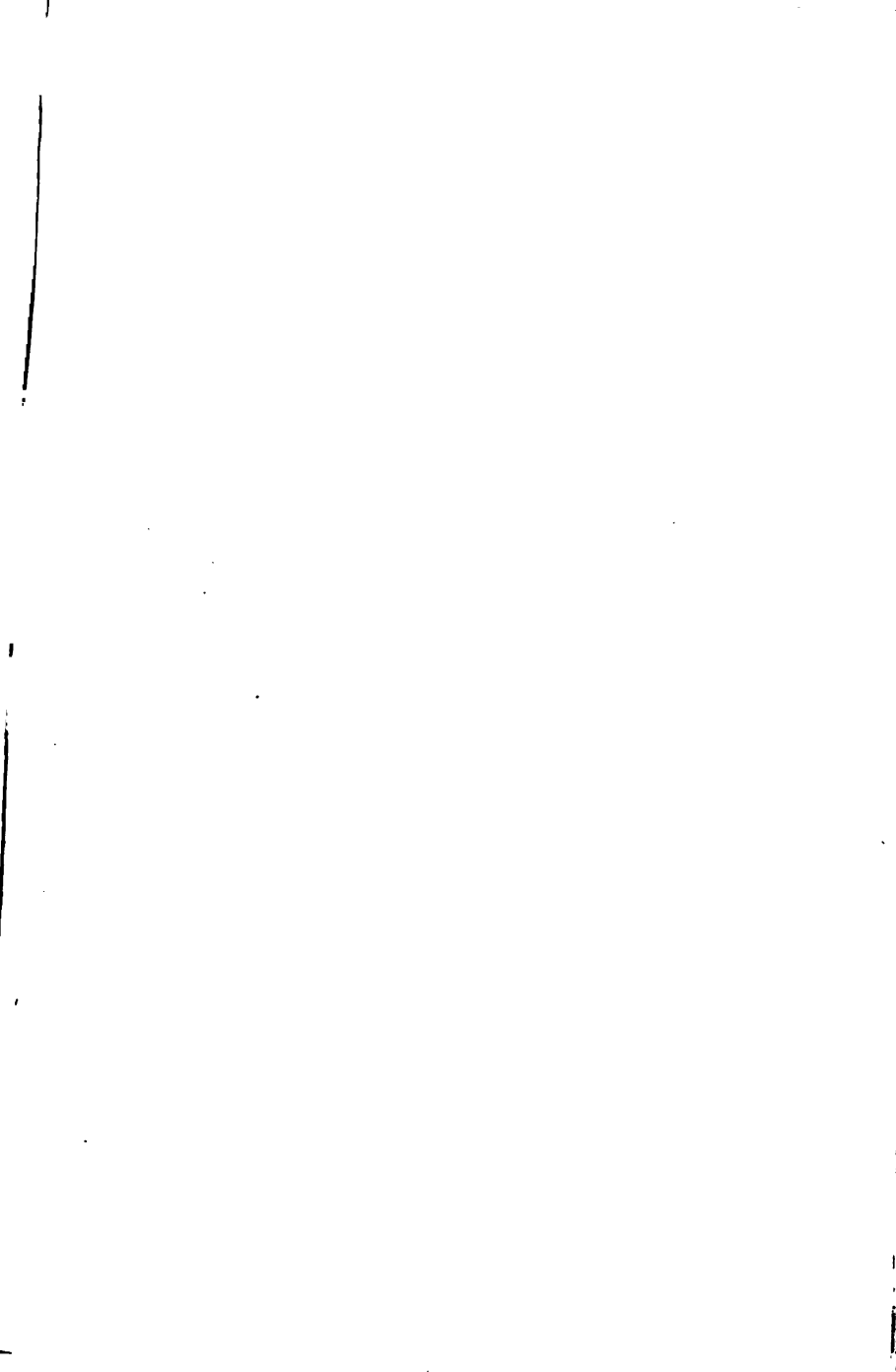
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THE LITTLE MAN
AND OTHER SATIRES
JOHN GALSWORTHY

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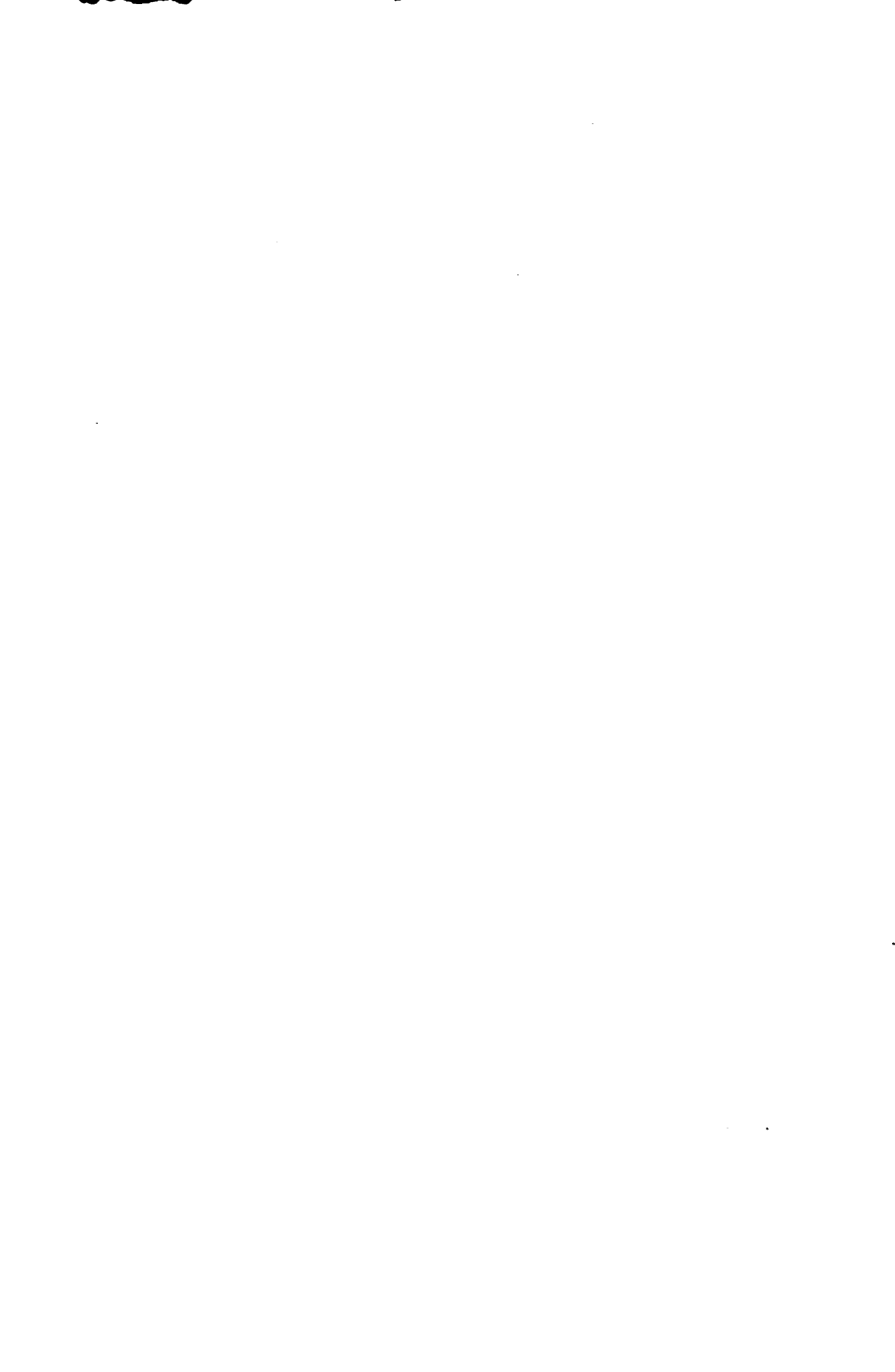
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THE LITTLE MAN
AND
OTHER SATIRES



THE LITTLE MAN

AND

OTHER SATIRES

BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

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NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1915

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TO
H. W. NEVINSON



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THE LITTLE MAN

AUTHOR'S NOTE

SINCE it is just possible that some one may think "The Little Man" has a deep, dark reference to the war, it may be as well to state that this whimsey was written in October, 1913.

THE LITTLE MAN

SCENE I

Afternoon, on the departure platform of an Austrian railway station. At several little tables outside the buffet persons are taking refreshment, served by a pale young waiter. On a seat against the wall of the buffet a woman of lowly station is sitting beside two large bundles, on one of which she has placed her baby, swathed in a black shawl.

WAITER (*approaching a table whereat sit an English traveller and his wife*). Zwei Kaffee?

ENGLISHMAN (*paying*). Thanks. (*To his wife, in an Oxford voice*) Sugar?

ENGLISHWOMAN (*in a Cambridge voice*). One.

AMERICAN TRAVELLER (*with field-glasses and a pocket camera—from another table*). Waiter, I'd like to have you get my eggs. I've been sitting here quite a while.

WAITER. Yes, sare.

GERMAN TRAVELLER. Kellner, bezahlen! (*His*

THE LITTLE MAN

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voice is, like his moustache, stiff and brushed up at the ends. His figure also is stiff and his hair a little grey; clearly once, if not now, a colonel.)

WAITER. Komm' gleich!

(The baby on the bundle wails. The mother takes it up to soothe it. A young, red-cheeked Dutchman at the fourth table stops eating and laughs.)

AMERICAN. My eggs! Get a wiggle on you!

WAITER. Yes, sare. *(He rapidly recedes.)*

(A LITTLE MAN in a soft hat is seen to the right of the tables. He stands a moment looking after the hurrying waiter, then seats himself at the fifth table.)

ENGLISHMAN *(looking at his watch)*. Ten minutes more.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Bother!

AMERICAN *(addressing them)*. 'Pears as if they'd a prejudice against eggs here, anyway.

(The English look at him, but do not speak.)

GERMAN *(in creditable English)*. In these places man can get nothing.

(The WAITER comes flying back with a compote for the DUTCH YOUTH, who pays.)

GERMAN. Kellner, bezahlen!

WAITER. Eine Krone sechzig.

(The GERMAN pays.)

AMERICAN *(rising, and taking out his watch—blandly)*. See here! If I don't get my eggs before this watch ticks twenty, there'll be another waiter in heaven.

WAITER *(flying)*. Kommi' gleich!

AMERICAN *(seeking sympathy)*. I'm gettin' kind of mad!

(The ENGLISHMAN halves his newspaper and hands the advertisement half to his wife. The BABY wails. The MOTHER rocks it. The DUTCH YOUTH stops eating and laughs. The GERMAN lights a cigarette. The LITTLE MAN sits motionless, nursing his hat. The WAITER comes flying back with the eggs and places them before the AMERICAN.)

AMERICAN *(putting away his watch)*. Good! I don't like trouble. How much?

(He pays and eats. The WAITER stands a moment at the edge of the platform and passes his hand across his brow. The LITTLE MAN eyes him and speaks gently.)

LITTLE MAN. Herr Ober! *(The WAITER turns.)*
Might I have a glass of beer?

THE LITTLE MAN

SC. I

WAITER. Yes, sare.

LITTLE MAN. Thank you very much.

(The WAITER goes.)

AMERICAN *(pausing in the deglutition of his eggs—affably)*. Pardon me, sir; I'd like to have you tell me why you called that little bit of a feller "Herr Ober." Reckon you would know what that means? Mr. Head Waiter.

LITTLE MAN. Yes, yes.

AMERICAN. I smile.

LITTLE MAN. Oughtn't I to call him that?

GERMAN *(abruptly)*. Nein—Kellner.

AMERICAN. Why, yes! Just "waiter."

(The ENGLISHWOMAN looks round her paper for a second. The DUTCH YOUTH stops eating and laughs. The LITTLE MAN gazes from face to face and nurses his hat.)

LITTLE MAN. I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

GERMAN. Gott!

AMERICAN. In my country we're vurry democratic—but that's quite a proposition.

ENGLISHMAN *(handling coffee-pot, to his wife)*.
More?

ENGLISHWOMAN. No, thanks.

GERMAN *(abruptly)*. These fellows—if you treat

them in this manner, at once they take liberties. You see, you will not get your beer.

(As he speaks the WAITER returns, bringing the LITTLE MAN'S beer, then retires.)

AMERICAN. That 'pears to be one up to democracy. *(To the LITTLE MAN)* I judge you go in for brotherhood?

LITTLE MAN *(startled)*. Oh, no! I never——

AMERICAN. I take considerable stock in Leo Tolstoi myself. Grand man—grand-souled apparatus. But I guess you've got to pinch those waiters some to make 'em skip. *(To the English, who have carelessly looked his way for a moment)* You'll appreciate that, the way he acted about my eggs. *(The English make faint motions with their chins, and avert their eyes. To the WAITER, who is standing at the door of the buffet)* Waiter! Flash of beer—jump, now!

WAITER. Komm' gleich!

GERMAN. Cigarren!

WAITER. Schön. *(He disappears.)*

AMERICAN *(affably—to the LITTLE MAN)*. Now, if I don't get that flash of beer quicker'n you got yours, I shall admire.

GERMAN *(abruptly)*. Tolstoi is nothing—nichts! No good! Ha?

AMERICAN (*relishing the approach of argument*).

Well, that is a matter of tempérament. Now, I'm all for equality. See that poor woman there—vurry humble woman—there she sits among us with her baby. Perhaps you'd like to locate her somewhere else?

GERMAN (*shrugging*). Tolstoi is sentimentalisch.

Nietzsche is the true philosopher, the only one.

AMERICAN. Well, that's quite in the prospectus—vurry stimulating party—old Nietzsche—virgin mind. But give me Leo! (*He turns to the red-cheeked youth.*) What do you opine, sir? I guess by your labels, you'll be Dutch. Do they read Tolstoi in your country?

(*The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.*)

AMERICAN. That is a verrry luminous answer.

GERMAN. Tolstoi is nothing. Man should himself express. He must push—he must be strong.

AMERICAN. That is so. In Amurrica we believe in virility; we like a man to expand—to cultivate his soul. But we believe in brotherhood too; we're verrry democratic. We draw the line at niggers; but we aspire, we're verrry high-souled. Social barriers and distinctions we've not much use for.

ENGLISHMAN. Do you feel a draught?

ENGLISHWOMAN (*with a shiver of her shoulder toward the AMERICAN*). I do—rather.

GERMAN. Wait! You are a young people.

AMERICAN. That is so; there are no flies on us.
(*To the LITTLE MAN, who has been gazing eagerly from face to face*) Say! I'd like to have you give us your sentiments in relation to the duty of man.

(*The LITTLE MAN fidgets, and is about to open his mouth.*)

AMERICAN. For example—is it your opinion that we should kill off the weak and diseased, and all that can't jump around?

GERMAN (*nodding*). Ja, ja! That is coming.

LITTLE MAN (*looking from face to face*). They might be me.

(*The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.*)

AMERICAN (*reproving him with a look*). That's true humility. 'Tisn't grammar. Now, here's a proposition that brings it nearer the bone: Would you step out of your way to help them when it was liable to bring you trouble?

GERMAN. Nein, nein! That is stupid.

LITTLE MAN (*eager but wistful*). I'm afraid not.
Of course one wants to——

GERMAN. Nein, nein! That is stupid! What is the duty?

THE LITTLE MAN

SC. I

LITTLE MAN. There was St. Francis d'Assisi and St. Julien l'Hospitalier, and——

AMERICAN. Vurry lofty dispositions. Guess they died of them. (*He rises.*) Shake hands, sir—my name is— (*He hands a card.*) I am an ice-machine maker. (*He shakes the LITTLE MAN's hand.*) I like your sentiments—I feel kind of brotherly. (*Catching sight of the WAITER appearing in the doorway.*) Waiter, where to h—ll is that flash of beer?

GERMAN. Cigarren!

WAITER. Komm' gleich! (*He vanishes.*)

ENGLISHMAN (*consulting watch*). Train's late.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Really! Nuisance!

(*A station POLICEMAN, very square and uniformed, passes and repasses.*)

AMERICAN (*resuming his seat—to the GERMAN*).

Now, we don't have so much of that in Amurica. Guess we feel more to trust in human nature.

GERMAN. Ah! ha! you will bresently find there is nothing in him but self.

LITTLE MAN (*wistfully*). Don't you believe in human nature?

AMERICAN. Vurry stimulating question. That invites remark. (*He looks round for opinions. The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.*)

ENGLISHMAN (*holding out his half of the paper to his wife*). Swap! (*His wife swaps.*)

GERMAN. In human nature I believe so far as I can see him—no more.

AMERICAN. Now that 'pears to me kind o' blasphemy. I'm vurry idealistic; I believe in heroism. I opine there's not one of us settin' around here that's not a hero—give him the occasion.

LITTLE MAN. Oh! Do you believe that?

AMERICAN. Well! I judge a hero is just a person that'll help another at the expense of himself. That's a vurry simple definition. Take that poor woman there. Well, now, she's a heroine, I guess. She would die for her baby any old time.

GERMAN. Animals will die for their babies. That is nothing.

AMERICAN. Vurry true. I carry it further. I postulate we would all die for that baby if a locomotive was to trundle up right here and try to handle it. I'm an idealist. (*To the GERMAN*) I guess *you* don't know how good you are. (*As the GERMAN is twisting up the ends of his moustache—to the ENGLISHWOMAN*) I should like to have you express an opinion, ma'am. This is a high subject.

THE LITTLE MAN

SC. I

ENGLISHWOMAN. I beg your pardon.

AMERICAN. The English are vurry humanitarian; they have a vurry high sense of duty. So have the Germans, so have the Amurricans. (*To the DUTCH YOUTH*) I judge even in your little country they have that. This is a vurry civilised epoch. It is an epoch of equality and high-toned ideals. (*To the LITTLE MAN*) What is *your* nationality, sir?

LITTLE MAN. I'm afraid I'm nothing particular. My father was half-English and half-American, and my mother half-German and half-Dutch.

AMERICAN. My! That's a bit streaky, any old way. (*The POLICEMAN passes again.*) Now, I don't believe we've much use any more for those gentlemen in buttons, not amongst the civilised peoples. We've grown kind of mild—we don't think of self as we used to do.

(*The WAITER has appeared in the doorway.*)

GERMAN (*in a voice of thunder*). Cigarren! Donnerwetter!

AMERICAN (*shaking his fist at the vanishing WAITER*). That flash of beer!

WAITER. Komm' gleich!

AMERICAN. A little more, and he will join George Washington! I was about to remark when he

intruded: The kingdom of Christ nowadays is quite a going concern. The Press is vurry enlightened. We are mighty near to universal brotherhood. The colonel here (*He indicates the GERMAN*), he doesn't know what a lot of stock he holds in that proposition. He is a man of blood and iron, but give him an opportunity to be magnanimous, and he'll be right there. Oh, sir! yes.

(The GERMAN, with a profound mixture of pleasure and cynicism, brushes up the ends of his moustache.)

LITTLE MAN. I wonder. One wants to, but somehow—— (*He shakes his head.*)

AMERICAN. You seem kind of skeery about that. You've had experience maybe. The flesh is weak. I'm an optimist—I think we're bound to make the devil hum in the near future. I opine we shall occasion a good deal of trouble to that old party. There's about to be a holocaust of selfish interests. We're out for high sacrificial business. The colonel there with old-man Nietzsche—he won't know himself. There's going to be a vurry sacred opportunity.

(As he speaks, the voice of a RAILWAY OFFICIAL is heard in the distance calling out in

THE LITTLE MAN

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German. It approaches, and the words become audible.)

GERMAN (*startled*). Der Teufel!

(He gets up, and seizes the bag beside him. The STATION OFFICIAL has appeared, he stands for a moment casting his commands at the seated group. The DUTCH YOUTH also rises, and takes his coat and hat. The OFFICIAL turns on his heel and retires, still issuing directions.)

ENGLISHMAN. What does he say?

GERMAN. Our drain has come in, de oder platform; only one minute we haf.

(All have risen in a fluster.)

AMERICAN. Now, that's vurry provoking. I won't get that flash of beer.

(There is a general scurry to gather coats and hats and wraps, during which the lowly woman is seen making desperate attempts to deal with her baby and the two large bundles. Quite defeated, she suddenly puts all down, wrings her hands, and cries out: "Herr Jesu! Hilfe!" The flying procession turn their heads at that strange cry.)

AMERICAN. What's that? Help?

(He continues to run. The LITTLE MAN

spins round, rushes back, picks up baby and bundle on which it was seated.)

LITTLE MAN. Come along, good woman, come along!

(The woman picks up the other bundle and they run. The WAITER, appearing in the doorway with the bottle of beer, watches with his tired smile.)

SCENE II

A second-class compartment of a corridor carriage, in motion. In it are seated the ENGLISHMAN and his wife, opposite each other at the corridor end, she with her face to the engine, he with his back. Both are somewhat protected from the rest of the travellers by newspapers. Next to her sits the GERMAN, and opposite him sits the AMERICAN; next the AMERICAN in one window corner is seated the DUTCH YOUTH; the other window corner is taken by the GERMAN'S bag. The silence is only broken by the slight rushing noise of the train's progression and the crackling of the English newspapers.

AMERICAN *(turning to the DUTCH YOUTH)*. Guess I'd like that winder raised; it's kind of chilly after that old run they gave us.

(The DUTCH YOUTH laughs, and goes through the motions of raising the window. The English regard the operation with uneasy irritation. The GERMAN opens his bag, which reposes on the corner seat next him, and takes out a book.)

AMERICAN. The Germans are great readers. Vurry stimulating practice. I read most anything myself! *(The GERMAN holds up the book so that the title may be read.)* "Don Quixote"—fine book. We Amurricans take considerable stock in old man Quixote. Bit of a wild-cat—but we don't laugh at him.

GERMAN. He is dead. Dead as a sheep. A good thing, too.

AMERICAN. In Amurrica we have still quite an amount of chivalry.

GERMAN. Chivalry is nothing—sentimentalisch. In modern days—no good. A man must push, he must pull.

AMERICAN. So you say. But I judge your form of chivalry is sacrifice to the state. We allow more freedom to the individual soul. Where there's something little and weak, we feel it kind of noble to give up to it. That way we feel elevated.

(As he speaks there is seen in the corridor doorway the LITTLE MAN, with the WOMAN'S BABY still on his arm and the bundle held in the other hand. He peers in anxiously. The English, acutely conscious, try to dissociate themselves from his presence with their papers. The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.)

GERMAN. Ach! So!

AMERICAN. Dear me!

LITTLE MAN. Is there room? I can't find a seat.

AMERICAN. Why, yes! There's a seat for one.

LITTLE MAN *(depositing bundle outside, and heaving BABY)*. May I?

AMERICAN. Come right in!

(The GERMAN sulkily moves his bag. The LITTLE MAN comes in and seats himself gingerly.)

AMERICAN. Where's the mother?

LITTLE MAN *(ruefully)*. Afraid she got left behind.

(The DUTCH YOUTH laughs. The English unconsciously emerge from their newspapers.)

AMERICAN. My! That would appear to be quite a domestic incident.

(The ENGLISHMAN suddenly utters a profound "Ha, Ha!" and disappears behind

his paper. And that paper and the one opposite are seen to shake, and little squirrels and squeaks emerge.)

GERMAN. And you haf got her bundle, and her baby. Ha! (*He cackles drily.*)

AMERICAN (*gravely*). I smile. I guess Providence has played it pretty low down on you. I judge it's acted real mean.

(The BABY wails, and the LITTLE MAN jigs it with a sort of gentle desperation, looking apologetically from face to face. His wistful glance renews the fire of merriment wherever it alights. The AMERICAN alone preserves a gravity which seems incapable of being broken.)

AMERICAN. Maybe you'd better get off right smart and restore that baby. There's nothing can act madder than a mother.

LITTLE MAN. Poor thing; yes! What she must be suffering!

(A gale of laughter shakes the carriage. The English for a moment drop their papers, the better to indulge. The LITTLE MAN smiles a wintry smile.)

AMERICAN (*in a lull*). How did it eventuate?

LITTLE MAN. We got there just as the train was going to start; and I jumped, thinking I could

help her up. But it moved too quickly, and—and—left her.

(The gale of laughter blows up again.)

AMERICAN. Guess I'd have thrown the baby out.

LITTLE MAN. I was afraid the poor little thing might break.

(The BABY wails; the LITTLE MAN heaves it; the gale of laughter blows.)

AMERICAN *(gravely)*. It's highly entertaining—not for the baby. What kind of an old baby is it, anyway? *(He sniffs.)* I judge it's a bit—niffy.

LITTLE MAN. Afraid I've hardly looked at it yet.

AMERICAN. Which end up is it?

LITTLE MAN. Oh! I think the right end. Yes, yes, it is.

AMERICAN. Well, that's something. Guess I should hold it out of winder a bit. Vurry excitable things, babies!

ENGLISHWOMAN *(galvanized)*. No, no!

ENGLISHMAN *(touching her knee)*. My dear!

AMERICAN. You are right, ma'am. I opine there's a draught out there. This baby is precious. We've all of us got stock in this baby in a manner of speaking. This is a little bit of universal brotherhood. Is it a woman baby?

THE LITTLE MAN

sc. II

LITTLE MAN. I—I can only see the top of its head.

AMERICAN. You can't always tell from that. It looks kind of over-wrapped-up. Maybe it had better be unbound.

GERMAN. Nein, nein, nein!

AMERICAN. I think you are vurry likely right, colonel. It might be a pity to unbind that baby. I guess the lady should be consulted in this matter.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Yes, yes, of course—I——

ENGLISHMAN (*touching her*). Let it be! Little beggar seems all right.

AMERICAN. That would seem only known to Providence at this moment. I judge it might be due to humanity to look at its face.

LITTLE MAN (*gladly*). It's sucking my finger. There, there—nice little thing—there!

AMERICAN. I would surmise you have created babies in your leisure moments, sir?

LITTLE MAN. Oh! no—indeed, no.

AMERICAN. Dear me! That is a loss. (*Addressing himself to the carriage at large*) I think we may esteem ourselves fortunate to have this little stranger right here with us; throws a vurry tender and beautiful light on human

nature. Demónstrates what a hold the little and weak have upon us nowadays. The colonel here—a man of blood and iron—there he sits quite ca'm next door to it. (*He sniffs.*) Now, this baby is ruther chastening—that is a sign of grace, in the colonel—that is true heroism.

LITTLE MAN (*faintly*). I—I can see its face a little now.

(*All bend forward.*)

AMERICAN. What sort of a physiognomy has it, anyway?

LITTLE MAN (*still faintly*). I don't see anything but—but spots.

GERMAN. Oh! Ha! Pfui!

(*The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.*)

AMERICAN. I am told that is not uncommon amongst babies. Perhaps we could have you inform us, ma'am.

ENGLISHWOMAN. Yes, of course—only—what sort of—

LITTLE MAN. They seem all over its— (*At the slight recoil of every one*) I feel sure it's—it's quite a good baby underneath.

AMERICAN. That will be ruther difficult to come at. I'm just a bit sensitive. I've vurry little use for affections of the epidermis.

GERMAN. Pfui!

(He has edged away as far as he can get, and is lighting a big cigar. The DUTCH YOUTH draws his legs back.)

AMERICAN *(also taking out a cigar)*. I guess it would be well to fumigate this carriage. Does it suffer, do you think?

LITTLE MAN *(peering)*. Really, I don't—I'm not sure—I know so little about babies. I think it would have a nice expression—if—if it showed.

AMERICAN. Is it kind of boiled-looking?

LITTLE MAN. Yes—yes, it is.

AMERICAN *(looking gravely round)*. I judge this baby has the measles.

(The GERMAN screws himself spasmodically against the arm of the ENGLISHWOMAN'S seat.)

ENGLISHWOMAN. Poor little thing! Shall I——?
(She half-rises.)

ENGLISHMAN *(touching her)*. No, no— Dash it!

AMERICAN. I honour your emotion, ma'am. It does credit to us all. But I sympathise with your husband too. The measles is a vurry important pestilence in connection with a grown woman.

LITTLE MAN. It likes my finger awfully. Really, it's rather a sweet baby.

AMERICAN (*sniffing*). Well, that would appear to be quite a question. About them spots, now? Are they rosy?

LITTLE MAN. No—o; they're dark, almost black.

GERMAN. Gott! Typhus!

(He bounds up onto the arm of the ENGLISHWOMAN'S seat.)

AMERICAN. Typhus! That's quite an indisposition!

(The DUTCH YOUTH rises suddenly, and bolts out into the corridor. He is followed by the GERMAN, puffing clouds of smoke. The English and AMERICAN sit a moment longer without speaking. The ENGLISHWOMAN'S face is turned with a curious expression—half-pity, half-fear—toward the LITTLE MAN. Then the ENGLISHMAN gets up.)

ENGLISHMAN. Bit stuffy for you here, dear, isn't it?

(He puts his arm through hers, raises her, and almost pushes her through the doorway. She goes, still looking back.)

AMERICAN (*gravely*). There's nothing I admire

more'n courage. Guess I'll go and smoke in the corridor.

(As he goes out the LITTLE MAN looks very wistfully after him. Screwing up his mouth and nose, he holds the BABY away from him and wavers; then rising, he puts it on the seat opposite and goes through the motions of letting down the window. Having done so he looks at the BABY, who has begun to wail. Suddenly he raises his hands and clasps them, like a child praying. Since, however, the BABY does not stop wailing, he hovers over it in indecision; then, picking it up, sits down again to dandle it, with his face turned toward the open window. Finding that it still wails, he begins to sing to it in a cracked little voice. It is charmed at once. While he is singing, the AMERICAN appears in the corridor. Letting down the passage window, he stands there in the doorway with the draught blowing his hair and the smoke of his cigar all about him. The LITTLE MAN stops singing and shifts the shawl higher, to protect the BABY'S head from the draught.)

AMERICAN *(gravely)*. This is the most sublime

spectacle I have ever envisaged. There ought to be a record of this. (*The LITTLE MAN looks at him, wondering.*) We have here a most stimulating epitome of our marvellous advance toward universal brotherhood. You are typical, sir, of the sentiments of modern Christianity. You illustrate the deepest feelings in the heart of every man. (*The LITTLE MAN rises with the BABY and a movement of approach.*) Guess I'm wanted in the dining-car. (*He vanishes.*)

(*The LITTLE MAN sits down again, but back to the engine, away from the draught, and looks out of the window, patiently jogging the BABY on his knee.*)

SCENE III

An arrival platform. The LITTLE MAN, with the BABY and the bundle, is standing disconsolate, while travellers pass and luggage is being carried by. A STATION OFFICIAL, accompanied by a POLICEMAN, appears from a doorway, behind him.

OFFICIAL (*consulting telegram in his hand*). Das ist der Herr.

(*They advance to the LITTLE MAN.*)

OFFICIAL. Sie haben einen Buben gestohlen?

LITTLE MAN. I only speak English and American.

OFFICIAL. Dies ist nicht Ihr Bube? (*He touches the BABY.*)

LITTLE MAN (*shaking his head*). Take care—it's ill. (*The man does not understand.*) Ill—the baby——

OFFICIAL (*shaking his head*). Verstehe nicht. Dis is nod your baby? No?

LITTLE MAN (*shaking his head violently*). No, it is not. No.

OFFICIAL (*tapping the telegram*). Gut! You are 'rested. (*He signs to the POLICEMAN, who takes the LITTLE MAN'S arm.*)

LITTLE MAN. Why? I don't want the poor baby.

OFFICIAL (*lifting the bundle*). Dies ist nicht Ihr Gepäck—pag?

LITTLE MAN. No.

OFFICIAL. Gut. You are 'rested.

LITTLE MAN. I only took it for the poor woman. I'm not a thief—I'm—I'm——

OFFICIAL (*shaking head*). Verstehe nicht.

(*The LITTLE MAN tries to tear his hair.
The disturbed BABY wails.*)

LITTLE MAN (*dandling it as best he can*). There, there—poor, poor!

OFFICIAL. Halt still! You are 'rested. It is all right.

LITTLE MAN. Where is the mother?

OFFICIAL. She comm by next drain. Das telegram say: Halt einen Herrn mit schwarzem Buben and schwarzem Gepäck. 'Rest gentleman mit black baby und black—pag.

(*The LITTLE MAN turns up his eyes to heaven.*)

OFFICIAL. Komm mit us.

(*They take the LITTLE MAN toward the door from which they have come. A voice stops them.*)

AMERICAN (*speaking from as far away as may be*).

Just a moment!

(*The OFFICIAL stops; the LITTLE MAN also stops and sits down on a bench against the wall. The POLICEMAN stands stolidly beside him. The AMERICAN approaches a step or two, beckoning; the OFFICIAL goes up to him.*)

AMERICAN. Guess you've got an angel from heaven there! What's the gentleman in buttons for?

OFFICIAL. Was ist das?

AMERICAN. Is there anybody here that can understand Amurrican?

OFFICIAL. Verstehe nicht.

AMERICAN. Well, just watch my gestures. I was saying (*he points to the LITTLE MAN, then makes gestures of flying*) you have an angel from heaven there. You have there a man in whom Gawd (*he points upward*) takes quite an amount of stock. This is a vurry precious man. You have no call to arrest him (*he makes the gesture of arrest*). No, sir. Providence has acted pretty mean, loading off that baby on him (*he makes the motion of dandling*). The little man has a heart of gold. (*He points to his heart, and takes out a gold coin.*)

OFFICIAL (*thinking he is about to be bribed*). Aber, das ist zu viel!

AMERICAN. Now, don't rattle me! (*Pointing to the LITTLE MAN*) Man (*pointing to his heart*) Herz (*pointing to the coin*) von Gold. This is a flower of the field—he don't want no gentleman in buttons to pluck him up. (*A little crowd is gathering, including the two English, the GERMAN, and the DUTCH YOUTH.*)

OFFICIAL. Verstehe absolut nichts. (*He taps the telegram.*) Ich muss mein duty do.

AMERICAN. But I'm telling you. This is a good

man. This is probably the best man on Gawd's airth.

OFFICIAL. Das macht nichts—gut or no gut, I muss mein duty do. (*He turns to go toward the LITTLE MAN.*)

AMERICAN. Oh! Vurry well, arrest him; do your duty. This baby has typhus.

(*At the word "typhus" the OFFICIAL stops.*)

AMERICAN (*making gestures*). First-class typhus, black typhus, schwarzen typhus. Now you have it. I'm kind o' sorry for you and the gentleman in buttons. Do your duty!

OFFICIAL. Typhus? Der Bub'—die baby hat typhus?

AMERICAN. I'm telling you.

OFFICIAL. Gott im Himmel!

AMERICAN (*spotting the GERMAN in the little throng*). Here's a gentleman will corroborate me.

OFFICIAL (*much disturbed, and signing to the POLICEMAN to stand clear*). Typhus! Aber das ist grässlich!

AMERICAN. I kind o' thought you'd feel like that.

OFFICIAL. Die Sanitätsmaschine! Gleich!

(*A PORTER goes to get it. From either side the broken half-moon of persons stand gaz-*

ing at the LITTLE MAN, who sits unhappily dandling the BABY in the centre.)

OFFICIAL (*raising his hands*). Was zu thun?

AMERICAN. Guess you'd better isolate the baby.

(A silence, during which the LITTLE MAN is heard faintly whistling and clucking to the BABY.)

OFFICIAL (*referring once more to his telegram*).

'Rest gentleman mit black baby. (*Shaking his head*) Wir must de gentleman hold. (*To the GERMAN*) Bitte, mein Herr, sagen Sie ihm, den Buben zu niedersetzen. (*He makes the gesture of deposit.*)

GERMAN (*to the LITTLE MAN*). He say: Put down the baby.

(The LITTLE MAN shakes his head, and continues to dandle the BABY.)

OFFICIAL. Sie müssen—you must.

(The LITTLE MAN glowers, in silence.)

ENGLISHMAN (*in background—muttering*). Good man!

GERMAN. His spirit ever denies; er will nicht.

OFFICIAL (*again making his gesture*). Aber er muss! (*The LITTLE MAN makes a face at him.*)

Sag' Ihm: Instantly put down baby, and komm' mit us.

(The BABY wails.)

LITTLE MAN. Leave the poor ill baby here alone?
Be-be-be- d—d first!

AMERICAN (*jumping onto a trunk—with enthusiasm*). Bully!

(*The English clap their hands; the DUTCH YOUTH laughs. The OFFICIAL is muttering, greatly incensed.*)

AMERICAN. What does that body-snatcher say?

GERMAN. He say this man use the baby to save himself from arrest. Very smart—he say.

AMERICAN. I judge you do him an injustice. (*Showing off the LITTLE MAN with a sweep of his arm.*) This is a vurry white man. He's got a black baby, and he won't leave it in the lurch. Guess we would all act noble, that way, give us the chance.

(*The LITTLE MAN rises, holding out the BABY, and advances a step or two. The half-moon at once gives, increasing its size; the AMERICAN climbs onto a higher trunk. The LITTLE MAN retires and again sits down.*)

AMERICAN (*addressing the OFFICIAL*). Guess you'd better go out of business and wait for the mother.

OFFICIAL (*stamping his foot*). Die Mutter sall 'rested be for taking out baby mit typhus.

Ha! (*To the LITTLE MAN*) Put ze baby down! (*The LITTLE MAN smiles.*) Do you 'ear?

AMERICAN (*addressing the OFFICIAL*). Now, see here. 'Pears to me you don't suspicion just how beautiful this is. Here we have a man giving his life for that old baby that's got no claim on him. This is not a baby of his own making. No, sir, this a vurry Christ-like proposition in the gentleman.

OFFICIAL. Put ze baby down, or ich will gommand some one it to do.

AMERICAN. That will be vurry interesting to watch.

OFFICIAL (*to POLICEMAN*). Nehmen Sie den Buben. Dake it vrom him.

(*The POLICEMAN mutters, but does not.*)

AMERICAN (*to the GERMAN*). Guess I lost that.

GERMAN. He say he is not his officier.

AMERICAN. That just tickles me to death.

OFFICIAL (*looking round*). Vill nobody dake ze Bub'?

ENGLISHWOMAN (*moving a step—faintly*). Yes—
I—

ENGLISHMAN (*grasping her arm*). By Jove! Will you!

OFFICIAL (*gathering himself for a great effort to take the BABY, and advancing two steps*). Zen I gommand you—— (*He stops and his voice dies away.*) Zit dere!

AMERICAN. My! That's wonderful. What a man this is! What a sublime sense of duty!

(*The DUTCH YOUTH laughs. The OFFICIAL turns on him, but as he does so the MOTHER of the BABY is seen hurrying.*)

MOTHER. Ach! Ach! Mei' Bubi!

(*Her face is illumined; she is about to rush to the LITTLE MAN.*)

OFFICIAL (*to the POLICEMAN*). Nimm die Frau!

(*The POLICEMAN catches hold of the WOMAN.*)

OFFICIAL (*to the frightened WOMAN*). Warum haben Sie einen Buben mit Typhus mit ausgebracht?

AMERICAN (*eagerly, from his perch*). What was that? I don't want to miss any.

GERMAN. He say: Why did you a baby with typhus with you bring out?

AMERICAN. Well, that's quite a question. (*He takes out the field-glasses slung around him and adjusts them on the BABY.*)

MOTHER (*bewildered*). Mei' Bubi—Typhus—aber

Typhus? (*She shakes her head violently.*) Nein, nein, nein! Typhus!

OFFICIAL. Er hat Typhus.

MOTHER (*shaking her head*). Nein, nein, nein!

AMERICAN (*looking through his glasses*). Guess she's kind of right! I judge the typhus is where the baby's slobbered on the shawl, and it's come off on him.

(*The DUTCH YOUTH laughs.*)

OFFICIAL (*turning on him furiously*). Er hat Typhus.

AMERICAN. Now, that's where you slop over. Come right here.

(*The OFFICIAL mounts, and looks through the glasses.*)

AMERICAN (*to the LITTLE MAN*). Skin out the baby's leg. If we don't locate spots on that, it'll be good enough for me.

(*The LITTLE MAN fumbles out the BABY'S little white foot.*)

MOTHER. Mei' Bubi! (*She tries to break away.*)

AMERICAN. White as a banana. (*To the OFFICIAL—affably*) Guess you've made kind of a fool of us with your old typhus.

OFFICIAL. Lass die Frau!

(*The POLICEMAN lets her go, and she rushes to her BABY.*)

MOTHER. Mei' Bubi!

(The BABY, exchanging the warmth of the LITTLE MAN for the momentary chill of its MOTHER, wails.)

OFFICIAL *(descending and beckoning to the POLICEMAN)*. Sie wollen den Herrn accusiren?

(The POLICEMAN takes the LITTLE MAN'S arm.)

AMERICAN. What's that? They goin' to pinch him after all?

(The MOTHER, still hugging her BABY, who has stopped crying, gazes at the LITTLE MAN, who sits dazedly looking up. Suddenly she drops on her knees, and with her free hand lifts his booted foot and kisses it.)

AMERICAN *(waving his hat)*. 'Ra! 'Ra! *(He descends swiftly, goes up to the LITTLE MAN, whose arm the POLICEMAN has dropped, and takes his hand.)* Brother, I am proud to know you. This is one of the greatest moments I have ever experienced. *(Displaying the LITTLE MAN to the assembled company)* I think I sense the situation when I say that we all esteem it an honour to breathe the rather inferior atmosphere of this station here along with our little friend. I guess we shall all go home and

treasure the memory of his face as the whitest thing in our museum of recollections. And perhaps this good woman will also go home and wash the face of our little brother here. I am inspired with a new faith in mankind. We can all be proud of this mutual experience; we have our share in it; we can kind of feel noble. Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to present to you a sure-enough saint—only wants a halo, to be transfigured. (*To the LITTLE MAN*) Stand right up.

(The LITTLE MAN stands up bewildered. They come about him. The OFFICIAL bows to him, the POLICEMAN salutes him. The DUTCH YOUTH shakes his head and laughs. The GERMAN draws himself up very straight, and bows quickly twice. The ENGLISHMAN and his wife approach at least two steps, then, thinking better of it, turn to each other and recede. The MOTHER kisses his hand. The PORTER returning with the Sanitätsmaschine, turns it on from behind, and its pinkish shower, goldened by a ray of sunlight, falls around the LITTLE MAN'S head, transfiguring it as he stands with eyes upraised to see whence the portent comes.)

AMERICAN (*rushing forward and dropping on his knees*). Hold on just a minute! Guess I'll take a snap-shot of the miracle. (*He adjusts his pocket camera.*) This ought to look bully!

HALL-MARKED

The scene is the sitting-room and veranda of Her bungalow.

The room is pleasant, and along the back, where the veranda runs, it seems all window, both French and casement. There is a door right and a door left. The day is bright; the time morning. HERSELF, dripping wet, comes running along the veranda, through the French window, with a wet Scotch terrier in her arms. She vanishes through the door left. A little pause, and LADY ELLA comes running, dry, thin, refined, and agitated. She halts where the tracks of water cease at the door left. A little pause, and MAUD comes running, fairly dry, stolid, breathless, and dragging a bulldog, wet, breathless, and stout, by the crutch end of her en-tout-cas.

LADY ELLA. Don't bring Hannibal in till I know where she's put Edward!

MAUD (*brutally, to HANNIBAL*). Bad dog! Bad dog!

(HANNIBAL *snuffles*.)

HALL-MARKED

LADY ELLA. Maud, do take him out! Tie him up. Here! (*She takes out a lace handkerchief.*) No—something stronger! Poor darling Edward! (*To HANNIBAL*) You are a bad dog!

(*HANNIBAL snuffles.*)

MAUD. Edward began it, Ella. (*To HANNIBAL*) Bad dog! Bad dog!

(*HANNIBAL snuffles.*)

LADY ELLA. Tie him up outside. Here, take my scarf. Where is my poor treasure? (*She removes her scarf.*) Catch! His ear's torn; I saw it.

MAUD (*taking the scarf, to HANNIBAL*). Now! (*HANNIBAL snuffles. She ties the scarf to his collar.*) He smells horrible. Bad dog—getting into ponds to fight!

LADY ELLA. Tie him up, Maud. I *must* try in here.

(*Their husbands, THE SQUIRE and THE RECTOR, come hastening along the veranda.*)

MAUD (*to THE RECTOR*). Smell him, Bertie! (*To THE SQUIRE*) You *might* have that pond drained, Squire!

(*She takes HANNIBAL out, and ties him to the veranda. THE SQUIRE and RECTOR*

HALL-MARKED

come in. LADY ELLA is knocking on the door left.)

HER VOICE. All right! I've bound him up!

LADY ELLA. May I come in?

HER VOICE. Just a second! I've got nothing on.

(LADY ELLA recoils. THE SQUIRE and RECTOR make an involuntary movement of approach.)

LADY ELLA. Oh! There you are!

THE RECTOR *(doubtfully)*. I was just going to wade in——

LADY ELLA. Hannibal would have killed him, if she hadn't rushed in!

THE SQUIRE. Done him good, little beast!

LADY ELLA. Why didn't *you* go in, Tommy?

THE SQUIRE. Well, I *would*——only she——

LADY ELLA. I can't think how she got Edward out of Hannibal's awful mouth!

MAUD *(without—to HANNIBAL, who is snuffing on the veranda, and straining at the scarf)*. Bad dog!

LADY ELLA. We must simply thank her tremendously! I shall never forget the way she ran in, with her skirts up to her waist!

THE SQUIRE. By Jove! No.

LADY ELLA. Her clothes must be ruined. That

HALL-MARKED

pond—ugh! (*She wrinkles her nose.*) Tommy, do have it drained.

THE RECTOR (*dreamily*). I don't remember her face in church.

THE SQUIRE. Ah! Yes. Who is she? Pretty woman!

LADY ELLA. I must get the Vet. to Edward.
(*To THE SQUIRE*) Tommy, do exert yourself!
(*MAUD re-enters.*)

THE SQUIRE. All right! (*Exerting himself*) Here's a bell.

HER VOICE (*through the door*). The bleeding's stopped. (*They listen.*) Shall I send him in to you?

LADY ELLA. Oh, please! Poor darling!

(*LADY ELLA prepares to receive EDWARD. THE SQUIRE and RECTOR stand transfixed. The door opens, and a bare arm gently pushes EDWARD forth. He is bandaged with a smooth towel. There is a snuffle—HANNIBAL has broken the scarf, outside.*)

LADY ELLA (*aghast*). Look! Hannibal's loose! Maud—Tommy. (*To THE RECTOR*) You!
(*The three rush to prevent HANNIBAL from re-entering.*)

HALL-MARKED

LADY ELLA (*to EDWARD*). Yes, I know—you'd like to! You *shall* bite him when it's safe. Oh! my darling, you *do*— (*She sniffs.* MAUD and THE SQUIRE *re-enter.*) Have you tied him properly this time?

MAUD. With Bertie's braces.

LADY ELLA. Oh! but——

MAUD. It's all right; they're almost leather.

(THE RECTOR *re-enters, with a slight look of insecurity.*)

LADY ELLA. Rector, are you sure it's safe?

THE RECTOR (*hitching at his trousers*). No, indeed, Lady Ella—I——

LADY ELLA. Tommy, do lend a hand!

THE SQUIRE. All right, Ella; all right! He doesn't mean what you mean!

LADY ELLA (*transferring EDWARD to THE SQUIRE*). Hold him, Tommy. He's sure to smell out Hannibal!

THE SQUIRE (*taking EDWARD by the collar, and holding his own nose*). Jove! Clever if he can smell anything but himself. Phew! She ought to have the Victoria Cross for goin' in that pond.

(*The door opens, and HERSELF appears; a fine, frank, handsome woman, in a man's*

HALL-MARKED

*orange-coloured motor-coat, hastily thrown
on over the substrata of costume.)*

SHE. So very sorry—had to have a bath, and
change, of course!

LADY ELLA. We're so awfully grateful to you.
It was splendid.

MAUD. Quite.

THE RECTOR (*rather holding himself together*).
Heroic! I was just myself about to——

THE SQUIRE (*restraining EDWARD*). Little beast
will fight—must apologise—you were too quick
for me——

*(He looks up at her. She is smiling, and
regarding the wounded dog, her head
benevolently on one side.)*

SHE. Poor dears! They thought they were so
safe in that nice pond!

LADY ELLA. Is he very badly torn?

SHE. Rather nasty. There ought to be a stitch
or two put in his ear.

LADY ELLA. I thought so. Tommy, do——

THE SQUIRE. All right. Am I to let him go?

LADY ELLA. No.

MAUD. The fly's outside. Bertie, run and tell
Jarvis to drive in for the Vet.

THE RECTOR (*gentle and embarrassed*). Run?
Well, Maud—I——

HALL-MARKED

SHE. The doctor would sew it up. My maid can go round.

(HANNIBAL appears at the open casement with the broken braces dangling from his collar.)

LADY ELLA. Look! Catch him! Rector!

MAUD. Bertie! Catch him!

(THE RECTOR seizes HANNIBAL, but is seen to be in difficulties with his garments. HERSELF, who has gone out left, returns, with a leather strop in one hand and a pair of braces in the other.)

SHE. Take this strop—he can't break that. And would these be any good to you?

(She hands the braces to MAUD and goes out onto the veranda and hastily away. MAUD, transferring the braces to THE RECTOR, goes out, draws HANNIBAL from the casement window, and secures him with the strop. THE RECTOR sits suddenly, with the braces in his hands. There is a moment's peace.)

LADY ELLA. Splendid, isn't she? I do admire her.

THE SQUIRE. She's all there.

THE RECTOR *(feelingly)*. Most kind.

(He looks ruefully at the braces and at LADY ELLA. A silence. MAUD reappears at the door and stands gazing at the braces.)

HALL-MARKED

THE SQUIRE (*suddenly*). Eh?

MAUD. Yes.

THE SQUIRE (*looking at his wife*). Ah!

LADY ELLA (*absorbed in EDWARD*). Poor darling!

THE SQUIRE (*bluntly*). Ella, the rector wants to get up!

THE RECTOR (*gently*). Perhaps—just for a moment—

LADY ELLA. Oh! (*She turns to the wall.*)

(THE RECTOR, *screened by his wife, retires onto the veranda, to adjust his garments.*)

THE SQUIRE (*meditating*). So she's married!

LADY ELLA (*absorbed in EDWARD*). Why?

THE SQUIRE. Braces.

LADY ELLA. Oh! Yes. We ought to ask them to dinner, Tommy.

THE SQUIRE. Ah! Yes. Wonder who they are?

(THE RECTOR *and* MAUD *reappear.*)

THE RECTOR. Really very good of her to lend her husband's— I was—er—quite—

MAUD. That'll do, Bertie.

(*They see HER returning along the veranda, followed by a sandy, red-faced gentleman in leather leggings, with a needle and cotton in his hand.*)

HALL-MARKED

HERSELF. Caught the doctor just starting. So lucky!

LADY ELLA. Oh! Thank goodness!

DOCTOR. How do, Lady Ella? How do, Squire—how do, Rector? (*To MAUD*) How de do? This the beast? I see. Quite! Who'll hold him for me?

LADY ELLA. Oh! I!

HERSELF. D'you know, I *think* I'd better. It's so dreadful when it's your own, isn't it? Shall we go in here, doctor? Come along, pretty boy!

(*SHE takes EDWARD, and they pass into the room, left.*)

LADY ELLA. I dreaded it. She is splendid!

THE SQUIRE. Dogs take to her. That's a sure sign.

THE RECTOR. Little things—one can always tell.

THE SQUIRE. Something very attractive about her—what! Fine build of woman.

MAUD. I shall get hold of her for parish work.

THE RECTOR. Ah! Excellent—excellent! Do!

THE SQUIRE. Wonder if her husband shoots? She seems quite—er—quite—

LADY ELLA (*watching the door*). Quite! Altogether charming; one of the nicest faces I ever

HALL-MARKED

SAW. (THE DOCTOR *comes out alone.*) Oh! Doctor—have you—is it——

DOCTOR. Right as rain! She held him like an angel—he just licked her, and never made a sound.

LADY ELLA. Poor darling! Can I— (*She signs toward the door.*)

DOCTOR. Better leave 'em a minute. She's mop-pin' 'im off. (*He wrinkles his nose.*) Wonderful clever hands!

THE SQUIRE. I say—who *is* she?

DOCTOR (*looking from face to face with a dubious and rather quizzical expression*). Who? Well—There you have me! All I know is she's a first-rate nurse—been helpin' me with a case in Ditch Lane. Nice woman, too—thorough good sort! Quite an acquisition here. H'm! (*Again that quizzical glance.*) Excuse me hurryin' off—very late. Good-bye, Rector! Good-bye, Lady Ella! Good-bye!

(*He goes. A silence.*)

THE SQUIRE. H'm! I suppose we ought to be a bit careful.

(*JARVIS, flyman of the old school, has appeared on the veranda.*)

JARVIS (*to THE RECTOR*). Beg pardon, sir. Is the little dog all right?

HALL-MARKED

MAUD. Yes.

JARVIS (*touching his hat*). Seein' you've missed your train, m'm, shall I wait, and take you 'ome again?

MAUD. No.

JARVIS. Cert'nly, m'm.

(*He touches his hat with a circular gesture, and is about to withdraw.*)

LADY ELLA. Oh! Jarvis—what's the name of the people here?

JARVIS. Challenger's the name I've driven 'em in, my lady.

THE SQUIRE. Challenger? Sounds like a hound. What's he like?

JARVIS (*scratching his head*). Wears a soft 'at, sir.

THE SQUIRE. H'm! Ah!

JARVIS. Very nice gentleman, very nice lady. 'Elped me with my old mare when she 'ad the 'ighsteria last week—couldn't 'a' been kinder if they'd 'a' been angels from 'eaven. Wonderful fond o' dumb animals, the two of 'em. I don't pay no attention to gossip, meself.

MAUD. Gossip? What gossip?

JARVIS (*backing*). Did I make use of the word, m'm? You'll excuse me, I'm sure. There's always talk where there's newcomers. I takes people as I finds 'em.

HALL-MARKED

THE RECTOR. Yes, yes, Jarvis—quite—quite right!

JARVIS. Yes, sir. I've—I've got a 'abit that way at my time o' life.

MAUD (*sharply*). How long have they been here, Jarvis?

JARVIS. Well—er—a matter of three weeks, m'm.

(*A slight involuntary stir. Apologetic*) Of course, in my profession, I can't afford to take notice of whether there's the trifle of a ring between 'em, as the sayin' is. 'Tisn't 'ardly my business like.

(*A silence.*)

LADY ELLA (*suddenly*). Er—thank you, Jarvis; you needn't wait.

JARVIS. No, m'lady! Your service, sir—service, m'm. (*He goes.*)

(*A silence.*)

THE SQUIRE (*drawing a little closer*). Three weeks? I say—er—wasn't there a book?

THE RECTOR (*abstracted*). Three weeks—I certainly haven't seen them in church.

MAUD. A *trifle* of a ring!

LADY ELLA (*impulsively*). Oh, bother! I'm sure she's all right. And if she isn't, I don't care. She's been much too splendid.

THE SQUIRE. Must think of the village. Didn't quite like the doctor's way of puttin' us off.

HALL-MARKED

LADY ELLA. The poor darling owes his life to her.

THE SQUIRE. H'm! Dash it! Yes! Can't forget the way she ran into that stinkin' pond.

MAUD. *Had she a wedding-ring on?*

(They look at each other, but no one knows.)

LADY ELLA. Well, *I'm* not going to be ungrateful!

THE SQUIRE. It'd be dashed awkward—mustn't take a false step, Ella.

THE RECTOR. And I've got his braces!

(He puts his hand to his waist.)

MAUD *(warningly)*. Bertie!

THE SQUIRE. That's all right, Rector—we're goin' to be perfectly polite, and—and—thank her, and all that.

LADY ELLA. We can *see* she's a good sort. What *does* it matter?

MAUD. My dear Ella! "What does it matter!"
We've got to know.

THE RECTOR. We *do* want light.

THE SQUIRE. I'll ring the bell.

(He rings. They look at each other aghast.)

LADY ELLA. What did you ring for, Tommy?

THE SQUIRE *(flabbergasted)*. God knows!

MAUD. Somebody'll come.

THE SQUIRE. Rector—you—you've got to——

HALL-MARKED

MAUD. Yes, Bertie.

THE RECTOR. Dear me! But—er—what—er—
How?

THE SQUIRE (*deeply—to himself*). The whole
thing's damn delicate.

(*The door right is opened and a MAID ap-
pears. She is a determined-looking female.
They face her in silence.*)

THE RECTOR. Er—er—your master is not in?

THE MAID. No. 'E's gone up to London.

THE RECTOR. Er—*Mr. Challenger*, I think?

THE MAID. Yes.

THE RECTOR. Yes! Er—quite so!

THE MAID (*eyeing them*). D'you want—Mrs.
Challenger?

THE RECTOR. Ah! Not precisely—

THE SQUIRE (*to him in a low, determined voice*). Go
on.

THE RECTOR (*desperately*). I asked because there
was a—a—*Mr. Challenger* I used to know in
the nineties, and I thought—you wouldn't
happen to know how long they've been mar-
ried? My friend marr—

THE MAID. Three weeks.

THE RECTOR. Quite so—quite so! I shall hope
it will turn out to be— Er—thank you—
Ha!

HALL-MARKED

LADY ELLA. Our dog has been fighting with the rector's, and Mrs. Challenger rescued him; she's bathing his ear. We're waiting to thank her. You needn't—

THE MAID (*eyeing them*). No. (*She turns and goes out.*)

THE SQUIRE. Phew! What a gorgon! I say, Rector, did you really know a Challenger in the nineties?

THE RECTOR (*wiping his brow*). No.

THE SQUIRE. Ha! Jolly good!

LADY ELLA. Well, you see!—it's all right.

THE RECTOR. Yes, indeed. A great relief!

LADY ELLA (*moving to the door*). I must go in now.

THE SQUIRE. Hold on! You goin' to ask 'em to—to—anything?

LADY ELLA. Yes.

MAUD. I shouldn't.

LADY ELLA. Why not? We all like the look of her.

THE RECTOR. I think we should punish ourselves for entertaining that uncharitable thought.

LADY ELLA. Yes. It's horrible not having the courage to take people as they are.

THE SQUIRE. As they are? H'm! How *can* you till you know?

HALL-MARKED

LADY ELLA. Trust our instincts, of course.

THE SQUIRE. And supposing she'd turned out not married—eh?

LADY ELLA. She'd still be *herself*, wouldn't she?

MAUD. Ella!

THE SQUIRE. H'm! Don't know about that.

LADY ELLA. Of course she would, Tommy.

THE RECTOR (*his hand stealing to his waist*). Well!
It's a great weight off my——!

LADY ELLA. There's the poor darling snuffing.
I must go in.

(She knocks on the door. It is opened, and EDWARD comes out briskly, with a neat little white pointed ear-cap on one ear.)

LADY ELLA. Precious!

(SHE HERSELF comes out, now properly dressed in flax-blue linen.)

LADY ELLA. How perfectly sweet of you to make him that!

SHE. He's such a dear. And the other poor dog?

MAUD. Quite safe, thanks to your strop.

(HANNIBAL appears at the window, with the broken strop dangling. Following her gaze, they turn and see him.)

MAUD. Oh! There, he's broken it. Bertie!

SHE. Let me! *(SHE seizes HANNIBAL.)*

HALL-MARKED

THE SQUIRE. We're really most tremendously obliged to you. Afraid we've been an awful nuisance.

SHE. Not a bit. I love dogs.

THE SQUIRE. Hope to make the acquaintance of Mr.—of your husband.

LADY ELLA (*to EDWARD, who is straining*). Gently, darling! Tommy, take him. (THE SQUIRE *does so*.)

MAUD (*approaching HANNIBAL*). Is he behaving? (*She stops short, and her face suddenly shoots forward at HER hands that are holding HANNIBAL'S neck.*)

SHE. Oh! yes—he's a love.

MAUD (*regaining her upright position, and pursing her lips; in a peculiar voice*). Bertie, take Hannibal.

(THE RECTOR *takes him.*)

LADY ELLA (*producing a card*). I can't be too grateful for all you've done for my poor darling. This is where we live. Do come—and see—(MAUD, *whose eyes have never left those hands, tweaks LADY ELLA'S dress.*) That is—I'm—I—

(HERSELF *looks at LADY ELLA in surprise.*)

THE SQUIRE. I don't know if your husband shoots,

HALL-MARKED

but—if—(MAUD, *catching his eye, taps the third finger of her left hand*)—er—he—does—er—
—er—

(HERSELF *looks at THE SQUIRE surprised.*)

MAUD (*turning to her husband, repeats the gesture with the low and simple word*) Look!

THE RECTOR (*with round eyes, severely*). Hannibal!

(*He lifts him bodily, and carries him away.*)

MAUD. Don't squeeze him, Bertie! (*She follows through the French window.*)

THE SQUIRE (*abruptly—of the unoffending EDWARD*). That dog'll be forgettin' himself in a minute. (*He picks up EDWARD, and takes him out. LADY ELLA is left staring.*)

LADY ELLA (*at last*). You mustn't think, I—you mustn't think, we— Oh! I *must* just see they don't let Edward get at Hannibal. (*She skims away.*)

(HERSELF *is left staring after LADY ELLA, in surprise.*)

SHE. What is the matter with them?

(*The door is opened.*)

THE MAID (*entering, and holding out a wedding-ring—severely*). You left this, m'm, in the bathroom.

HALL-MARKED

SHE (*looking, startled, at HER finger*). Oh! (*Taking it*) I hadn't missed it. Thank you, Martha.

(**THE MAID** goes. *A hand, slipping in at the casement window, softly lays a pair of braces on the window-sill. SHE looks at the braces, then at the ring. HER lip curls.*)

SHE (*murmuring deeply*). Ah!



THE VOICE OF —!

The proprietor of "The Paradise" had said freely that she would "knock them." Broad, full-coloured, and with the clear, swimming eye of an imaginative man, he was trusted when he spoke thus of his new "turns." There was the feeling that he had once more discovered a good thing.

And on the afternoon of the new star's dress rehearsal it was noticed that he came down to watch her, smoking his cigar calmly in the front row of the stalls. When she had finished and withdrawn, the *chef d'orchestre*, while folding up his score, felt something tickling his ear.

"Bensoni, this is hot goods!"

Turning that dim, lined face of his, whose moustache was always coming out of wax, Signor Bensoni answered: "A bit of all right, boss!"

"If they hug her real big to-night, send round to my room."

"I will."

Evening came, and under the gilt-starred dome the house was packed. Rows and rows of serious seekers for amusement; and all the customary

THE VOICE OF —!

crowd of those who "drop in"—old clients with hair and without hair, in evening clothes, or straight from their offices or race-course; bare-necked ladies sitting; ladies who never sat, but under large hats stood looking into the distance, or moved with alacrity in no particular direction, and halted swiftly with a gentle humming; lounging and high-collared youths, furtively or boldly staring, and unconsciously tightening their lips; distinguished goatee-bearded foreigners wandering without rest. And always round the doorways the huge attendants, in their long, closely buttoned coats.

The little Peruvian bears had danced. The Volpo troupe in claret-coloured tights had gone once more without mishap through their hair-breadth tumbles. The Mulligatawny quartet had contributed their "unparalleled plate spray." "Donks, the human ass," had brayed. Signor Bensoni had conducted to its close his "Pot-pouriture" which afforded so many men an opportunity to stretch their legs. Arsenico had swallowed many things with conspicuous impunity. "Great and Small Scratch" had scratched. "Fräulein Tizi, the charming female vocalist," had suddenly removed his stays. There had been no minute dull; yet over the whole performance

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had hung that advent of the new star, that sense of waiting for a greater moment.

She came at last—in black and her own whiteness, “La Bellissima,” straight from Brazil; tall, with raven-dark hair, and her beautiful face as pale as ivory. Tranquilly smiling with eyes only, she seemed to draw the gaze of all into those dark wells of dancing life; and, holding out her arms, that seemed fairer and rounder than the arms of women, she said: “Ladies and gentlemen, I will dance for you de latest Gollywog Brazilian caterpillar crawl.”

Then, in lime-light streaming down on her from the centre of the gallery, she moved back to the corner of the stage. Those who were wandering stood still; every face craned forward. For, side-long, with a mouth widened till it nearly reached her ears, her legs straddling, and her stomach writhing, she was moving incomparably across the stage. Her face, twisted on her neck, at an alarming angle, was distorted to a strange, imitable hideousness. She reached the wings, and turned. A voice cried out: “*Épatant!*” Her arms, those round white arms, seemed yellow and skinny now, her obviously slender hips had achieved miraculous importance; each movement of her whole frame was attuned to a perfect har-

THE VOICE OF —!

mony of ugliness. Twice she went thus marvelously up and down, in the ever-deepening hush. Then the music stopped, the lime-light ceased to flow, and she stood once more tranquil and upright, beautiful, with her smiling eyes. A roar of enthusiasm broke, salvo after salvo—clapping and “Bravos,” and comments flying from mouth to mouth.

“Rippin’!” “Bizarre—I say—how bizarre!” “Of the most chic!” “*Wunderschön!*” “Bully!”

Raising her arms again for silence, she said quite simply: “Good! I will now, ladies and gentlemen, sing you the latest Patagonian Squaw Squall. I sing you first, however, few bars of ‘Che farò’ old-fashion, to show you my natural tones—so you will see.” And in a deep, sweet voice began at once: “Che farò senz’ Euridice”; while through the whole house ran a shuffle of preparation for the future. Then all was suddenly still; for from her lips, remarkably enlarged, was issuing a superb cacophony. Like the screeching of parrots, and miauling of tiger-cats fighting in a forest, it forced attention from even the least musical.

Before the first verse was ended, the uncontrollable applause had drowned her; and she stood, not bowing, smiling with her lips now—her pretty

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lips. Then raising a slender forefinger, she began the second verse. Even more strangely harsh and dissonant, from lips more monstrously disfigured, the great sound came. And, as though in tune with that crescendo, the lime-light brightened till she seemed all wrapped in flame. Before the storm of acclamation could burst from the enraptured house, a voice coming from the gallery was heard suddenly to cry:

“Woman! Blasphemous creature! You have profaned Beauty!”

For a single second there was utter silence, then a huge, angry “Hush!” was hurled up at the speaker; and all eyes turned toward the stage.

There stood the beautiful creature, motionless, staring up into the lime-light. And the voice from the gallery was heard again.

“The blind applaud you; it is natural. But you—unnatural! Go!” The beautiful creature threw up her head, as though struck below the jaw, and with hands flung out, rushed from the stage. Then, amidst the babel of a thousand cries—“Chuck the brute out!” “Throw him over!” “Where’s the manager?” “Encore, encore!”—the manager himself came out from the wings. He stood gazing up into the stream of lime-light, and there was instant silence.

THE VOICE OF —!

"Hullo! up there! Have you got him?"

A voice, far and small, travelled back in answer:

"It's no one up here, sir!"

"What? Limes! It was in front of you!"

A second faint, small voice came quavering down:

"There's been no one hollerin' near me, sir."

"Cut off your light!"

Down came the quavering voice: "I 'ave cut off, sir."

"What?"

"I 'ave cut off—I'm disconnected."

"Look at it!" And, pointing toward the brilliant ray still showering down onto the stage, whence a faint smoke seemed rising, the manager stepped back into the wings.

Then, throughout the house, arose a rustling and a scuffling, as of a thousand furtively consulting; and through it, of it, continually louder, the whisper—"Fire!"

And from every row some one stole out: the women in the large hats clustered, and trooped toward the doors. In five minutes "The Paradise" was empty, save of its officials. But of fire there was none.

Down in the orchestra, standing well away from the centre, so that he could see the stream of lime-light, the manager said:

THE VOICE OF —!

“Electrics!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Cut off every light.”

“Right, sir.”

With a clicking sound the lights went out; and all was black—but for that golden pathway still flowing down the darkness. For a moment the manager blinked silently at the strange effulgence. Then his scared voice rose: “Send for the Boss—look alive! Where’s Limes?”

Close to his elbow a dark little quick-eyed man, with his air of professional stupidity, answered in doubt: “Here, sir.”

“It’s up to you, Limes!”

The little man, wiping his forehead, gazed at the stream of golden light, powdering out to silver at its edges.

“I’ve took out me limes, and I’m disconnected, and this blanky ray goes on. What am I to do? There’s nothing up there to cause it. Go an’ see for yourself, sir!” Then, passing his hand across his mouth, he blurted out: “It’s got to do with that there voice—I shouldn’t be surprised. Unnat’ral-like; the voice o’ ——”

The manager interrupted sharply: “Don’t be a d—d ass, Limes!”

And, suddenly, all saw the proprietor passing

THE VOICE OF — 1

from the prompt side behind that faint mist where the ray fell.

“What’s the theatre dark like this for? Why is it empty? What’s happened?”

The manager answered.

“We’re trying to find out, sir; a madman in the gallery, whom we couldn’t locate, made a disturbance, called the new turn ‘A natural’; and now there’s some hanky with this lime. It’s been taken out, and yet it goes on like that!”

“What cleared the house?”

The manager pointed at the stage.

“It looked like smoke,” he said: “That light’s loose; we can’t get hold of its end anywhere.”

From behind him Signor Bensoni suddenly pushed up his dim, scared face.

“Boss!” he stammered: “It’s the most bizarre—the most bizarre—thing I ever struck—Limes thinks——”

“Yes?” The Boss turned and spoke very quickly: “What does he think—yes?”

“He thinks—the voice wasn’t from the gallery—but higher; he thinks—he thinks—it was the voice of—voice of——”

A sudden sparkle lit up the Boss’s eyes. “Yes?” he hissed out; “yes?”

“He thinks it was the voice of— Hullo!”

THE VOICE OF —!

The stream of light had vanished. All was darkness.

Some one called: "Up with your lights!"

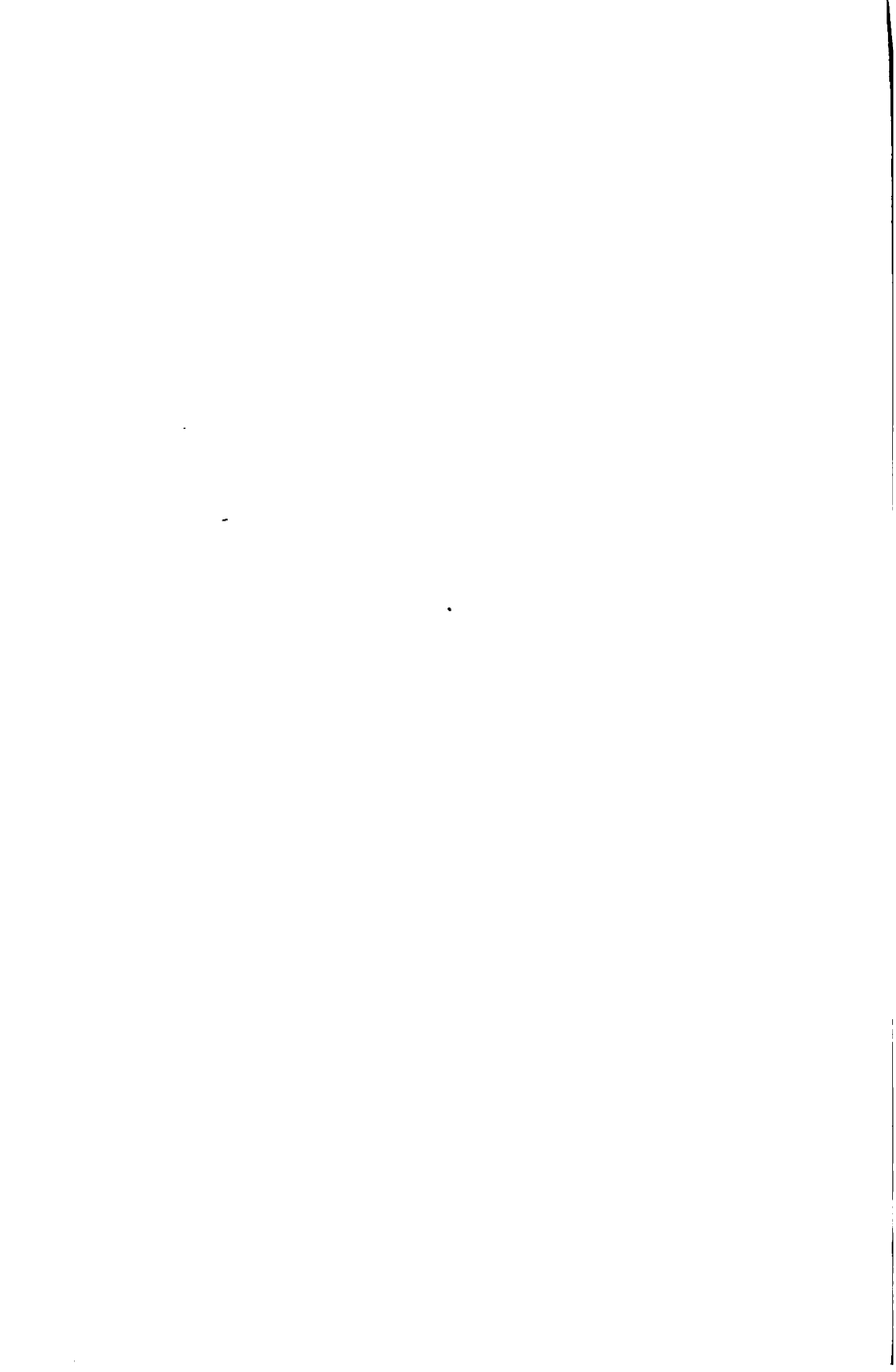
As the lights leaped forth, all about the house, the Boss was seen to rush to the centre of the stage, where the ray had been.

"Bizarre! By gum! . . . Hullo! Up there!"

No sound, no ray of light, answered that passionately eager shout.

The Boss spun round: "Electrics! You blazing ass! Ten to one but you've cut my connection, turning up the lights like that. The voice of—! Great snakes! What a turn! What a turn! I'd have given it a thou' a week! . . . *Hullo! up there! Hullo!*"

But there came no answer from under the gilt-starred dome.



THE DEAD MAN

In the spring of the year 1950 a lawyer and his friend were sitting over their wine and walnuts. The lawyer said: "In turning over my father's papers the other day, I came across this cutting from a newspaper. It is dated December, 19—. Rather a singular document. If you like I'll read it to you."

"Do," said the friend.

The lawyer began to read:

'Some sensation was caused in a London police court yesterday by a poorly dressed but respectable-looking man who applied to the magistrate for advice. We give the conversation verbatim:

"Your Worship, may I ask you a question?"

"If it is one that I can answer."

"It's just this: Am I alive?"

"Go away!"

"Your Worship, I am perfectly serious. It's a

THE DEAD MAN

matter of vital importance to me to know; I am a chain-maker."

"Are you sane?"

"Your Worship, I am quite sane."

"Then what do you mean by coming here and asking me a question like that?"

"Your Worship, I am out of work."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Your Worship, it's like this. I've been out of work, through no fault of my own, for two months. Your Worship has heard, no doubt, that there are hundreds of thousands of us chaps."

"Well, go on!"

"Your Worship, I don't belong to a union; as you know, there's no union to my trade."

"Yes, yes."

"Your Worship, I came to the end of my resources three weeks ago. I've done my best to get work, but I've not been successful."

"Have you applied to the distress committee of your district?"

"I have, your Worship; but they are full-up."

"Have you been to the parish authorities?"

"Yes, your Worship; and to the parson."

THE DEAD MAN

"Haven't you any relations or friends to help you?"

"Half of them, your Worship, are in my condition, and I've exhausted the others."

"You've——?"

"Exhausted the others—had all they could spare."

"Have you a wife and children?"

"No, your Worship; that's against me, it makes me come in late everywhere."

"Yes, yes—well, you have the poor law; you have the right to——"

"Your Worship, I have been in two of those places—but last night dozens of us were turned away for want of accommodation. Your Worship, I am in need of food; have I the right to work?"

"Only under the poor law."

"I've told you, sir, I couldn't get in there last night. Can't I force anybody else to give me work?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Your Worship, I'm very badly in want of food; will you allow me to beg in the streets?"

"No, no; I can't. You know I can't."

THE DEAD MAN

"Well, your Worship, may I steal?"

"Now, now; you mustn't waste the time of the court."

"But, your Worship, it's very serious to me; I'm literally starving, I am indeed! Will you allow me to sell my coat or trousers—" Unbuttoning his coat, the applicant revealed a bare chest. "I've nothing else to——"

"You mustn't go about in an indecent state; I can't allow you to go outside the law."

"Well, sir, will you give me permission, anyway, to sleep out at night, without being taken up for vagrancy?"

"Once for all, I have no power to allow you to do any of these things."

"What *am* I to do, sir, then? I'm telling you the truth. I want to keep within the law. Can you give me advice how to go on living without food?"

"I wish I could."

"Well, then, I ask you, sir: In the eyes of the law, am I alive at all?"

"That is a question, my man, which I cannot answer. On the face of it, you appear to be alive only if you break the law; but I trust you will

THE DEAD MAN

not do that. I am very sorry for you; you can have a shilling from the box. Next case!"

. . . The lawyer stopped.

"Yes," said his friend, "that is very interesting; very singular indeed. Curious state of things existing then!"



WHY NOT?

Travelling one day from Ashford to Charing Cross, I fell into conversation with a gentleman in a speckled straw hat. He asked me, very soon, my business in life. I informed him, and hesitating to be inferior in friendly curiosity, inquired of him in turn. He wavered a moment, then replied:

“A wife-insurance agent.”

“A life-insurance——?”

“A wife-insurance agent”; and, handing me his card, he added: “Don’t you know my place?”

I answered that I had not that advantage.

“Really!” he said; “I am surprised. I thought every one was beginning to know of me.”

“A *wife-insurance agent*, I think you said?”

“Certainly,” he answered. “Let me explain! You see, for many years I was a solicitor; and the notion came to me one day in the course of business. I can assure you it did not take me long to grasp its possibilities.”

WHY NOT?

He smoked for a moment silently, and then went on:

“When I first started I was a good deal bothered how to get myself known, for I was afraid of wounding the susceptibilities of the public. You see, the matter’s delicate. One might have been misunderstood, and laid oneself open to attack in some of those papers that—er—you know. It was my wife who solved that difficulty. ‘Don’t advertise,’ she said; ‘go quietly round amongst your married friends. The thing is good—it will spread itself.’”

He paused, took his cigar from his mouth, and smiled.

“My dear sir, she was right. I issued five hundred policies that first year. Since then business has been going up by leaps and bounds; four thousand policies last year; this year they’ll double that again.”

I interrupted him to say:

“But forgive me! I haven’t quite grasped as yet the nature of this insurance.”

He looked at me as who should ask: “Where can you have lived lately?” but replied courteously:

“I will come to that presently. The notion struck me one day in court, watching a divorce

WHY NOT?

case I had in hand. I was acting for the petitioner—nice fellow, friend of my own, best type of Englishman. The poor chap had said to me—as a matter of fact, you know, they all do: ‘I don’t like claimin’ damages. It may be my duty; but somehow I feel it’s not quite delicate.’ I told him that the law expected it. ‘But, of course,’ I said, ‘I quite understand your feelings. It is awkward. You’re not in any way bound to.’ ‘Oh, well!’ he said, ‘I suppose it’ll have to be—; no good standing out against custom.’

“Well, as I say, watching him that afternoon in the witness-box, the inspiration came to me. Why *should* innocent people be put to all this difficulty about making up their minds whether or no to claim damages, and be left with that unpleasant feeling afterward; for, say what you like, it is awkward for men with a sense of honour—or is it humour? I never know. Why, I remember one of my own clients—society man, you’d probably recollect his case—I had him in my office four consecutive days changing his mind, and it was only when, quite by chance, he learned that his wife really was fond of the other fellow that he decided on putting in a claim. Well, as I say, watching my client in that other case, the idea came to me: ‘Why not wife-insur-

WHY NOT?

ance for misfortunes of this kind? Is there any distinction in law between that and any other kind of accident? Here's a definite injury, to a definite bit of property, definitely assessed on hard facts, and paid for in hard cash, and no more account taken of private feelings, or spirituality, as you might say, than when you lose a toe by a defect in your employer's machine!' I turned it over and over and over again; I could not see any distinction, and felt immediately what an immense thing it was that I had struck. Perfectly simple, too; I had only to get at the percentage of divorce to marriage. Well, being a bit of an actuary, I was very soon able to calculate my proper scale of premiums. These are payable, you know, on the same principle as life-insurance, and work out very small on the whole. And—but this I consider a stroke of genius, quite my own idea, too—if there's no divorce within twenty-five years of taking out the policy, the insured gets a substantial bonus. That's where I rebut all possible charge of fostering immorality. For, you see, the law permits you to benefit by your wife's misconduct—so, of course, does my insurance; but, whereas the law holds out no inducement to the husband not to seek divorce, my insurance, through its bonus, does—it is, in

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fact, a premium on family life. No one has had a bonus *yet*, naturally, because I've only been established three years. But the principle is absolute. To put it crudely, instead of a simple benefit from the wife's infidelity such as the law gives you, you have a benefit from her infidelity, counteracted by a benefit from her fidelity. I'm anxious to make that clear, of course, on moral grounds. You ask me, perhaps, can I afford this bonus? Certainly—I allow for it on the figures; so that my system is not only morally sounder than the law, but really first-rate business." He paused, but, as I did not speak, went on again:

"I was very anxious to have got out a policy which took in also the risk of breach of promise; but at present I haven't been able to fix that up. Up till marriage, of course, the whole thing is in flux, and there's too much danger of collusion. Still, the system's young yet, and I don't despair, because I know very well that in breach-of-promise actions the same question of personal honour is involved, and people with any sense of humour feel a great delicacy about bringing them. However, as I say, the risk of *mala fides* is too great at present. You may contend, of course, that there's risk of *mala fides* in my divorce insurance, but you

WHY NOT?

see I'm really secured against that by the Court." And here he laid one finger on his nose, and sunk his voice almost to a whisper: "*For no man can recover from me on his policy unless the Court has given him his decree, which is practically a certificate that the misconduct was secret and the relations of wife and husband those of cat and dog. Unless the Court is satisfied of this, you see, it never grants relief; and without a decree granted there's no benefit to be had under my policies.*" Then, recovering his voice, he went on buoyantly: "I pride myself, in fact, on not departing either from the letter or the spirit of the law. All that my system deals with is the matter of personal delicacy. Under my policies you can go into Court, without asking for damages, and come out a free man, without a stain on your honour and minus that miserable feeling that people know you've benefited by your wife's disgrace. And then you come to me, and I salve the wound. If you think it over, you'll see that the thing is absolutely sound. You come out of Court with clean hands. Instead of feeling the whole world's grinning at your having made money out of your wife's infidelity, not a soul knows but me. Secrecy, of course, is guaranteed."

As he spoke, we ran into a station, and he arose.

WHY NOT?

“I get down here, sir,” he said, lifting his speckled hat: “Remember, I only follow out the principle of the law—what’s good enough for that is good enough for me. You have my card, in case at any time——!”

HEY-DAY

And the Recording Angel said:

“Man! Millions of years have passed since you came into being, and, now that you can fly, and speak without wires from one end of the earth to the other, you may well say there is nothing you cannot do. You have achieved triumphs of architecture, music, literature, painting, and science, such as you may never surpass. You have sampled all the resources of the earth and all the sensations of your soul. Your civilisation is undoubted. Let us consider its nature.

“You annually slay, and gorge yourself on, more billions of other creatures than ever you slew and ate in all your history. This you do for the sake of health!

“You deck yourself with fur and feathers, as did your first progenitors, destroying in savage ways myriads of creatures whose natural coverings you covet. This you do for the sake of beauty!

“You clothe yourself in garments produced by labour so miserably paid that their makers are starved of everything that you appreciate in life. This you do for the sake of commerce!

HEY-DAY

“You prepare year by year engines of destruction more colossal and terrific than ever were prepared in the darkest ages of your existence. This you do for the sake of peace!

“You put these engines of destruction into use, and blow far more men into far smaller pieces than men have ever yet been blown. This you do for the sake of honour!

“You pile up year by year fortunes more stupendous, and form combinations of capital more powerful, than the world has ever known, out of the labour of men as poor and miserable as men have ever been, in towns blacker, huger, and less restful than ever were yet constructed. This you do for the sake of progress!

“You organise and distribute journals, more and more perfectly adjusted to the lower levels of society’s tastes, with a rapidity and completeness hitherto unparalleled. This you do for the sake of knowledge!

“You provide pageantry for the eye, by shows, picture palaces, and sports, such as shall give audiences the most perfect rest from mental or physical exertion. This you do for the sake of culture!

“You devise comfort in your hotels, houses, and means of locomotion, such as your ancestors never

HEY-DAY

dreamed of in their most ecstatic moments. This you do for the sake of your physique!

"You prosecute scientific learning till you are acutely conscious of the nature and cure of almost all your sicknesses. This you do for the assuagement of your nerves!

"You so discuss everything under the sun, that you no longer believe in anything. This you do for the assurance of your spiritual happiness!

"Of all this you are extremely proud. Man! You are in your hey-day!"

And Man answered: "Recording Angel! You have judged us in our hey-day. Hear us reply:

"When first in molten space the protoplasm came, you watched, inscrutable, that jelly thing profane with life the breathless majesty of chaos; watched it live on, become a fish, a bird, a beast, a man. In caves and water-dwellings our ancestors held on to life. Across snowy wastes, in trackless forests, over pathless seas, they roamed, hopeless, in fear of every death. And, all the time, you sat up there, and watched serenely!

"During a thousand centuries, painfully, through every ill, past every counterstroke of Nature, our ancestors gained consciousness of self. You sat up there, and frowned!

HEY-DAY

“Through unimaginable trouble, in grief darker than night, with bitterness more bitter than the sea, our ancestors learned how to love others beside self. You sat up there, and took a feather from your wing!

“Groping and purblind, whipped and hunted by savage instincts, failing, stumbling, our ancestors shaped the rudiments of justice. You sat up there, and dipped that feather in a purple cloud!

“Out of the desperate morasses and the tangled woods of fear and superstition, their backs against the rocky walls of death, their eyes fronting the eternal abysses of uncertainty, our ancestors won through to the refuge of a faith in their own hearts. You sat up there, and wrote down its deficiencies!

“And we, their children, in this our hey-day—with what force and faith we have inherited, meddling, and muddling, and dreaming of perfection, adventuring, and running riot in the welter of discovery, now torpid, now raving mad, yet ever moving forward—make what we can out of our poor humanity. You sit up there, and read us the record of our failures!

“Recording Angel! Something human is more precious than all the judgments of the Sky!”



STUDIES OF EXTRAVAGANCE

I. THE WRITER

Every morning when he awoke his first thought was: How am I? For it was extremely important that he should be well, seeing that when he was not well he could neither produce what he knew he ought, nor contemplate that lack of production with equanimity. Having discovered that he did not ache anywhere, he would say to his wife: "Are you all right?" and, while she was answering, he would think: "Yes—if I make that last chapter pass subjectively through Blank's personality, then I had better—" and so on. Not having heard whether his wife were all right, he would get out of bed and do that which he facetiously called "abdominable cult," for it was necessary that he should digest his food and preserve his figure, and while he was doing it he would partly think: "I am doing this well," and partly he would think: "That fellow in *The Parnassus* is quite wrong—he simply doesn't see—" And pausing for a moment with nothing on, and his toes level with the top of a chest of drawers, he would say to his wife: "What I think about that

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Parnassus fellow is that he doesn't grasp the fact that my books—" And he would not fail to hear her answer warmly: "Of course he doesn't; he's a perfect idiot." He would then shave. This was his most creative moment, and he would soon cut himself and utter a little groan, for it would be needful now to find his special cotton wool and stop the bleeding, which was a paltry business and not favourable to the flight of genius. And if his wife, taking advantage of the incident, said something which she had long been waiting to say, he would answer, wondering a little what it was she had said, and thinking: "There it is, I get no time for steady thought."

Having finished shaving he would bathe, and a philosophical conclusion would almost invariably come to him just before he douched himself with cold—so that he would pause, and call out through the door: "You know, I think the supreme principle—" And while his wife was answering, he would resume the drowning of her words, having fortunately remembered just in time that his circulation would suffer if he did not douse himself with cold while he was still warm. He would dry himself, dreamily developing that theory of the universe and imparting it to his wife in sentences that seldom had an end,

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so that it was not necessary for her to answer them. While dressing he would stray a little, thinking: "Why can't I concentrate myself on my work; it's awful!" And if he had by any chance a button off, he would present himself rather unwillingly, feeling that it was a waste of his time. Watching her frown from sheer self-effacement over her button-sewing, he would think: "She is wonderful! How can she put up with doing things for me all day long?" And he would fidget a little, feeling in his bones that the postman had already come.

He went down always thinking: "Oh, hang it! this infernal post taking up all my time!" And as he neared the breakfast-room, he would quicken his pace; seeing a large pile of letters on the table, he would say automatically: "Curse!" and his eyes would brighten. If—as seldom happened—there were not a green-coloured wrapper enclosing mentions of him in the press, he would murmur: "Thank God!" and his face would fall.

It was his custom to eat feverishly, walking a good deal and reading about himself, and when his wife tried to bring him to a sense of his disorder he would tighten his lips without a word and think: "I have a good deal of self-control."

He seldom commenced work before eleven, for,

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though he always intended to, he found it practically impossible not to dictate to his wife things about himself, such as how he could not lecture here; or where he had been born; or how much he would take for this; and why he would not consider that; together with those letters which began:

"MY DEAR ——,

"Thanks tremendously for your letter about my book, and its valuable criticism. Of course, I think you are quite wrong. . . . You don't seem to have grasped . . . In fact, I don't think you ever quite do me justice. . . .

"Yours affectionately,

"——."

When his wife had copied those that might be valuable after he was dead, he would stamp the envelopes and, exclaiming: "Nearly eleven—my God!" would go somewhere where they think.

It was during those hours when he sat in a certain chair with a pen in his hand that he was able to rest from thought about himself; save, indeed, in those moments, not too frequent, when he could not help reflecting: "That's a fine page—I have seldom written anything better"; or in those moments, too frequent, when he sighed deeply and thought: "I am not the man I was." About half past one, he would get up, with the

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pages in his hand, and, seeking out his wife, would give them to her to read, remarking: "Here's the wretched stuff—no good at all"; and, taking a position where he thought she could not see him, would do such things as did not prevent his knowing what effect the pages made on her. If the effect were good he would often feel how wonderful she was; if it were not good he had at once a chilly sensation in the pit of his stomach, and ate very little lunch.

When, in the afternoons, he took his walks abroad, he passed great quantities of things and people without noticing, because he was thinking deeply on such questions as whether he were more of an observer or more of an imaginative artist; whether he were properly appreciated in Germany; and particularly whether one were not in danger of thinking too much about oneself. But every now and then he would stop and say to himself: "I really must see more of life, I really must take in more fuel"; and he would passionately fix his eyes on a cloud, or a flower, or a man walking, and there would instantly come into his mind the thought: "I have written twenty books—ten more will make thirty—that cloud is grey"; or: "That fellow X— is jealous of me! This flower is blue"; or: "This

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man is walking very—very— D—n *The Morning Muff*, it always runs me down!" And he would have a sort of sore, beaten feeling, knowing that he had not observed those things as accurately as he would have wished to.

During these excursions, too, he would often reflect impersonally upon matters of the day, large questions of art, public policy, and the human soul; and would almost instantly find that he had always thought this or that; and at once see the necessity for putting his conclusion forward in his book or in the press, phrasing it, of course, in a way that no one else could; and there would start up before him little bits of newspaper with these words on them: "No one, perhaps, save Mr. —, could have so ably set forth the case for Baluchistan"; or, "In *The Daily Miracle* there is a noble letter from that eminent writer, Mr. —, pleading against the hyperspiritualism of our age."

Very often he would say to himself, as he walked with eyes fixed on things that he did not see: "This existence is not healthy. I really must get away and take a complete holiday, and not think at all about my work; I am getting too self-centred." And he would go home and say to his wife: "Let's go to Sicily, or Spain, or some-

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where. Let's get away from all this, and just live." And when she answered: "How jolly!" he would repeat, a little absently: "How jolly!" considering what would be the best arrangement for forwarding his letters. And if, as sometimes happened, they *did* go, he would spend almost a whole morning living, and thinking how jolly it was to be away from everything; but toward the afternoon he would feel a sensation as though he were a sofa that had been sat on too much, a sort of subsidence very deep within him. This would be followed in the evening by a disinclination to live; and that feeling would grow until on the third day he received his letters, together with a green-coloured wrapper enclosing some mentions of himself, and he would say: "Those fellows—no getting away from them!" and feel irresistibly impelled to sit down. Having done so he would take up his pen, not writing anything, indeed—because of the determination to "live," as yet not quite extinct—but comparatively easy in his mind. On the following day he would say to his wife: "I believe I can work here." And she would answer, smiling: "That's splendid"; and he would think: "She's wonderful!" and begin to write.

On other occasions, while walking the streets

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or about the countryside, he would suddenly be appalled at his own ignorance, and would say to himself: "I know simply nothing—I must read." And going home he would dictate to his wife the names of a number of books to be procured from the library. When they arrived he would look at them a little gravely and think: "By Jove! Have I got to read those?" and the same evening he would take one up. He would not, however, get beyond the fourth page, if it were a novel, before he would say: "Muck! He can't write!" and would feel absolutely stimulated to take up his own pen and write something that was worth reading. Sometimes, on the other hand, he would put the novel down after the third page, exclaiming: "By Jove! He can write!" And there would rise within him such a sense of dejection at his own inferiority that he would feel simply compelled to try to see whether he really was inferior.

But if the book were not a novel he sometimes finished the first chapter before one of two feelings came over him: Either that what he had just read was what he had himself long thought—that, of course, would be when the book was a good one; or that what he had just read was not true, or at all events debatable. In each of these

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events he found it impossible to go on reading, but would remark to his wife: "This fellow says what I've always said"; or, "This fellow says so and so, now I say—" and he would argue the matter with her, taking both sides of the question, so as to save her all unnecessary speech.

There were times when he felt that he absolutely must hear music, and he would enter the concert-hall with his wife in the pleasurable certainty that he was going to lose himself. Toward the middle of the second number, especially if it happened to be music that he liked, he would begin to nod; and presently, on waking up, would get a feeling that he really was an artist. From that moment on he was conscious of certain noises being made somewhere in his neighbourhood causing a titillation of his nerves favourable to deep and earnest thoughts about his work. On going out his wife would ask him: "Wasn't the Mozart lovely?" or, "How did you like the Strauss?" and he would answer: "Rather!" wondering a little which was which; or he would look at her out of the corner of his eye and glance secretly at the programme to see whether he had really heard them, and which Strauss it might be.

He was extremely averse to being interviewed, or photographed, and all that sort of publicity,

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and only made exceptions in most cases because his wife would say to him: "Oh! I think you ought"; or because he could not bear to refuse anybody anything; together, perhaps, with a sort of latent dislike of waste, deep down in his soul. When he saw the results he never failed to ejaculate: "Never again! No, really—never again! The whole thing is wrong and stupid!" And he would order a few copies.

For he dreaded nothing so much as the thought that he might become an egoist, and, knowing the dangers of his profession, fought continually against it. Often he would complain to his wife: "I don't think of you enough." And she would smile and say: "Don't you?" And he would feel better, having confessed his soul. Sometimes for an hour at a time he would make really heroic efforts not to answer her before having really grasped what she had said; and to check a tendency, that he sometimes feared was growing on him, to say: "What?" whether he had heard or no. In truth, he was not (as he often said) constitutionally given to small talk. Conversation that did not promise a chance of dialectic victory was hardly to his liking; so that he felt bound in sincerity to eschew it, which sometimes caused him to sit silent for "quite a while," as the Amer-

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icans have phrased it. But once committed to an argument he found it difficult to leave off, having a natural, if somewhat sacred, belief in his own convictions.

His attitude to his creations was, perhaps, peculiar. He either did not mention them, or touched on them, if absolutely obliged, with a light and somewhat disparaging tongue; this did not, indeed, come from any real distrust of them, but rather from a superstitious feeling that one must not tempt Providence in the solemn things of life. If other people touched on them in the same way, he had, not unnaturally, a feeling of real pain, such as comes to a man when he sees an instance of cruelty or injustice. And, though something always told him that it was neither wise nor dignified to notice outrages of this order, he would mutter to his wife: "Well, I suppose it *is* true—I can't write"; feeling, perhaps, that—if *he* could not with decency notice such injuries, she might. And, indeed, she did, using warmer words than even he felt justified, which was soothing.

After tea it was his habit to sit down a second time, pen in hand; not infrequently he would spend those hours divided between the feeling that it was his duty to write something and the

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feeling that it was his duty not to write anything if he had nothing to say; and he generally wrote a good deal; for deep down he was convinced that if he did not write he would gradually fade away till there would be nothing left for him to read and think about, and, though he was often tempted to believe and even to tell his wife that fame was an unworthy thing, he always deferred that pleasure, afraid, perhaps, of too much happiness.

In regard to the society of his fellows he liked almost anybody, though a little impatient with those, especially authors, who took themselves too seriously; and there were just one or two that he really could not stand, they were so obviously full of jealousy, a passion of which he was naturally intolerant and had, of course, no need to indulge in. And he would speak of them with extreme dryness—nothing more, disdaining to disparage. It was, perhaps, a weakness in him that he found it difficult to accept adverse criticism as anything but an expression of that same yellow sickness; and yet there were moments when no words would adequately convey his low opinion of his own powers. At such times he would seek out his wife and confide to her his conviction that he was a poor thing, no good at all, with-

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out a thought in his head; and while she was replying: "Rubbish! You know there's nobody to hold a candle to you," or words to that effect, he would look at her tragically, and murmur: "Ah! you're prejudiced!" Only at such supreme moments of dejection, indeed, did he feel it a pity that he had married her, seeing how much more convincing her words would have been if he had not.

He never read the papers till the evening, partly because he had not time, and partly because he so seldom found anything in them. This was not remarkable, for he turned their leaves quickly, pausing, indeed, naturally, if there were any mention of his name; and if his wife asked him whether he had read this or that he would answer: "No," surprised at the funny things that seemed to interest her.

Before going up to bed he would sit and smoke. And sometimes fancies would come to him, and sometimes none. Once in a way he would look up at the stars, and think: "What a worm I am! This wonderful Infinity! I must get more of it—more of it into my work; more of the feeling that the whole is marvellous and great, and man a little clutch of breath and dust, an atom, a straw, a nothing!"

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And a sort of exaltation would seize on him, so that he knew that if only he did get that into his work, as he wished to, as he felt at that moment that he could, he would be the greatest writer the world had ever seen, the greatest man, almost greater than he wished to be, almost too great to be mentioned in the press, greater than Infinity itself—for would he not be Infinity's creator? And suddenly he would check himself with the thought: "I must be careful—I must be careful. If I let my brain go at this time of night, I sha'n't write a decent word to-morrow!"

And he would drink some milk and go to bed.

II. THE CRITIC

He often thought: "This is a dog's life! I must give it up, and strike out for myself. If I can't write better than most of these fellows, it'll be very queer." But he had not yet done so. He had in his extreme youth published fiction, but it had never been the best work of which he was capable—it was not likely that it could be, seeing that even then he was constantly diverted from the ham-bone of his inspiration by the duty of perusing and passing judgment on the work of other men.

If pressed to say exactly why he did not strike out for himself, he found it difficult to answer, and what he answered was hardly as true as he could have wished; for, though truthful, he was not devoid of the instinct of self-preservation. He could hardly, for example, admit that he preferred to think what much better books he could have written if only he had not been handicapped, to actually striking out and writing them. To believe this was an inward comfort not readily to

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be put to the rude test of actual experience. Nor would it have been human of him to acknowledge a satisfaction in feeling that he could put in their proper places those who had to an extent, as one might say, retarded his creative genius by compelling him to read their books. But these, after all, were but minor factors in his long hesitation, for he was not a conceited or malicious person. Fundamentally, no doubt, he lived what he called "a dog's life" with pleasure, partly because he was used to it—and what a man is used to he is loath to part with; partly because he really had a liking for books; and partly because to be a judge is better than to be judged. And no one could deny that he had a distinctly high conception of his functions. He had long laid down for himself certain leading principles of professional conduct, from which he never departed, such as that a critic must not have any personal feelings, or be influenced by any private considerations whatever. This, no doubt, was why he often went a little out of his way to be more severe than usual with writers whom he suspected of a secret hope that personal acquaintance might incline him to favour them. He would, indeed, carry that principle further, and, where he had, out of an impersonal enthusiasm at some

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time or another, written in terms of striking praise, he would make an opportunity later on of deliberately taking that writer down a peg or two lower than he deserved, lest his praise might be suspected of having been the outcome of personal motives, or of gush—for which he had a great abhorrence. In this way he preserved a remarkably pure sense of independence; a feeling that he was master in his own house, to be dictated to only by a proper conviction of his own importance. It is true that there were certain writers whom, for one reason or another, he could not very well stand; some having written to him to point out inaccuracies, or counter one of his critical conclusions, or, still worse, thanked him for having seen exactly what they had meant—a very unwise and even undignified thing to do, as he could not help thinking; others, again, having excited in him a natural dislike by their appearance, conduct, or manner of thought, or by having, perhaps, acquired too rapid or too swollen a reputation to be, in his opinion, good for them. In such cases, of course, he was not so unhuman as to disguise his convictions. For he was, before all things, an Englishman with a very strong belief in the freest play for individual taste. But of almost any first book by an un-

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known author he wrote with an impersonality which it would have been difficult to surpass.

Then there was his principle that one must never be influenced in judging a book by anything one has said of a previous book by the same writer—each work standing entirely on its own basis. He found this important, and made a point of never rereading his own criticisms; so that the rhythm of his judgment, which, if it had risen to a work in 1920, would fall over the author's next in 1921, was entirely unbiassed by recollection, and followed merely those immutable laws of change and the moon so potent in regard to tides and human affairs.

For sameness and consistency he had a natural contempt. It was the unexpected both in art and criticism that he particularly looked for; anything being, as he said, preferable to dulness—a sentiment in which he was supported by the public; not that, to do him justice, this weighed with him, for he had a genuine distrust of the public, as was proper for one sitting in a seat of judgment. He knew that there were so-called critics who had a kind of formula for each writer, as divines have sermons suitable to certain occasions. For example: "We have in 'The Mazy Swim' another of Mr. Hyphen Dash's virile stories. . . .

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We can thoroughly recommend this pulsating tale, with its true and beautiful character study of Little Katie, to every healthy reader as one of the best that Mr. Hyphen Dash has yet given us." Or: "We cannot say that 'The Mazy Swim' is likely to increase Mr. Hyphen Dash's reputation. It is sheer melodrama, such as we are beginning to expect from this writer. . . . The whole is artificial to a degree. . . . No sane reader will, for a moment, believe in Little Katie." Toward this sort of thing he showed small patience, having noticed with some acumen a relationship between the name of the writer, the politics of the paper, and the temper of the criticism. No! For him, if criticism did not embody the individual mood and temper of the critic, it was not worthy of the name.

But the canon which of all he regarded as most sacred was this: A critic must surrender himself to the mood and temper of the work he is criticising, take the thing as it is with its own special method and technique, its own point of view, and, only when all that is admitted, let his critical faculty off the chain. He was never tired of insisting on this, both to himself and others, and never sat down to a book without having it firmly in his mind. Not infrequently, however, he found

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that the author was, as it were, wilfully employing a technique or writing in a mood with which he had no sympathy, or had chosen a subject obviously distasteful, or a set of premises that did not lead to the conclusion which he would have preferred. In such cases his scrupulous honesty warned him not to compromise with his conscience, but to say outright that it would have been better if the technique of the story had been objective instead of subjective; that the morbidity of the work prevented serious consideration of a subject which should never have been chosen; or that he would ever maintain that the hero was too weak a character to be a hero, and the book, therefore, of little interest. If any one pointed out to him that had the hero been a strong character there would have been no book, it being, in point of fact, the study of a weak character, he would answer: "That may be so, but it does not affect what I say—the book would have been better and more important if it had been the study of a strong character." And he would take the earliest opportunity of enforcing his recorded criticism that the hero was no hero, and the book no book to speak of. For, though not obstinate, he was a man who stood to his guns. He took his duty to the public very seriously, and

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felt it, as it were, a point of honour never to admit himself in the wrong. It was so easy to do that and so fatal; and the fact of being anonymous, as on the whole he preferred to be, made it all the harder to abstain (on principle and for the dignity of criticism) from noticing printed contradictions to his conclusions.

In spite of all the heart he put into his work, there were times when, like other men, he suffered from dejection, feeling that the moment had really come when he must either strike out for himself into creative work, or compile a volume of synthetic criticism. And he would say: "None of us fellows are doing any constructive critical work; no one nowadays seems to have any conception of the first principles of criticism." Having talked that theory out thoroughly he would feel better, and next day would take an opportunity of writing: "We are not like the academic French, to whom the principles of criticism are so terribly important; our genius lies rather in individual judgments, pliant and changing as the works they judge."

There was that in him which, like the land from which he sprang, could ill brook control. He approved of discipline, but knew exactly where it was deleterious to apply it to himself; and

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no one, perhaps, had a finer and larger conception of individual liberty. In this way he maintained the best traditions of a calling whose very essence was superiority. In course of conversation he would frequently admit, being a man of generous calibre, that the artist, by reason of long years of devoted craftsmanship, had possibly the most intimate knowledge of his art, but he would not fail to point out, and very wisely, that there was no such unreliable testimony as that of experts, who had an axe to grind, each of his own way of doing things; for comprehensive views of literature seen in due perspective there was nothing—he thought—like the trained critic, rising superior, as it were professionally, to myopia and individual prejudice.

Of the new school who maintained that true criticism was but reproduction in terms of sympathy, and just as creative as the creative work it reproduced, he was a little impatient, not so much on the ground that to make a model of a mountain was not quite the same thing as to make the mountain; but because he felt in his bones that the true creativeness of criticism (in which he had a high belief) was its destructive and satiric quality; its power of reducing things to rubbish and clearing them away, ready for the next lot.

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Instinct, fortified by his own experience, had guided him to that conclusion. Possibly, too, the conviction, always lurking deep within him, that the time was coming when he would strike out for himself and show the world how a work of art really should be built, was in some sort responsible for the necessity he felt to keep the ground well cleared.

He was nearly fifty when his clock chimed, and he began seriously to work at the creation of that masterpiece which was to free him from "a dog's life," and, perhaps, fill its little niche in the gallery of immortality. He worked at it happily enough till one day, at the end of the fifth month, he had the misfortune to read through what he had written. With his critical faculty he was able to perceive that which gave him no little pain—every chapter, most pages, and many sentences destroyed the one immediately preceding. He searched with intense care for that coherent thread which he had suspected of running through the whole. Here and there he seemed to come on its track, then it would vanish. This gave him great anxiety.

Abandoning thought for the moment, he wrote on. He paused again toward the end of the seventh month, and once more patiently reviewed

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the whole. This time he found four distinct threads that did not seem to meet; but still more puzzling was the apparent absence of any individual flavour. He was staggered. Before all he prized that quality, and throughout his career had fostered it in himself. To be unsapped in whim or fancy, to be independent, had been the very salt of his existence as a critic. And now, and now—when his hour had struck, and he was in the very throes of that long-deferred creation, to find——! He put thought away again, and doggedly wrote on.

At the end of the ninth month, in a certain exaltation, he finished; and slowly, with intense concentration, looked at what he had produced from beginning to end. And as he looked something clutched at him within, and he felt frozen. The thing did not move, it had no pulse, no breath, no colour—it was dead.

And sitting there before that shapeless masterpiece, still-born, without a spirit or the impress of a personality, a horrid thought crept and rattled in his brain. Had he, in his independence, in his love of being a law unto himself, *become so individual that he had no individuality left?* Was it possible that he had judged, and judged, and—not been judged, too long? It was not true—

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not true! Locking the soft and flavourless thing away, he took up the latest novel sent him, and sat down to read it. But, as he read, the pages of his own work would implant themselves above those that he turned and turned. At last he put the book down, and took up pen to review it. "This novel," he wrote, "is that most pathetic thing, the work of a man who has burned the lamp till the lamp has burned him; who has nourished and cultured his savour, and fed his idiosyncrasies, till he has dried and withered, without savour left." And, having written that damnation of the book that was not his own, the blood began once more flowing in his veins, and he felt warm.

III. THE PLAIN MAN

He was plain. It was his great quality. Others might have graces, subtleties, originality, fire, and charm; they had not his plainness. It was that which made him so important, not only in his country's estimation, but in his own. For he felt that nothing was more valuable to the world than for a man to have no doubts, and no fancies, but to be quite plain about everything. And the knowledge that he was looked up to by the press, the pulpit, and the politician sustained him in the daily perfecting of that unique personality which he shared with all other plain men. In an age which bred so much that was freakish and peculiar, to know that there was always himself with his sane and plain outlook to fall back on, was an extraordinary comfort to him. He knew that he could rely on his own judgment, and never scrupled to give it to a public which never tired of asking for it.

In literary matters especially was it sought for, as invaluable. Whether he had read an au-

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thor or not, he knew what to think of him. For he had in his time unwittingly lighted on books before he knew what he was doing. They had served him as fixed stars forever after; so that if he heard any writer spoken of as "advanced," "erotic," "socialistic," "morbid," "pessimistic," "tragic," or what not unpleasant, he knew exactly what he was like, and thereafter only read him by accident. He liked a healthy tale, preferably of love or of adventure (of detective stories he was, perhaps, fondest), and insisted upon a happy ending, for, as he very justly said, there was plenty of unhappiness in life without gratuitously adding to it, and as to "ideas," he could get all he wanted and to spare from the papers. He deplored altogether the bad habit that literature seemed to have of seeking out situations which explored the recesses of the human spirit or of the human institution. As a plain man he felt this to be unnecessary. He himself was not conscious of having these recesses, or perhaps too conscious, knowing that if he once began to look, there would be no end to it; nor would he admit the use of staring through the plain surface of society's arrangements. To do so, he thought, greatly endangered, if it did not altogether destroy, those simple faculties which men required

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for the fulfilment of the plain duties of every-day life, such as: Item, the acquisition and investment of money; item, the attendance at church and maintenance of religious faith; item, the control of wife and children; item, the serenity of nerves and digestion; item, contentment with things as they were.

For there was just that difference between him and all those of whom he strongly disapproved, that whereas *they* wanted to *see* things as they were, *he* wanted to *keep* things as they were. But he would not for a moment have admitted this little difference to be sound, since his instinct told him that he himself saw things as they were better than ever did such cranky people. If a human being had got to get into spiritual fixes, as those fellows seemed to want one to believe, then certainly the whole unpleasant matter should be put into poetry, and properly removed from comprehension. "And, anyway," he would say: "In real life, I shall know it fast enough when I get there, and I'm not going to waste my time nosin' it over beforehand." His view of literary and, indeed, all art, was that it should help him to be cheerful. And he would make a really extraordinary outcry if amongst a hundred cheerful plays and novels he inadvertently

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came across one that was tragic. At once he would write to the papers to complain of the gloomy tone of modern literature; and the papers, with few exceptions, would echo his cry, because he was the plain man, and took them in. "What on earth," he would remark, "is the good of showin' me a lot of sordid sufferin'? It doesn't make me any happier. Besides"—he would add—"it isn't art. The function of art is beauty." Some one had told him this, and he was very emphatic on the point, going religiously to any show where there was a great deal of light and colour. The shapes of women pleased him, too, up to a point. But he knew where to stop; for he felt himself, as it were, the real censor of the morals of his country. When the plain man was shocked it was time to suppress the entertainment, whether play, dance, or novel. Something told him that he, beyond all other men, knew what was good for his wife and children. He often meditated on that question coming in to the City from his house in Surrey; for in the train he used to see men reading novels, and this stimulated his imagination. Essentially a believer in liberty, like every Englishman, he was only for putting down a thing when it offended his own taste. In speaking with his friends on

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this subject, he would express himself thus: "These fellows talk awful skittles. Any plain man knows what's too hot and what isn't. All this 'flim-flam' about art, and all that, is beside the point. The question simply is: Would you take your wife and daughters? If not, there's an end of it, and it ought to be suppressed." And he would think of his own daughters, very nice, and would feel sure. Not that he did not himself like a "full-blooded" book, as he called it, provided it had the right moral and religious tone. Indeed, a certain kind of fiction which abounded in descriptions "of her lovely bosom" often struck him pink, as he hesitated to express it; but there was never in such masterpieces of emotion any nasty subversiveness, or wrong-headed idealism, but frequently the opposite.

Though it was in relation to literature and drama, perhaps, that his quality of plainness was most valuable, he felt the importance of it, too, in regard to politics. When they had all done "messaging about," he knew that they would come to him, because, after all, there he was, a plain man wanting nothing but his plain rights, not in the least concerned with the future, and Utopia, and all that, but putting things to the plain touchstone: "How will it affect me?" and

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forming his plain conclusions one way or the other. He felt, above all things, each new penny of the income-tax before they put it on, and saw to it if possible that they did not. He was extraordinarily plain about that, and about national defence, which instinct told him should be kept up to the mark at all costs. But there must be ways, he felt, of doing the latter without having recourse to the income-tax, and he was prepared to turn out any government that went on lines unjust to the plainest principles of property. In matters of national honour he was even plainer, for he never went into the merits of the question, knowing, as a simple patriot, that his country must be right; or that, if not right, it would never do to say she wasn't. So aware were statesmen and the press of this sound attitude of his mind, that, without waiting to ascertain it, they acted on it in perfect confidence.

In regard to social reform, while recognising, of course, the need for it, he felt that, in practice, one should do just as much as was absolutely necessary and no more; a plain man did not go out of his way to make quixotic efforts, but neither did he sit upon a boiler till he was blown up.

In the matter of religion he regarded his posi-

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tion as the only sound one, for however little in these days one could believe and all that, yet, as a plain man, he did not for a moment refuse to go to church and say he was a Christian; on the contrary, he was rather more particular about it than formerly, since when a spirit has departed, one must be very careful of the body, lest it fall to pieces. He continued, therefore, to be a churchman—living in Hertfordshire.

He often spoke of science, medical or not, and it was his plain opinion that these fellows all had an axe to grind; for *his* part he only believed in them just in so far as they benefited a plain man. The latest sanitary system, the best forms of locomotion and communication, the newest antiseptics, and time-saving machines—of all these, of course, he made full use; but as to the researches, speculations, and theories of scientists—to speak plainly, they were, he thought, “pretty good rot.”

He abominated the word “humanitarian.” No plain man wanted to inflict suffering, especially on himself. He would be the last person to do any such thing, but the plain facts of life must be considered, and convenience and property duly safeguarded. He wrote to the papers perhaps more often on this subject than on any other,

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and was gratified to read in their leading articles continual allusion to himself: "The plain man is not prepared to run the risks which a sentimental treatment of this subject would undoubtedly involve"; "After all, it is to the plain man that we must go for the sanity and common sense of this matter." For he had no dread in life like that of being called a sentimentalist. If an instance of cruelty came under his own eyes he was as much moved as any man, and took immediate steps to manifest his disapproval. To act thus on his feelings was not at all his idea of being sentimental. But what he could not stand was making a fuss about cruelties, as people called them, which had not actually come under his own plain vision; to be indignant in regard to such *was* sentimental, he was sure, involving as it did an exercise of imagination, than which there was nothing he distrusted more. Some deep instinct no doubt informed him perpetually that if he felt anything, other than what disturbed him personally at first hand, he would suffer unnecessarily, and perhaps be encouraging such public action as might diminish his comfort. But he was no alarmist, and, on the whole, felt pretty sure that while he was there, living in Kent, with his plain views, there was no chance of any-

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thing being done that would cause him any serious inconvenience.

On the woman's question generally he had long made his position plain. He would move when the majority moved, and not before. And he expected all plain men (and women—if there were any, which he sometimes doubted) to act in the same way. In this policy he felt instinctively, rather than consciously, that there was no risk. No one—at least, no one that mattered, no plain, solid person—would move until he did, and he would not, of course, move until they did; in this way there was a perfectly plain position. And it was an extraordinary gratification to him to feel, from the tone of politicians, the pulpit, and the press, that he had the country with him. He often said to his wife: "One thing's plain to me; we shall never have the suffrage till the country wants it." But he rarely discussed the question with other women, having observed that many of them could not keep their tempers when he gave them his plain view of the matter.

He was sometimes at a loss to think what on earth they would do without him on juries, of which he was usually elected foreman. And he never failed to listen with pleasure to the words that never failed to be spoken to him: "As plain

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men, gentlemen, you will at once see how improbable in every particular is the argument of my friend." That he was valued in precisely the same way by both sides and ultimately by the judge filled him sometimes with a modest feeling that only a plain man was of any value whatever, certainly that he was the only kind of man who had any sort of judgment.

He often wondered what the country would do without him; into what abysmal trouble she would get in her politics, her art, her law, and her religion. It seemed to him that he alone stood between her and manifold destructions. How many times had he not seen her reeling in her cups and sophistries, and beckoning to him to save her! And had he ever failed her, with his simple philosophy of a plain man: "Follow me, and the rest will follow itself"? Never! As witness the veneration in which he saw that he was held every time he opened a paper, attended the performance of a play, heard a sermon, or listened to a speech. Some day he meant to sit for his portrait, believing that this was due from him to posterity; and now and then he would look into the glass to fortify his resolution. What he saw there always gave him secret pleasure. Here was a face that he knew he

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could trust, and even in a way admire. Nothing brilliant, showy, eccentric, soulful; nothing rugged, devotional, profound, or fiery; not even anything proud, or stubborn; no surplus of kindness, sympathy, or aspiration; but just simple, solid lines, a fresh colour, and sensible, rather prominent eyes—just the face that he would have expected and desired, the face of a plain man.

IV. THE SUPERLATIVE

Though he had not yet arrived, he had personally no doubt about the matter. It was merely a question of time. Not that for one moment he approved of "arriving" as a general principle. Indeed, there was no one whom he held in greater contempt than a man who had arrived. It was to him the high-water mark of imbecility, commercialism, and complacency. For what did it mean save that this individual had pleased a sufficient number of other imbeciles, hucksterers, and fatheads, to have secured for himself a reputation? These pundits, these mandarins, these so-called "masters"—they were an offence to his common sense. He had passed them by, with all their musty and sham-Abraham achievements. That fine flair of his had found them out. Their mere existence was a scandal. Now and again one died; and his just anger would wane a little before the touch of the Great Remover. No longer did that pundit seem quite so objectionable now that he no longer cumbered the ground.

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It might even, perhaps, be admitted that there had been something coming out of that one; and, as the years rolled on, this something would roll on too, till it became quite a big thing; and he would compare those miserable pundits who still lived with the one who had so fortunately died, to their great disadvantage. There were, in truth, very few living beings that he could stand. Somehow they were not—no, they really *were not*. The great—as they were called forsooth—artists, writers, politicians—what were they? He would smile down one side of his long nose. It was enough. Forthwith those reputations ceased to breathe—for him. Their theories, too, of art, reform, what-not—how puerile! How utterly and hopelessly old-fashioned, how worthy of all the destruction that his pen and tongue could lavish on them!

For, to save his country's art, his country's literature and politics—that was, he well knew, his mission. And he periodically founded, or joined, the staff of papers that were going to do this trick. They always lasted several months, some several years, before breathing the last impatient sigh of genius. And while they lived, with what wonderful clean brooms they swept! Perched above all that miasma known as human

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nature, they beat the air, sweeping it and sweeping it, till suddenly there was no air left. And that theory, that real vision of art and existence, which they were going to put in place of all this muck, how near—how unimaginably near—they brought it to reality! Just another month, another year, another good sweeping, would have done it! And on that final ride of the broomstick, he—he would have arrived! At last some one would have been there with a real philosophy, a truly creative mind; some one whose poems and paintings, music, novels, plays, and measures of reform would at last have borne inspection! And he would go out from the office of that great paper so untimely wrecked, and, conspiring with himself, would found another.

This one should follow principles that could not fail. For, first, it should tolerate nothing—nothing at all. That was the mistake they had made last time. They had tolerated some reputations. No more of that; no—more! The imbeciles, the shallow frauds, let them be carted once for all. And with them let there be cremated the whole structure of society, all its worn-out formulas of art, religion, sociology. In place of them he would not this time be content to put nothing. No; it was the moment to elucidate and develop

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that secret rhyme and pulsation in the heart of the future hitherto undisclosed to any but himself. And all the time there should be flames going up out of that paper—the pale-red, the lovely flames of genius. Yes, the emanation should be wonderful. And, collecting his tattered mantle round his middle so small, he would start his race again.

For three numbers he would lay about him and outline religiously what was going to come. In the fourth number he would be compelled to concentrate himself on a final destruction of all those defences and spiteful counter-attacks which wounded vanity had wrung from the pundits, those apostles of the past; this final destruction absorbed his energies during the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth numbers. In the ninth he would say positively that he was now ready to justify the constructive prophecies of his first issues. In the tenth he would explain that, unless a blighted public supported an heroic effort better, genius would be withheld from them. In the eleventh number he would lay about him as he had never done, and in the twelfth give up the ghost.

In connection with him one had always to remember that he was not one of those complacent folk whose complacency stops short somewhere;

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his was a nobler kind, ever trying to climb into that heaven which he alone was going to reach some day. He had a touch of the divine discontent even with himself; and it was only in comparison with the rest of the world that he felt he was superlative.

It was a consolation to him that Nietzsche was dead, so that out of a full heart and empty conscience he could bang upon the abandoned drum of a man whom he scarcely hesitated to term great. And yet, what—as he often said—could be more dismally asinine than to see some of these live stucco moderns pretending to be supermen? Save this Nietzsche he admitted perhaps no philosopher into his own class, and was most down on Aristotle, and that one who had founded the religion of his country.

Of statesmen he held a low opinion—what were they, after all, but politicians? There was not one in the whole range of history who could take a view like an angel of the dawn surveying creation; not one who could soar above a contemptible adaptation of human means to human ends.

His poet was Blake. His playwright Strindberg, a man of distinct promise—fortunately dead. Of novelists he accepted Dostoievsky. Who else was there? Who else that had gone outside the

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range of normal, stupid, rational humanity, and shown the marvellous qualities of the human creature drunk or dreaming? Who else who had so arranged his scenery that from beginning to end one need never witness the dull shapes and colours of human life quite unracked by nightmare? It was in nightmare only that the human spirit revealed its possibilities.

In truth, he had a great respect for nightmare, even in its milder forms, the respect of one who felt that it was the only thing which an ordinary sane man could not achieve in his waking moments. He so hated the ordinary sane man, with his extraordinary lack of the appreciative faculty.

In his artistic tastes he was paulo-post-futurist, and the painter he had elected to admire was one that no one had yet heard of. He meant, however, that they should hear of him when the moment came. With the arrival of that one would begin a new era of art, for which in the past there would be no parallel, save possibly one Chinese period long before that of which the pundits—poor devils—so blatantly bleated.

He was a connoisseur of music, and nothing gave him greater pain than a tune. Of all the ancients he recognised Bach alone, and only in

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his fugues. Wagner was considerable in places. Strauss and Debussy, well—yes, but now *vieux jeu*. There was an Esquimaux. His name? No, let them wait! That fellow was something. Let them mark his words, and wait!

It was for this kind of enlightenment of the world that he most ardently desired his own arrival, without which he sometimes thought he could no longer bear things as they were, no longer go on watching his chariot unhitched to a star, trailing the mud of this musty, muddled world, whose ethics even, those paltry wrappings of the human soul, were uncongenial to him.

Talking of ethics, there was one thing especially that he absolutely could not bear—that second-hand creature, a gentleman; the notion that his own superlative self should be compelled by some mouldy and incomprehensible tradition to respect the feelings or see the point of view of others—this was indeed the limit. No, no! To bound upon the heads and limbs the prejudices and convictions of those he came in contact with, especially in print, that was a holy duty. And, though conscientious to a degree, there was certainly no one of all his duties that he performed so conscientiously as this. No amenities defiled his tongue or pen, nor did he ever shrink from per-

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sonalities—his spiritual honesty was terrific. But he never thrust or cut where it was not deserved; practically the whole world was open to his scorn, as he well knew, and he never needed to go out of his way to find victims for it. Indeed, he made no cult at all of eccentricity—that was for smaller creatures. His dress, for instance, was of the soberest, save that now and then he would wear a purple shirt, grey boots, or a yellow-ochre tie. His life and habits, lost in the future, were, on the whole, abstemious. He had no children, but set great store by them, and fully meant when he had time to have quite a number, for this was, he knew, his duty to a world breeding from mortal men. Whether they would arrive before he did was a question, since, until then, his creative attention could hardly be sufficiently disengaged.

At times he scarcely knew himself, so absorbed was he; but you knew him because he breathed rather hard, as became a man lost in creation. In the higher flights of his genius he paused for nothing, not even for pen and paper; he touched the clouds, indeed—and, like the clouds, height piled on vaporous height, his images and conceptions hung wreathed, immortal, evanescent as the very air. . It was an annoyance to him afterward

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to find that he had neglected to pin them to earth. Still, with his intolerance of all except divinity, and his complete faith that he must in time achieve it, he was perhaps the most interesting person to be found in the purlieus of—wherever it might be.

V. THE PRECEPTOR

He had a philosophy as yet untouched. His stars were the old stars, his faith the old faith; nor would he recognise that there was any other, for not to recognise any point of view except his own was no doubt the very essence of his faith. Wisdom! There was surely none save the flinging of the door to, standing with your back against that door, and telling people what was behind it. For, though he also could not know what was behind, he thought it low to say so. An "atheist," as he termed certain persons, was to him beneath contempt, an "agnostic," as he termed certain others, a poor and foolish creature. As for a rationalist, positivist, pragmatist, or any other "ist"—well, that was just what they were. He made no secret of the fact that he simply could not understand people like that. It was true. "What can they do—save deny?" he would say. "What do they contribute to the morals and the elevation of the world? What do they put in place of what they take away? What have they got, to make up for what is be-

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hind that door? Where are their symbols? How shall they move and lead the people? No," he said, "a little child shall lead the people, and I am the little child! For I can spin them a tale such as children love, of what is behind the door." Such was the temper of his mind that he never flinched from believing true what he thought would benefit himself and others. For example, he held a crown of ultimate advantage to be necessary to induce pure and stable living. If one could not say: "Listen, children! there it is, behind the door! Look at it, shining, golden—yours! Not now, but when you die, if you are good. Be good, therefore! For if you are not good—no crown!" If one could not say that—what could one say? What inducement hold out? And warmly he would describe the crown! There was nothing he detested more than commercialism. And to any one who ventured to suggest that there was something rather commercial about the idea of that crown, he would retort with asperity. A mere creed that good must be done, so to speak, just out of a present love of dignity and beauty—as a man, seeing something he admired, might work to reproduce it, knowing that he would never achieve it perfectly, but going on until he dropped, out of sheer

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love of going on—he thought vague, futile, devoid of glamour, and contrary to human nature, for he always judged people by himself, and felt that no one could like to go on unless they knew that they would get something if they did. To promise victory, therefore, was most important. Forlorn hopes, setting your teeth, back to the wall, and such like, was bleak and wintry doctrine, without inspiration in it, because it led to nothing—so far as he could see. Those others, who, not presuming to believe in anything, went on, because—as they said—to give up would be to lose their honour, seemed to him poor lost creatures who had denied faith; and faith was, as has been said, the mainspring of his philosophy.

Once, indeed, in the unguarded moment of a heated argument, he had confessed that some day men might not require to use the symbols of religion which they used now. It was at once pointed out to him that, if he thought that, he could not believe these symbols to be true for all time; and if they were not true for all time, why did he say they were? He was dreadfully upset. Deferring answer, however, for the moment, he was soon able to retort that the symbols were true—er—mystically. If a man—and this was the point—did not stand by *these sym-*

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bols, by which could he stand? Tell him that! Symbols were necessary. But what symbols were there in a mere good will; a mere vague following of one's own dignity and honour, out of a formless love of life? How put up a religion of such amorphous and unrewarded chivalry and devotion, how put up a blind love of mystery, in place of a religion of definite crowns and punishments, how substitute a worship of mere abstract goodness, or beauty, for worship of what could be called by Christian names? Human nature being what it was—it would not do, it absolutely would not do. Though he was fond of the words “mystery,” “mystical,” he had emphatically no use for them when they were vaguely used by people to express their perpetual (and quite unmoral) reverence for the feeling that they would never find out the secret of their own existence, never even understand the nature of the universe or God. Fancy! Mystery of that kind seemed to him pagan, almost nature-worship, having no finality. And if confronted by some one who said that a Mystery, *if* it could be understood, would naturally not be a mystery, he would raise his eyebrows. It was that kind of loose, specious, sentimental talk that did so much harm, and drew people away from right understanding of that

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Great Mystery which, if it was *not* understood and properly explained, was, for all practical purposes, not a great mystery at all. No, it had all been gone into long ago, and he stood by the explanations and intended that every one else should, for in that way alone men were saved; and, though he well knew (for he was no Jesuit) that the end did not justify the means, yet in a matter of such all-importance one stopped to consider neither means nor ends—one just saved people. And as for truth—the question of that did not arise, if one believed. What one believed, what one was told to believe, *was* the truth; and it was no good telling him that the whole range of a man's feeling and reasoning powers must be exercised to ascertain truth, and that, when ascertained, it would only be relative truth, and the best available to that particular man. Nothing short of the absolute truth would *he* put up with, and that guaranteed fixed and immovable, or it was no good for his purpose. To any one who threw out doubts here and doubts there, and even worse than doubts, he had long formed the habit of saying simply, with a smile that he tried hard to make indulgent: "Of course, if you believe *that!*"

But he very seldom had to argue on these

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matters, because people, looking at his face with its upright bone-formation, rather bushy eyebrows, and eyes with a good deal of light in them, felt that it would be simpler not. He seemed to them to know his own mind almost too well. Joined to this potent faculty of implanting in men a childlike trustfulness in what he told them was behind the door, he had a still more potent faculty of knowing exactly what was good for them in everyday life. The secret of this power was simple. He did not recognise the existence of what moderns and so-called "artists" dubbed "temperament." All talk of that sort was bosh, and generally immoral bosh; for all moral purposes people really had but one temperament, and that was, of course, just like his own. And no one knew better than he what was good for it. He was perfectly willing to recognise the principle of individual treatment for individual cases; but it did not do, in practice, he was convinced, to vary. This instinctive wisdom made him invaluable in all those departments of life where discipline and the dispensation of an even justice were important. To adapt men to the moral law was—he thought—perhaps the first duty of a preceptor, especially in days when there was perceptible a distinct but regrettable tendency

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to try and adapt the moral law to the needs—as they were glibly called—of men. There was, perhaps, in him something of the pedagogue, and when he met a person who disagreed with him his eyes would shift a bit to the right and a bit to the left, then become firmly fixed upon that person from under brows rather drawn down; and his hand, large and strong, would move fingers, as if more and more tightly grasping a cane, birch, or other wholesome instrument. He loved his fellow creatures so that he could not bear to see them going to destruction for want of a timely flogging to salvation.

He was one of those who seldom felt the need for personal experience of a phase of life, or line of conduct, before giving judgment on it; indeed, he gravely distrusted personal experience. He had opposed, for instance, all relief for the unhappily married long before he left the single state; and, when he did leave it, would not admit for a moment that his own happiness was at all responsible for the petrification of his view that no relief was necessary. Hard cases made bad law! But he did not require to base his opinion upon that. He said simply that he had been told there was to be no relief—it was enough.

The saying "To understand all is to forgive"

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all!" left him cold. It was, as he well knew, quite impossible to identify himself with such conditions as produced poverty, disease, and crime, even if he wished to do so (which he sometimes doubted). He knew better, therefore, than to waste his time attempting the impossible; and he pinned his faith to an instinctive knowledge of how to deal with all such social ills: A contented spirit for poverty; for disease isolation; and for crime such punishment as would at once deter others, reform the criminal, and convince every one that law must be avenged and the social conscience appeased. On this point of revenge he was emphatic. No vulgar personal feeling of vindictiveness, of course, but a strong state feeling of "an eye for an eye." It was the only taint of socialism that he permitted himself. Loose thinkers, he knew, dared to say that a desire for retribution or revenge was a purely human or individual feeling like hate, love, and jealousy; and that to talk of satisfying such a feeling in the collected bosom of the state was either to talk nonsense—how could a state have a bosom?—or to cause the bosoms of the human individuals who administered the justice of the state to feel that each of them was itself that stately bosom, and entitled to be revengeful. "Oh, no!"

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he would answer to such loose-thinking persons; "judges, of course, give expression not to what they feel themselves but to what they imagine the state feels." He himself, for example, was perfectly able to imagine which crimes were those that inspired in the bosom of the state a particular abhorrence, a particular desire to be avenged; now it was blackmail, now assaults upon children, or living on the earnings of immoral women; he was certain that the state regarded all these with peculiar detestation, for he had, and quite rightly, a particular detestation of them himself; and if he were a judge, he would never for a moment hesitate to visit on the perpetrators of such vile crimes the utmost vengeance of the law. He was no loose thinker. In these times, bedridden with loose thinking and sickly sentiment, he often felt terribly the value of his own philosophy, and was afraid that it was in danger. But not many other people held that view, discerning his finger still very large in every pie—so much so that there often seemed less pie than finger.

It would have shocked him much to realise that he could be considered a fit subject for a study of extravagance; fortunately, he had not the power of seeing himself as others saw him, nor was there any danger that he ever would.

VI. THE ARTIST

He had long known, of course, that to say the word "bourgeois" with contempt was a little bit old-fashioned, and he did his utmost not to; yet was there a still small voice within him that would whisper: "Those people—I want to and I do treat them as my equals. I have even gone so far of late years as to dress like them, to play their games, to eat regularly, to drink little, to love decorously, with many other bourgeois virtues, but in spite of all I remain where I was, an inhabitant of another—" and, just as he thought the whispering voice was going to die away, it would add hurriedly—"and a better world."

It worried him; and he would diligently examine the premises of that small secret conclusion, hoping to find a flaw in the justness of his conviction that he was superior. But he never did; and for a long time he could not discover why.

Often the conduct of the "bourgeois" would strike him as almost superfluously good. They were brave, much braver than he was conscious

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of being; clean-thinking, oh, far more clean-thinking than a man like himself, necessarily given to visions of all kinds; they were straightforward, almost ridiculously so, as it seemed to one who saw the inside-out of everything almost before he saw the outside-out; they were simple, as touchingly simple as those little children, to whom Scriptures and post-impressionism had combined to award the crown of wisdom; they were kind and self-denying in a way that often made him feel quite desperately his own selfishness—and yet—they were inferior. It was simply maddening that he could never rid himself of that impression.

It was one November afternoon, while talking with another artist, that the simple reason struck him with extraordinary force and clarity: *He could make them, and they could not make him!*

It was clearly this which caused him to feel so much like God when they were about. Glad enough, as any man might be, of that discovery, it did not set his mind at rest. He felt that he ought rather to be humbled than elated. And he went to work at once to be so, saying to himself: "I am just, perhaps, a little nearer to the Creative Purpose than the rest of the world—a mere accident, nothing to be proud of; I can't

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help it, nothing to make a fuss about, though people will!" For it did seem to him sometimes that the whole world was in conspiracy to make him feel superior—as if there were any need! He would have felt much more comfortable if that world had despised him, as it used to in the old days, for then the fire of his conviction could with so much better grace have flared to heaven; there would have been something fine about a superiority leading its own forlorn hope. But this trailing behind the drums and trumpets of a press and public so easily taken in he felt to be both flat and a little degrading. True, he had his moments, as when his eyes would light on sentences like this (penned generally by clergymen): "All this talk of art is idle; what really matters is morals." Then, indeed, his spirit would flame, and after gazing at "is morals" with flashing eye and curling lip, and wondering whether it ought to have been "are morals," he would say to whomsoever might happen to be there: "These bourgeois! What do they know? What can they see?" and, without waiting for an answer, would reply: "Nothing! Nothing! Less than nothing!" and mean it. It was at moments such as these that he realised how he not only despised, but almost hated, those dense and cocky

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Philistines who could not see his obvious superiority. He felt that he did not lightly call them by such names, because they really *were* dense and cocky, and no more able to see things from his point of view than they were to jump over the moon. These fellows could see nothing except from their own confounded view-point! They were so stodgy too; and he gravely distrusted anything static. Flux, flux, and once more flux! He knew by intuition that an artist alone had the capacity for concreting the tides of life in forms that were not deleterious to anybody. For rules and canons he recognised the necessity with his head (including his tongue), but never with his heart; except, of course, the rules and canons of art. He worshipped these; and when anybody like Tolstoi came along and said, "Blow art!" or words to that effect, he hummed like bees caught on a gust of wind. What did it matter whether you had anything to express, so long as you expressed it? That only was "pure æsthetics," as he often said. To place before the public eye something so exquisitely purged of thick and muddy actuality that it might be as perfectly without direct appeal to-day as it would be two thousand years hence—this was an ambition to which in truth he nearly always attained;

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this only was great art. He would assert with his last breath—which was rather short, for he suffered from indigestion—that one must never concrete anything in terms of ordinary nature. No! one must devise pictures of life that would be equally unfamiliar to men in A. D. 2520 as they had been in A. D. 1920; and when an inconsiderate person drew his attention to the fact that to the spectator in 2520 the most naturalistic pictures of the life of 1920 would seem quite convincingly fantastic, so that there was no need for him to go out of his way to devise fantasy—he would stare. For he was emphatically not one of those who did not care a button what the form was so long as the spirit of the artist shone clear and potent through the pictures he drew. No, no; he either demanded the poetical, the thing that got off the ground, with the wind in its hair (and he himself would make the wind, rather perfumed); or—if not the poetical—something observed with extreme fidelity and without the smallest touch of that true danger to art, the temperamental point of view. “No!” he would say; “it’s our business to put it down just as it is, to see it, not to feel it. In feeling damnation lies.” And nothing gave him greater uneasiness than to find the emotions of anger,

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scorn, love, reverence, or pity surging within him as he worked, for he knew that they would, if he did not at once master them, spoil a certain splendid vacuity that he demanded of all art. In painting, Raphael, Tintoretto, and Holbein pleased him greatly; in fiction, "Salammbô" was his model, for, as he very justly said, you could supply to it what soul you liked—there being no inconvenient soul already in possession.

As can be well imagined, his conviction of being, in a small way, God, permeated an outlook that was passionless and impartial to a degree—except perhaps toward the bourgeoisie, with their tiring morals and peculiar habits. If he had a weakness, it was his paramount desire to suppress in himself any symptoms of temperament, except just that temperament of having no temperament, which seemed to him the only one permissible to an artist, who, as he said, was nothing if not simply either a recorder or a weaver of beautiful lines in the air.

Record and design, statement and decoration—these, in combination, constituted creation! It was to him a certain source of pleasure that he had discovered this. Not that he was, of course, neglectful of sensations, but he was perfectly careful not to *feel* them—in order that he might be

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able to record them, or use them for his weaving in a purely æsthetic manner. The moment they impinged on his spirit, and sent the blood to his head, he reined in, and began tracing lines in the air, a practice that never failed him.

It was his deliberate opinion that a work of art quite as great as the "Bacchus and Ariadne" could be made out of a kettle singing on a hob. You had merely to record it with beautiful lines and colour; and what—in parenthesis—could lend itself more readily to beautiful treatment of lines woven in the air than steam rising from a spout? It was a subject, too, which in its very essence almost precluded temperamental treatment, so that this abiding temptation was removed from the creator. It could be transferred to canvas with a sort of immortal blandness—black, singing, beautiful. All that cant, such as, "The greater the artist's spirit, the greater the subject he will treat, and the greater achievement attain, technique being equal," was to him beneath contempt. The spirit did not matter, because one must not intrude it; and, since one must not intrude it, the more unpretentious the subject, the less temptation one had to diverge from impersonality, that first principle of art. Oranges on a dish afforded probably the finest subject one could meet

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with; unless one chanced to dislike oranges. As for what people called "criticism of life," he maintained that such was only permissible when the criticism was so sunk into the very fibre of a work as to be imperceptible to the most searching eye. When this was achieved he thought it extremely valuable. Anything else was simply the work of the moralist, of the man who took sides and used his powers of expression to embody a temperamental and therefore an obviously one-sided view of his subject; and, however high those powers of expression might be, he could not admit that this was in any sense real art. He could never forgive Leonardo da Vinci, because, he said, "the fellow was always trying to put the scientific side of himself into his confounded paintings, and not just content to render faithfully in terms of decoration"; nor could he ever condone Euripides for letting his philosophy tincture his plays. And, if it were advanced that the former was the greatest painter and the latter the greatest dramatist the world had ever seen, he would say: "That may be, but they weren't artists, of course."

He was fond of the words "of course"; they gave the impression that he could not be startled, as was right and proper for a man occupying his

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post, a little nearer to the Creative Purpose than those others. As mark of that position, he always permitted himself just one eccentricity, changing it every year, his mind being subtle—not like those of certain politicians or millionaires, content to wear orchids or drive zebras all their lives. Anon it would be a little pointed beard and no hair to speak of; next year, no beard, and wings; the year after, a pair of pince-nez with alabaster rims, very cunning; once more anon, a little pointed beard. In these ways he singled himself out just enough, no more; for he was no *poseur*, believing in his own place in the scheme of things too deeply.

His views on matters of the day varied, of course, with the views of those he talked to, since it was his privilege always to see either the other side or something so much more subtle on the same side as made that side the other.

But all topical thought and emotion was beside the point for one who lived in his work; who lived to receive impressions and render them again so faithfully that you could not tell he had ever received them. His was—as he sometimes felt—a rare and precious personality.

VII. THE HOUSEWIFE

Though frugal by temperament, and instinctively aware that her sterling nature was the bank in which the national wealth was surely deposited, she was of benevolent disposition; and when, as occasionally happened, a man in the street sold her one of those jumping toys for her children, she would look at him and say:

“How much? You don’t look well!” and he would answer: “Tuppence, lidy. Truth is, lidy, I’ve gone ’ungry this lawst week.” Searching his face shrewdly, she would reply: “That’s bad—a sin against the body. Here’s threepence. Give me a ha’penny. You don’t look well.” And, taking the ha’penny, she would leave the man inarticulate.

Food appealed to her, not only in relation to herself, but to others. Often to some friend she would speak a little bitterly, a little mournfully, about her husband. “Yes, I quite like my ‘hubby’ to go out sometimes where he can talk about art, and war, and things that women can’t. He takes no interest in his food.” And

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she would add, brooding: "What he'd do if I didn't study him, I really don't know." She often felt with pain that he was very thin. She studied him incessantly—that is, in due proportion to their children, their position in society, their Christianity, and herself. If he was her "hubby," she was his "hub"—the housewife, that central pivot of society, that national pivot, which never could or would be out of gear. Devoid of conceit, it seldom occurred to her to examine her own supremacy, quietly content to be "integer vitæ, scelerisque pura"—just the one person against whom nobody could say anything. Subconsciously, no doubt, she *must* have valued her worth and reputation, or she would never have felt such salutary gusts of irritation and contempt toward persons who had none. Like cows when a dog comes into a field, she would herd together whenever she saw a woman with what she suspected was a past, then advance upon her, horns down. If the offending creature did not speedily vacate the field, she would, if possible, trample her to death. When, by any chance, the female dog proved too swift and lively, she would remain sullenly turning and turning her horns in the direction of its vagaries. Well she knew that, if she once raised those horns

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and let the beast pass, her whole herd would suffer. There was something almost magnificent about her virtue, based, as it was, entirely on self-preservation, and her remarkable power of rejecting all premises except those peculiar to herself. This gave it a fibre and substance hard as concrete. Here, indeed, was something one could build on; here, indeed, was the strait thing. Her husband would sometimes say to her: "My dear, we don't know what the poor woman's circumstances were, we really don't, you know. I think we should try to put ourselves in her place." And she would fix his eye, and say: "James, it's no good. I can't imagine myself in that woman's place, and I won't. Do you think that *I* would ever leave *you*?" And, watching till he shook his head, she would go on: "Of course not. No. Nor let you leave me." And, pausing a second, to see if he blinked, because men were rather like that (even those who had the best of wives), she would go on: "She deserves all she gets. I have no personal feeling, but, if once decent women begin to get soft about this sort of thing, then good-bye to family life and Christianity, and everything. I'm not hard, but there are things I feel strongly about, and this is one of them." And secretly she would think: "That's

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why he keeps so thin—always letting himself doubt, and sympathise, where one has no right to. Men!" Next time she passed the woman, she would cut her deader than the last time, and, seeing her smile, would feel a sort of divine fury. More than once this had led her into courts of law on charges of libel and slander. But, knowing how impregnable was her position, she almost welcomed that opportunity. For it was ever transparent to judge and jury from the first that she was that crown of pearls, a virtuous woman, and so she was never cast in damages.

On one such occasion her husband had been so ill-advised as to remark: "My dear, I have my doubts whether our duty does not stop at seeing to ourselves, without throwing stones at others."

"Robert," she had answered, "if you think that, just because there's a chance that you may have to pay damages, I'm going to hold my tongue when vice flaunts itself, you make a mistake. I always put your judgment above mine, but this is not a matter of judgment—it is a matter of Christian and womanly conduct. I can't admit even your right to dictate."

She hated that expression, "The grey mare is the better horse"; it was vulgar, and she would never recognise its truth in her own case—for a

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wife's duty was to submit herself to her husband, as she had already said. After this little incident she took the trouble to go and open her New Testament and look up the story of a certain woman. There was not a word in it about women not throwing stones; the discouragement referred entirely to men. Exactly! No one knew better than she the difference between men and women in the matter of moral conduct. Probably there *were* no men without that kind of sin, but there were plenty of women, and, without either false or true pride, she felt that she was one of them. And there the matter rested.

Her views on political and social questions—on the whole, very simple—were to be summed up in the words, “That *man*—!” and, so far as it lay in her power, she saw to it that her daughters should not have any views at all. She found this, however, an increasingly hard task, and on one occasion was almost terrified to find her first and second girls abusing “that man—,” not for going too fast, but for not going fast enough. She spoke to William about it, but found him hopeless, as usual, where his daughters were concerned. It was her principle to rule them with good, motherly sense, as became a woman in whose hands the family life of

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her country centred; and it was satisfactory on the whole to find that they obeyed her whenever they wished to. On this occasion, however, she spoke to them severely: "The place of woman," she said, "is in the home." "The whole home—and nothing but the home." "Ella! The place of woman is by the side of man; counselling, supporting, ruling, but never competing with him. The place of woman is in the shop, the kitchen, and—" "The—bed!" "Ella!" "In the soup!" "Beatrice! I wish—I do wish you girls would be more respectful. The place of woman is in the home. Yes, I've said that before, but I shall say it again, and don't you forget it! The place of woman is—the most important thing in national life. If you want to realise that, just think of your own mother; and—" "Our own father." "Ella! The place of woman is in the—!" She left the room, feeling that, for the moment, she had said enough.

In disposition sociable, and no niggard of her company, there was one thing she liked to work at alone—her shopping, an art which she had long reduced to a science. The principles she laid down are worth remembering: Never grudge your time to save a ha'penny. Never buy anything until you have turned it well over, recollect-

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ing that the rest of you will have turned it over too. Never let your feelings of pity interfere with your sense of justice, but bear in mind that the girls who sell to you are paid for doing it; if you can afford the time to keep them on their legs, they can afford the time to let you. Never read pamphlets, for you don't know what may be in them about furs, feathers, and forms of food. Never buy more than your husband can afford to pay for; but, on the whole, buy as much. Never let any seller see that you think you have bought a bargain, but buy one if you can; you will find it pleasant afterward to talk of your prowess. Shove, shove, and shove again!

In the perfect application of these principles, she had found, after long experience, that there was absolutely no one to touch her.

In regard to meat, she had sometimes thought she would like to give it up, because she had read in her paper that being killed hurt the poor animals; but she had never gone beyond thought, because it was very difficult to do that. Henry was thin, and distinctly pale; the girls were growing girls; Sunday would hardly seem Sunday without; besides, it did not do to believe what one read in the paper, and it would hurt her butcher's feelings—she was sure of that. Christ-

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mas, too, stood in the way. It was one's duty to be cheerful at that season, and Christmas would seem so strange without the cheery butchers' shops and their appropriate holocaust. She had once read some pages of a disgraceful book that seemed going out of its way all the time to prove that *she* was just an animal—a dreadful book, not at all nice! As if she would eat those creatures if they were really her brother animals, and not just sent by God to feed her. No; at Christmas she felt especially grateful to the good God for his abundance, for all the good things he gave her to eat. For all these reasons she swallowed her scruples religiously. But it was very different in regard to dairy produce; for here there was, she knew, a real danger—not, indeed, to the animals, but to her family and herself. She was for once really proud of the thoroughness with which she dealt with that important nourishment—milk. None came into her house except in sealed bottles, with the name of the cow, spiritually speaking, on the outside. Some wag had suggested, in her hearing, that hens should be compelled to initial their eggs when they were delivered, as well as to put the dates on them. This she had thought ribald; one could go too far.

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She was, before all things, an altruist; and in nothing more so than in her relations with her servants. If they did not do their duty, they went. It was the only way, she had found, to really benefit them. Country girls and town girls, they passed from her in a stream, having learned, once for all, the standard that was expected from them. She christened and educated more servants, perhaps, than any one in the kingdom. The Marthas went first, being invariably dirty; the Marys and Susans lasted, on an average, perhaps four months, and then left for many reasons. Cook seldom hurried off before her year was over, because it was so difficult to get her before she came, and to replace her after she was gone; but when she did go it was in a gale of wind. The "day out" was, perhaps, the most fruitful source of disillusionment—girls of that class, no matter how much they protested their innocence, seemed utterly unable to keep away from man's society. It was only once a fortnight that she required them to exercise their self-control and self-respect in that regard, for on the other thirteen days she took care that they had no chance, suffering no male footstep in her basement. And yet—would you believe it?—on those fourteenth days, she was never able to

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be easy in her mind. But, however kindly and considerate she might be in her dealings with those of lowly station, she found ever the same ingratitude, the same incapacity, or, as she had reluctantly been forced to believe, the same deliberate unwillingness to grasp her point of view. It was as if they were always rudely saying to themselves: "What do you know of us? We wish you'd leave us alone!" The idea! As if she could, or would! As if it were not an almost sacred charge on her in her station, with the responsibilities that attached to it, to look after her poorer neighbours and see that they acted properly in their own interests. The drink, the immorality, the waste amongst the poor was notorious, and anything she could do to lessen it she always did, dismissing servants for the least slip, and never failing to point a moral. All that new-fangled talk about the rich getting off the backs of the poor, about the law not being the same for both, about how easy it was to be moral and clean on two thousand a year, she put aside as silly. It was just the sort of thing that discontented people would say. In this view she was supported daily by her newspaper and herself, wherever she might be. No, no! If the well-to-do did not look after and control the poor, no

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one would, which was just what they would like. They were, in her estimation, incurable; but, so far as lay in her power, she would cure them, however painful it might be.

A religious woman, she rarely missed the morning, and seldom went to evening, service, feeling that in daylight she could best set an example to her neighbours.

God knew her views on art, for she was not prodigal of them—her most remarkable pronouncement being delivered on hearing of the disappearance of the "Monna Lisa": "Oh, that dreadful woman! I remember her picture perfectly. Well, I'm glad she's gone. I thought she would some day." When asked why, she would only answer: "She gave me the creeps."

She read such novels as the library sent, to save her daughters from reading a second time those which did not seem to her suitable, and promptly sent them back. In this way she preserved purity in her home. As to purity outside the home, she made a point of never drawing Frederick's attention to female beauty; not that she felt she had any real reason to be alarmed, for she was a fine woman; but because men were so funny.

There were no things in life of which she would

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have so entirely disapproved, if she had known about them, as Greek ideals, for she profoundly distrusted any display of the bare limb, and fully realised that, whatever beauty may have meant to the Greeks, to her and George it meant something very different. To her, indeed, Nature was a "hussy," to be tied to the wheels of that chariot which she was going to keep as soon as motor-cars were just a little cheaper and really reliable.

It was often said that she was a vanishing type, but she knew better. Pedantic fools murmured that Ibsen had destroyed her, but she had not yet heard of him. Literary folk and artists, socialists and society people, might talk of types, and liberty, of brotherhood, and new ideas, and sneer at Mrs. Grundy. With what unmoved solidity she dwelt among them! They were but as gadflies, buzzing and darting on the fringes of her central bulk. To those flights, to that stinging she paid less attention than if she had been cased in leather. In the words of her favourite Tennyson: "They may come, and they may go, but—whatever you may think—I go on forever!"

VIII. THE LATEST THING

There was in her blood that which bade her hasten, lest there should be something still new to her when she died. Death! She was continually haunted by the fear lest that itself might be new. And she would say: "Do you know what it feels like to be dead? I do." If she had not known this, she felt that she would not have lived her life to the full. And one must live one's life to the full. Indeed, yes! One must experience everything. In her relations with men, for instance, there was nothing, so far as she could see, to prevent her from being a good wife, good mother, good mistress, and good friend—to different men all at the same time, and even to more than one man of each kind, if necessary. One had merely to be oneself, a full nature, giving and taking generously. Greed was a low and contemptible attribute, especially in woman; a woman wanted nothing more than—everything, and the best of that. And it was intolerable if one could not have that little. Women had al-

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ways been kept down. Not to be kept down was still, on the whole, new. Yet sometimes, after she had not been kept down rather violently, she would feel: Oh, the weariness! I shall throw it all up, and live on a shilling a day, like a sweated worker—that, at all events, will be new! She even sometimes dreamed of retirement to convent life—the freshness of its old-world novelty appealed to her.

To such an idealist, the very colours of the rainbow did not suffice, nor all the breeds of birds there were; her life was piled high with cages. Here she had had them one by one, borrowed their songs, relieved them of their plumes; then, finding that they no longer had any, let them go; for to look at things without possessing them was intolerable, but to keep them when she had got them even more so.

She often wondered how people could get along at all whose natures were not so full as hers. Life, she thought, must be so dull for the poor creatures, only doing one thing at a time, and that time so long. What with her painting, and her music, her dancing, her flying, her motoring, her writing of novels and poems, her love-making, maternal cares, entertaining, friendships, house-keeping, wifely duties, political and social inter-

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ests, her gardening, talking, acting, her interest in Russian linen and the woman's movement; what with travelling in new countries, listening to new preachers, lunching new novelists, discovering new dancers, taking lessons in Spanish; what with new dishes for dinner, new religions, new dogs, new dresses, new duties to new neighbours, and newer charities—life was so full that the moment it stood still and was simply old "life," it seemed to be no life at all.

She could not bear the amateur; feeling within herself some sacred fire that made her "an artist" whatever she took up—or dropped. She had a particular dislike, too, of machine-made articles; for her, personality must be deep-woven into everything—look at flowers, how wonderful they were in that way, growing quietly to perfection, each in its corner, and inviting butterflies to sip their dew! She knew, for she had been told it so often, that she was the crown of creation—the latest thing in women, who were, of course, the latest thing in creatures. There had never, till quite recently, been a woman like her, so awfully interested in so many things, so likely to be interested in so many more. She had flung open all the doors of life, and was so continually going out and coming in, that life had some con-

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siderable difficulty in catching a glimpse of her at all. Just as the cinematograph was the future of the theatre, so was she the future of women, and in the words of the poet "prou' title." To sip at every flower before her wings closed; if necessary, to make new flowers to sip at. To smoke the whole box of cigarettes straight off, and in the last puff of smoke expire! And withal, no feverishness, only a certain reposeful and womanly febrility; a mere perpetual glancing from quick-sliding eyes, to see the next move, to catch the new movement—God bless it! And, mind you, a high sense of duty—perhaps a higher sense of duty than that of any woman who had gone before; a deep and intimate conviction that women had an immensity of leeway to make up, that their old, starved, stunted lives must be avenged, and that right soon. To enlarge the horizon—this was the sacred duty! No mere Boccaccian or Louis Quinze cult of pleasurable sensations; no crude, lolling, plutocratic dollery of a spoiled dame. No! the full, deep river of sensations nibbling each other's tails. Life was real, life was earnest, and time the essence of its contract.

To say that she had favourite books, plays, men, dogs, colours, was to do her but momen-

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tary justice. A deeper equity assigned her only one favourite—the next; and, for the sake of that one favourite, no Catharine, no Semiramis or Messalina, could more swiftly dispose of all the others. With what avidity she sprang into its arms, drained its lips of kisses, looking hurriedly the while for its successor; for Heaven alone—she felt—knew what would happen to her if she finished drinking before she caught sight of that next necessary one.

And yet, now and again, time played her false, and she got through too soon. It was then that she realised the sensation of death. After the first terrible inanition, those moments lived without “living” would begin to assume a sort of preciousness, to acquire holy sensations of their own. “I am dead,” she would say to herself: “I really am dead; I lie motionless, hearing, feeling, smelling, seeing, thinking nothing. I lie impalpable—yes, that is the word—completely impalpable; above me I can see the vast blue blue, and all around me the vast brown brown—it is something like what I remember of Egypt. And there is a kind of singing in my ears, that are really not ears now, a grey, thin sound, like—ah!—Maeterlinck, and a very faint honey smell, like—er—Omar Kháyyam. And I just move as a blade of

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grass moves in the wind. Yes, I am dead. It feels exactly like it." And a new exhilaration would seize her, for she felt that, in that sensation of death, she was living! At lunch, or it might be dinner, she would tell her newest man, already past the prime of her interest, exactly what it felt like to be dead. "It's not really disagreeable," she would say; "it has its own flavour. You know, like Turkish coffee, just a touch of india-rubber in it—I mean the coffee." And the poor man would sneeze, and answer: "Yes, I know a little what you mean; asphodels, too; you get it in Greece. My only difficulty is that, if you *are* dead, you know—you—er—are." She would not admit that; it sounded true, but the man was getting stupid—to be dead like that would be the end of novelty, which was, to her, unthinkable.

Once, in a new book, she came across a little tale of a man who "lived" in Persia, of all heavenly places, frantically pursuing sensation. Entering one day the courtyard of his house, he heard a sigh behind him, and, looking round, saw his own spirit, apparently in the act of breathing its last. The little thing, dry and pearly-white as a seed-pod of "honesty," was opening and shutting its mouth, for all the world like an

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oyster trying to breathe. "What is it?" he said; "you don't seem well." And his spirit answered: "All right, all right! Don't distress yourself—it's nothing! I've just been crowded out. That's all. Good-bye!" And, with a wheeze, the little thing went flat, fell onto the special blue tiles he had caused to be put down there, and lay still. He bent to pick it up, but it came off on his thumb in a smudge of grey-white powder.

This fancy was so new that it pleased her greatly, and she recommended the book to all her friends. The moral, of course, was purely Eastern, and had no applicability whatever to Western life, where, the more one did and expressed, the bigger and more healthy one's spirit grew—as witness what she always felt to be going on within herself. But next spring she changed the blue tiles of her Persian smoking-room, put in a birch-wood floor, and made it all Russian. This she did, however, merely because one new room a year was absolutely essential to her spirit.

In her perpetual journey toward an ever-widening horizon of woman's life, she was not so foolish as to prize danger for its own sake—that was by no means her idea of adventure. That she ran some risks it would be idle to deny, but

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only when she had discerned the substantial advantage of a new sensation to be had out of adventures, not at all because they were necessary to keep her soul alive. She was, she felt, a Greek in spirit, only more so perhaps, having in her also something of America and the West End.

How she came to be at all was only known to that age—whose daughter she undoubtedly was—an age which ran all the time, without any foolish notion where it was running to. There was no novelty in a destination, and no sensation to be had from sitting cross-legged in a tub of sunlight—not, at least, after you had done it once. *She* had been born to dance the moon down, to ragtime. The moon, the moon! Ah, yes! It was the one thing that had as yet eluded her avidity. That, and her own soul.

IX. THE PERFECT ONE

When you had seen him you knew that there was really nothing to be said. Idealism, humanity, culture, philosophy, the religious and æsthetic senses—after all, where did all that lead? Not to him! What led to him was beef, and whisky, exercise, wine, strong cigars, and open air. What led to him was anything that ministered to the coatings of the stomach and the thickness of the skin. In seeing him, you also saw how progress, civilisation, and refinement simply meant attrition of those cuticles which made him what he was. And what was he? Well—perfect! Perfect for that high, that supreme purpose—the enjoyment of life as it was. And, aware of his perfection—oh, well aware!—with a certain blind astuteness that refused reflection on the subject—not caring what anybody said or thought, just enjoying himself, taking all that came his way, and making no bones about it; unconscious, indeed, that there were any to be made. He must

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have known by instinct that thought, feeling, sympathy only made a man chickeny, for he avoided them in an almost sacred way. To be "hard" was his ambition, and he moved through life hitting things, especially balls—whether they reposed on little inverted tubs of sand, or moved swiftly toward him, he almost always hit them, and told people how he did it afterward. He hit things, too, at a distance, through a tube, with a certain noise, and a pleasant swelling sensation under his fifth rib every time he saw them tumble, feeling that they had swollen still more under their fifth ribs and would not require to be hit again. He tried to hit things in the middle distance with little hooks which he flung out in front of him, and when they caught on, and he pulled out the result, he felt better. He was a sportsman, and not only in the field. He hit any one who disagreed with him, and was very angry if they hit him back. He hit the money-market with his judgment when he could, and when he couldn't, he hit it with his tongue. And all the time he hit the Government. It was a perpetual comfort to him in those shaky times to have that Government to hit. Whatever turned out wrong, whatever turned out right—there it was! To give it one—two—three, and watch it

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crawl away, was wonderfully soothing. Of a summer evening, sitting in the window of his club, having hit balls or bookies hard all day, how pleasant still to have that fellow Dash, and that fellow Blank, and all the —y crew to hit still harder. He hit women, not, of course, with his fists, but with his philosophy. Women were made for the perfection of men; they had produced, nourished, and nursed him, and he now felt the necessity for them to comfort and satisfy him. When they had done that he felt no further responsibility in regard to them; to feel further responsibility was to be effeminate. The idea, for instance, that a spiritual feeling must underlie the physical was extravagant; and when a woman took another view, he took—if not actually, then metaphorically—a stick. He was almost Teutonic in that way. But the Government, the Government! Right and left, he hit it all the time. He had a rooted conviction that some day it would hit him back, and this naturally exasperated him. In the midst of danger to the game laws, of socialism, and the woman's movement, the only hope, almost the only comfort, lay in hitting the Government. For socialists were getting so near that he could only hit them now in clubs, music-halls, and other quite safe places;

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and the woman's movement might be trusted implicitly to hit itself. Thus, in the world arena there was nothing left but that godsend. Always a fair man, and of thoroughly good heart, he, of course, gave it credit for the same amount of generosity and good will that he felt present in his own composition. There was no extravagance in that; and any man who gave it more he deemed an ass.

He had heard of "the people," and, indeed, at times had seen and smelt them; it had sufficed. Some persons, he knew, were concerned about their condition and all that; but what good it would do him to share that concern he could not see. Fellows spoke of them as "poor devils," and so forth; to his mind they were "pretty good rotters," most of them—especially the working-man, who wanted something for nothing all the time, and grumbled when he got it. The more you gave him the more he wanted, and, if he were this — Government, instead of coddling the blighters up he would hit them one, and have done with it. Insurance, indeed; pensions; land reform; minimum wage—it was a bit too thick! They would soon be putting the beggars into glass cases, and labelling them "This side up."

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Sometimes he dreamed of the time when he would have to ride for God and the king. But he strongly repelled, of course, any suggestion that he had been brought up to a belief in "caste." At his school he had once kicked a small scion of the royal family; this heroic action had dispersed in his mind once for all any notion that he was a snob. "Caste," indeed! There was no such thing in England nowadays. Had he not sung "The Leather Bottel" to an audience of dirty people in his school mission-hall, and—rather enjoyed it. It was not his fault that Labor was not satisfied. It was all those professional agitators, confound them! He himself was opposed to setting class against class. It was, however, ridiculous to imagine that he was going to hobnob with or take interest in people who weren't clean, who wore clothes with a disagreeable smell—people, moreover, who, in the most blatant way, showed him continually that they wanted what he had got. No, no! there were limits. Clean, at all events, any one could be—it was the *sine qua non*. What with clothes, a man to look after them, baths, and so on, he himself spent at least two hundred a year on being clean, and even took risks with the thickness of his skin, from the way he rubbed and scrubbed it. A man could not

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be hard and healthy if he wasn't clean, and if the blighters were only hard and healthy they would not be bleating about their wants.

One could see him perhaps to the best advantage in lands like India, or Egypt, striding in the early morn over the purlieus of the desert, with his loping, strenuous step, scurried after by what looked like little dark and anxious women, carrying his golf-clubs; his eyes, with their look of out-facing Death, fixed on the ball that he had just hit so hard, intent on overtaking it and hitting it even harder next time. Did he at these times of worship ever pause to contemplate that vast and ancient plain where, in the distance, pyramids, those creatures of eternity, seemed to tremble in the sun haze? Did he ever feel an ecstatic wonder at the strange cry of immemorial peoples far-travelling the desert air; or look and marvel at those dark and anxious little children of old civilisations who pattered after him? Did he ever feel the majesty of those vast lonely sands and that vast lonely sky? Not he! He d——d well hit the ball, until his skin began to act; then, going in, took a bath, and rubbed himself. At such moments he felt perhaps more truly religious than at any other, for one naturally could not feel so fit and good on Sundays, with

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the necessity it imposed for extra eating, smoking, kneeling, and other sedentary occupations. Indeed, he had become perhaps a little distracted in religious matters. There seemed to be things in the Bible about turning the other cheek, and lilies of the field, about rich men and camels, and the poor in spirit, which did not go altogether with his religion. Still, of course, one remained in the English church, hit things, and hoped for the best.

Once his convictions nearly took a toss. It was on a ship, not as classy as it might have been, so that he was compelled to talk to people that he would not otherwise perhaps have noticed. Amongst such was a fellow with a short beard, coming from Morocco. This person was lean and brown, his eyes were extremely clear; he held himself very straight, and looked fit to jump over the moon. It seemed obvious that he hit a lot of things. One questioned him, therefore, with some interest as to what he had been hitting. The fellow had been hitting nothing, absolutely nothing. How on earth, then, did he keep himself so fit? Walking, riding, fasting, swimming, climbing mountains, writing books; hitting neither the Government nor golf balls! Never to hit anything; write books, tolerate the Government, and

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look like that! It was 'not done.' And the odd thing was, the fellow didn't seem to know or care whether he was fit or not. All the four days that the voyage lasted, with this infernal healthy fellow under his very nose, he suffered. There was nothing to hit on board, and he himself did not feel very fit. However, on reaching Southampton and losing sight of his travelling acquaintance he soon regained his equanimity.

He often wondered what he would do when he passed the age of fifty; and felt more and more that he would either have to go into Parliament or take up the duties of a county magistrate. After that age there were certain kinds of balls and beasts that could no longer be hit with impunity, and if one was at all of an active turn of mind one must have substitutes. Marriage, no doubt, would do something for him, but not enough; his was a strenuous nature, and he intended to remain "hard" unto the end. To combine that with service to his country, especially if, incidentally, he could hit socialism and poachers, radicals, loafers, and the income tax—this seemed to him an ideal well worthy of his philosophy and life, so far. And with this in mind he lived on, his skin thickening, growing ever more and more perfect, more and more im-

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pervious to thought and feeling, to æstheticism, sympathy, and all the elements destructive of perfection. And thus—when his time has come there is every hope that he may die.

X. THE COMPETITOR

He was given that way almost from his nursery days, for he could not even dress without racing his little brother in the doing up of little buttons, and being upset if he got one little button behind. At the age of eight he climbed all the trees of his father's garden and, arriving at their tops, felt a pang because the creatures left off so abruptly that he could not get any higher. He wrestled with anybody who did not mind rolling on the floor; and stayed awake once all night because he heard that one of his cousins was coming next day and was a year older than himself. It was not that he desired to see this cousin, to welcome, or give him a good time; he simply designed to race him in the kitchen-garden, and to wrestle with him afterward. It would be grand, he thought, to bump the head of some one a year older than himself. The cousin, however, was "scratched" at the last moment. It was a blow. At the age of ten he cut his head open against a swing, and so far forgot himself as to cry when he saw the blood flowing. To have

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missed such an opportunity of being superior to other small boys made an indelible mark on his soul, for, though he had not cried from pain, he had from fright, and felt he might have beaten both emotions, if only he had had proper warning.

His first term at school he came out top, after a terrific struggle; there was one other boy in the class. And term after term he went on coming out top, or very near it. He never knew what he was learning, but he knew that he beat other boys. He ran all the races he could, and played all the games; not because he enjoyed them, but because unless you did you could not win. He was considered almost a prize specimen.

He went to college in an exhausted condition, and for two years devoted himself to dandyism, designing to be the coolest, slackest, best-dressed man up. He almost was. But as that day approached when one must either beat or be beaten in learning by one's contemporaries, a fearful feeling beset him, and he rushed off to a crammer. For a whole year he poured the crammer's notes into his memory. What they were all about he had no notion, but his memory retained them just over that hot week when he sat writing for his life, twice a day. He would have received a First, had not an examiner who did not under-

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stand that examinations are simply held to determine who can beat whom, asked him in the living voice a question, to answer which required a knowledge of why there was an answer. He came down exhausted, and ate his dinners for the Bar. It was an occupation at which he could achieve no distinction save that of eating them faster than any other student; and for two whole years he merely devoted himself to trying to be the best amateur actor and the best shot in the land. His method of acting was based on nothing so flat as identification with the character he personified, but on the amount of laughter and applause that he could get in excess of that bestowed on any other member of the company. Nor did he shoot birds because he loved them, like a true sportsman, but because it was a pleasure to him to feel each day that he had shot or was going to shoot more than any one else who was shooting with him.

The time had now come for him to embrace his profession, and he did so like a true Briton, with his eye ever on the future. He perceived from the first that this particular race was longer than any race he had ever started for, and he began slowly, with a pebble in his mouth, husbanding his wind. The whole thing was ex-

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tremely dry and extremely boring, but of course one had to get there before all those other fellows. And round and round he ran, increasing his speed almost imperceptibly, soon beginning to have his eye on the half-dozen who seemed dangerously likely to get there before him if he did not mind that eye. It cannot be said that he enjoyed his work, or cared for the money it brought him, for, what with getting through his day, and thinking of those other fellows who might be forging ahead of him, he had no time to spend money, or even to give it away. And so it began rolling up. One day, however, perceiving that he had quite a lot, the thought came to him that he ought to do something with it. And happening soon after to go into a picture-gallery, he bought a picture. He had not had it long before it seemed to him better than the picture of a friend who rather went in for them; and he thought, "I could easily beat him if I gave myself to it a little." And he did. It was fascinating to perceive, each time he bought, that his taste had improved, and was getting steadily ahead of his friend's taste; and, indeed, not only of his friend's, but of that of other people. He felt that soon he would have better taste than anybody, and he bought and bought. It was not that

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he cared for the pictures, for he really had not time or mind to give to them—set as he was on reaching eminence; but he dreamed of leaving them to the National Gallery as a monument to his taste, and final proof of superiority to his friend, after they were both gone.

About this time he took silk, sacrificing nearly half of his income. He would have preferred to wait longer, had he not perceived that if he did wait, his friends —— and —— and —— —— would be taking silk before him. And, since he meant to be a judge first, this must naturally be guarded against. The prospective loss of so much income made him for a moment restful and expansive, as if he felt that he had been pushed almost too far by his competitive genius; and so he found time to marry—it being the commencement of the long vacation. For six weeks he hardly thought of his friends —— and —— and —— ——, but near the end of September he was shocked back into a more normal frame of mind by the news that they also had been offered and had taken silk. It behoved him, he felt, to put his wife behind him and go back into harness. It would be just like those fellows to get ahead of him, if they could; and he curtailed his honeymoon by quite three weeks. Not two years, how-

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ever, elapsed before it became clear to him that to keep his place he must enter Parliament. And against his own natural feelings, against even the inclinations of his country, he secured a seat at the general election and began sitting. What, then, was his chagrin to find that his friend —, and his friend —, and even his friend — —, had also secured seats, and were sitting when he got there! What with the courts, and what with 'the House,' he became lean and very yellow; and his wife complained. He determined to give her a child every year to keep her quiet; for he felt that he must have perfect peace in his home surroundings if he were to maintain his position in the great life race for which he had started, knowing that his friends — and — and — — would never hesitate to avail themselves of his ill health, to beat him. None of those wretched fellows were having so many children. He did not find his work in Parliament congenial; it seemed to him unreal. For he could not get his mind—firmly fixed on himself and the horizon—to believe that all those little measures which he was continually passing would benefit people with whose lives he really had not time or inclination to be familiar. When one had got up, prepared two cases, had breakfast, walked down to

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the courts, sat there from half past ten to four, walked to 'the House,' sat there a little longer than his friend — — (the worst of them), spoken if his friend — had spoken, or if he thought his friend — were going to speak, had dinner, prepared two cases, kissed his wife, mentally compared his last picture with that last one of his friend's, had a glass of barley-water, and gone to bed—when one had done all this, there really was not time for living his own life, much less any one else's. He sometimes thought he would have to give up doing so much; but that, of course, was out of the question, seeing that his friends would at once shoot ahead. He took "Vitogen" instead. They used his photograph, with the words, "It does wonders with me," coming out of his mouth, and on the opposite page they used a photograph of his friend — —, with the words, "I take a glass a day, and revel in it," coming out of his. On discovering this he increased the amount at some risk to two glasses, determined not to be outdone by that fellow.

He sometimes wondered whether, in the army, the church, the stock exchange, or in literature, he would not have had a more restful life; for he would by no means have admitted that he

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carried within himself the microbe of his own fate.

His natural love of beauty, for instance, inspired him when he saw a sunset, or a mountain, or even a sea, with the thought: How jolly it would be to look at it! But he had gradually become so reconciled to knowing he had not time for this that he never did. But if he had heard by any chance that his friend —— did find time to contemplate such natural beauties, he would certainly have contrived somehow to contemplate them too.

As the time approached for being made a judge he compared himself more and more carefully with his friends —— and —— and —— ——. If they were appointed before him, it would be very serious for his prospects of ultimate pre-eminence. And it was with a certain relief, tempered with sorrow, that he heard one summer morning that his friend —— had fallen seriously ill, and was not expected to recover. He was assiduous in the expression of an anxiety that was quite genuine. His friend —— died as the courts rose. And all through that long vacation he thought continually of poor ——, and of his career cut so prematurely short. It was then that the idea came to him of capping his efforts by

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writing a book. He chose for subject, "The Evils of Competition in the Modern State," and devoted to it every minute he could spare during autumn months, fortunately bereft of Parliamentary duties. It would just, he felt, make the difference between himself and his friends — and — —, to a government essentially favourable to literary men. He finished it at Christmas, and arranged for a prompt publication. It was with a certain natural impatience that he read, two days later, of the approaching issue of a book by his friend — —, entitled, "Joy of Life, or the Cult of the Moment." What on earth the fellow was about to rush into print and on such a subject he was at a loss to understand! The book came out a week before his own. He read the reviews rather feverishly, for they were favourable. What to do now to recover his lead he hardly knew. If he had not been married it might have been possible to arrange something in that line with the daughter of an important personage; as it was, there was nothing for it but to part with his pictures to the National Gallery by way of a loan. And this he did, to the chagrin of his wife, about the middle of May. On the 1st of June he read in his Sunday paper that his friend — — had given his library

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outright to the British Museum. Some relief to the strain of his anxiety, however, was afforded in July by the unexpected accession of his friend — to a peerage, through the death of a cousin. The estate attached was considerable. He felt that this friend at all events would not continue to struggle; he would surely recognise that he was removed from active life. His premonition was correct; and his friend — — and himself were left to fight it out alone.

That judge who had so long been expected to quit his judgeship did so for another world in the fourth week of the long vacation.

He hastened back to town at once. This was one of the most crucial moments of a crucial career. If appointed, he would be the youngest judge. But his friend — — was of the same age, the same politics, the same calibre in every way, and more robust. During those weeks of waiting, therefore, he grew perceptibly greyer. His joy knew only the bounds of a careful concealment, when, at the beginning of October, he was appointed a judge of the High Court; for it was not till the following morning that he learned that his friend — — had also been appointed, the Government having decided to add one to the number of his Majesty's judges. Which of

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them had been made the extra judge he neither dared nor cared to inquire; but, setting his teeth, entered forthwith on his duties.

It cannot be pretended that he liked them; to like them one would have to take a profound, and, as it were, amateurish interest in equity and the lives of one's fellow men. For this, of course, he had not time, having to devote all his energies to not having his judgments reversed, and watching the judgments of his friend — —. In the first year that fellow was upset in the Court of Appeal three times oftener than himself, and it came as a blow when the House of Lords so restored him that they came out equal. In other respects, of course, the life was something of a rest after that which he had led hitherto, and he watched himself carefully lest he might deteriorate, and be tempted to enjoy himself, steadily resisting every effort on the part of his friends and family to draw him into recreations other than those of dining out, playing golf, and improving his acquaintanceship with that Law of which he would require a perfect knowledge when he became Lord Chancellor. He never could quite make up his mind whether to be glad or sorry that his friend — — did not confine himself entirely to this curriculum.

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At about this epoch he became so extremely moderate in his politics that neither party knew to which of them he belonged. It was a period of uncertainty when no man could say in whose hands power would be in, say, five or ten years' time, and instinctively he felt that he must look ahead. A moderate man stood perhaps the greater chance of steady and perpetual preferment, and he felt moderate, now that the spur of a necessary political activity was removed. It was a constant source of uneasiness to him that his friend —— —— had become so dark a horse that one could find out nothing about his political convictions; people, indeed, went so far as to say that the beggar had none.

He had not been a judge four years when an epidemic of influenza swept off three of his Majesty's judges, and sent one mad; and almost imperceptibly he found himself sitting with his friend —— —— in the Court of Appeal. Having the fellow there under his eye day by day, he was able to study him, and noted with satisfaction that, though more robust, he was certainly of full and choleric temperament, and not too careful of himself. At once he began taking extra care of his own health, giving up wine, tobacco, and any other pleasure that he had left.

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For three years they sat there side by side, almost mechanically differing in their judgments; and then one morning the Prime Minister went and made his friend — — Lord Chief Justice, and himself only Master of the Rolls. The shock was very great. After a week's indisposition, he reset his teeth and decided to struggle on; his friend — — was not Lord Chancellor yet! Two more years passed, during which he unwillingly undermined his health by dining constantly in the highest social and political circles, and delivering longer and weightier judgments every day. His wife and children, who still had access to him at times, watched him with anxiety.

One morning they found him pacing up and down the dining-room with *The Times* newspaper in his hand, and every mark of cerebral excitement. His friend — — had made a speech at a certain banquet, in which he had hit the Government a nasty knock. It was now, of course, only a question of whether they would retain office till the Lord Chancellor, who was very shaky, dropped off. He dropped off in June, and they buried him in Westminster Abbey; his friend — — and himself being chief mourners. In the same week the Government was defeated. The state of his mind can now not well be im-

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aged. In one week he lost five pounds that could not be spared. He stopped losing weight when the Government decided to hang on till the end of the session. On the 15th of July the Prime Minister sent for him, and offered him the Chancellorship. He accepted it, after first drawing attention to the superior claims of his friend — —. That evening, in the bosom of his family, he sat silent. A little smile played three times on his worn lips, and now and again his thin hand smoothed the parallel folds in his cheeks. His youngest daughter, moving to the bell behind his revered and beloved presence, heard him suddenly mutter, and bending hastily caught the precious words: "Pipped him on the post, by gum!"

He took up his final honours with the utmost ceremony. From that moment it was almost too noticeable how his powers declined. It was as if he had felt that, having won the race, he had nothing left to live for. Indeed, he only waited till his friend — — had received a slight stroke before, under doctor's orders, he laid down office. He dragged on for several years, writing his memoirs, but without interest in life; till one day, being drawn in his Bath-chair down the esplanade at Margate, he was brought to a stand-

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still by another chair being drawn in the opposite direction. Letting his eye rest wearily on the occupant, he recognised his friend — —. How the fellow had changed; but not in nature, for he quavered out at once: "Hallo! It's you! By George! You look jolly bad!" Hearing those words, seeing that paralytic smile, a fire seemed suddenly relit within him. Compressing his lips, he answered nothing, and dug his Bath-chair man in the back. From that moment he regained his interest in life. If he could not outlive his friend — — it would be odd! And he set himself to do it, thinking of nothing else by day or night, and sending daily to inquire how his friend — — was. The fellow lived till New Year's Day, and died at two in the morning. They brought him the news at nine. A smile lighted up his parched and withered face; his old hands, clenched on the feeding-cup, relaxed; he fell back—dead. The shock of his old friend's death, they said, had been too much for him.

ABRACADABRA

Our families occupied neighbouring houses in the country, and Minna used to hide in the bathroom whenever our governess took us round. She was to us but a symbol of shyness for months before she became a body—a very thin body, with dark, straggly hair, and dark eyes, and very long legs and arms for an eight-year-old. Looking back on her hardihoods from eight to fifteen, I find difficulty in assigning to the bathroom period its full significance, to realise that she actually used to make herself invisible because she could not face strange people even of her own age. She faced us so beautifully afterward, would steal up behind and pull our hairs, and bag our caps and throw them up onto the tops of wardrobes, and then, as likely as not, climb up, throw them down, and follow with a jump. Few were the tops of our trees that did not know her in her blue jersey and red cap, and stockings green at the knees and showing little white portions of her. She had a neck long as a turkey's and feet

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narrow as canoes. She was certainly going to be tall. Though quite normal about sticking pins into a body, making the lives of calves and dogs burdensome, giving fizzy magnesia to cats, fetching stray souls down with a booby-trap, and other salutary pastimes, she would dissolve into tears and rush away if anybody played Chopin, or caught and killed a butterfly; and, if one merely shot a little bird with a catapult, would dash up and thump him. When she fought she was like a tiger-cat, but afterward would sit and shake uncontrollably with most dreadful dry sobs. So there was no relying on her.

She could not have been called pretty in those days.

She became fifteen and went to school. We saw little of her for three years. At eighteen she came home, and out. Then we would meet her at dances and picnics, skating and playing tennis—always languid, pale, dark-eyed; still not quite regular in her features, and with angles not perfectly covered; but, on the whole, like a tall lily with a dark centre. She was very earnest, too, and beginning to be æsthetic, given to standing against walls, with her dark-brown eyes immovably fixed on persons playing violins; given to Russian linen and embroidering book covers; to

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poetry and the sermons of preachers just unorthodox enough; dreamy, too, but puffing and starting at things that came too near. She was very attractive.

Going to college, one saw little more of Minna till she was twenty-two. She was working then at a "Settlement," and looked unhappy and anæmic. Two months later we were told she had broken down. The work was too painful; her nerves had gone all wrong. She was taken abroad.

We did not see her again till she was twenty-six. She was then marrying a Quaker, a handsome, big fellow with reddish hair, ten years older than herself. More like a swaying lily than ever she looked in her long white veil. A tall, striking couple! The Quaker had warm eyes, and by the way he looked at her, one wondered.

Another four years had passed before I, at all events, saw much of Minna again. She was now thirty, and had three children, two girls and a boy, and was evidently soon to have another. There was a pathetic look in her eyes. They said that the Quaker should have been a Turk, for his physique was powerful and his principles extremely strict. His wife had grown to have a shrinking, fagged-out air, and worried terribly over her infants. She was visibly unhappy; had gone off,

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too, in looks; grown sallow and thin-cheeked, and seemed not to care to hold herself up.

I recollect the Quaker coming in one day, full of health and happiness, and putting his affectionate hand on her shoulder. To me—not to the Quaker, from whom many things were hidden—it was apparent that she flinched, and when his back was turned I saw in a mirror that she was actually trembling all over, and on her face an expression as if she saw before her suffering from which she could not possibly escape. It was clear that the quivering, lilylike creature had been brought almost to her last gasp by the physique and principles of that healthy, happy Quaker. It was quite painful to see one for whom life seemed so terribly too much.

She was, I think, about thirty-two when one noticed how much better she was looking. She had begun to fill out and hold herself up; her eyes had light in them again. Though she was more attractive than ever, and the Quaker had abated no jot of either principle or physique, she had given up quivering and starting, and had a way of looking tranquilly through or over him, as if he were not there, though her amiability was obviously perfect, and from all accounts she fulfilled every duty better than ever. She no longer

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worried over her children, of whom there were now five. It was mysterious. I can only describe the impression she made by saying that she seemed in a sort of trance, seeing and listening to something far away. There was a curious intentness in her eyes, and her voice had acquired a slight but not unpleasing drawl, as though what she was talking of had little reality. Every afternoon from three to four she was invisible.

Having in those days a certain interest in psychology, one used to concern oneself to account for the extraordinary change in her that was becoming more marked every year. By the time she was thirty-five it really seemed impossible that she could ever have been a sensitive, high-strung creature, hiding in the bathroom, thumping us for killing butterflies, sobbing afterward so uncontrollably; suffering such tortures from the "Settlement," and the Quaker, and her children, whose ailments and troubles she now supported with an equanimity which any one, seeing her for the first time, would surely have mistaken for callousness. And all the time she was putting on flesh without, however, losing her figure. Indeed, in those days she approached corporeal perfection.

And at last one afternoon I learned the reason. She no longer believed she had a body!

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She told me so, almost with tears of earnestness. And when I pointed out to her humbly that she had never had more, she insisted that I saw nothing really sitting there except the serene and healthy condition of her spirit. Long she talked to me that afternoon, explaining again and again, in her slightly drawling voice, that she could never have gone on but for this faith; and how comforting and uplifting it was, so that no one who lacked it could be really happy! Every afternoon—she told me—from three to four she “held” that idea of “no body.”

This was all so startling to me that I went away and thought it over. Next day I came back and said that I did not see how it could be much good to her to have no body, so long as other people still had theirs; since it was their bodies, not hers, which had caused her pain and grief.

“But, of course,” she said, “they haven’t.”

I had just met the Quaker coming in from golf, and could only murmur:

“Is that really so?”

“I couldn’t bear, now,” she said, “to think they had.”

“Then, do you really mean, Minna, that when they are there they are not there?”

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"Yes!" And her eyes shone.

I thought of her eldest boy, who happened to be ill with mumps.

"What, then, is Willy's mumps," I said, "if not an affection of the fleshy tissue of his cheeks and neck? Why should he cry with pain, and why should he look so horrid?"

She frowned, as if reflecting hard.

"When you came in," she said, "I'd just been holding the thought that he has no body, and I don't—I really don't feel any longer that he has mumps. So I don't worry. And that's splendid both for him and me."

I saw that it was splendid for her; but how was it splendid for him? I did not ask, however, because she looked so earnest and uplifted, and I was afraid of seeming unkind.

The next day I came back again, and said:

"I've been thinking over your faith, Minna. Candidly, I've never seen any one improve so amazingly in health and looks since you've had it. But what I've been wondering is, whether it's in the nature of fresh air, hard work, and plain living, or in the nature of a drug or anodyne. Whether it's prevention, or cure. In fact, whether you could hold it, or ever have held it, unless you had been sick *before* you held it?"

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She evidently did not grasp my meaning. I could, of course, have made it plain enough by saying: "Suppose you had not been a self-conscious, self-absorbed, high-strung, anæmic girl, like so many nowadays, quivering at life and Quakers with strong physique and principles; suppose you had been an Italian peasant woman or an English cottage lass, obliged to work and think of others all her time; suppose, in a word, you had not had the chance to be so desperately sensitive and conscious of your body—do you think you would ever have felt the necessity for becoming unconscious of it?" But she looked so serene and puzzled, so corporeally charming on her sofa, that I hadn't the heart to put it thus brutally; and I merely said:

"Do tell me how the idea first came to you?"

"It was put there. It could never have come of its own accord."

"No doubt; but exactly when?"

She grew rather pink.

"It was one evening when Willy—he was only four then—had been very naughty, and Tom" (this was the Quaker) "insisted on my whipping him. I was obliged to, you see, for fear he would do it himself. Poor Willy cried so that I was

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simply in despair. It hurt me awfully. I remember thinking: 'Ah! but it's not really me; not me—not my arm.' It seemed to me that there was a dreadful unreality about myself; that I was not really doing it, and so I surely could not be hurting him. It was such a comfort—and I wanted comfort."

I felt the sacredness and the pathos of that; I felt, too, that her despair, before that comfort came, had been her farewell to truth; but I would not for the world have said that, nor asked what Willy's tears had really been, if not real tears.

"Yes," I murmured; "and after that?"

"After that—I tried every day, and gradually the whole beauty of it came to me—because, you know, there are so many things to fret one, and it's so splendid to feel uplifted above it all."

They tell me the morphia habit is wonderful! But I only said:

"And so you really never suffer now?"

"Oh!" she answered, "I often have the beginnings; but I just hold that thought and—it goes. I do wish—I *do* wish you would try!"

"Yes, yes," I murmured; "yes, yes!" She looked so pathetically earnest and as if she would be so disappointed. "But just one thing: Don't you ever feel that the knowledge that people have

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no bodies and don't really suffer"—and there I stopped. I had meant to add—"blunts sympathy and dries up the springs of fellow-feeling from which all kindly action comes?" But I hadn't the heart.

"Oh! do put any questions to me!" she said. "You can't shake my faith! It's religion with me, you know."

"You certainly seem fitter and stronger every day. I quite understand that you're being saved by it. And that's the essence of religion, isn't it?"

She drew herself up and smiled. "Tom says I'm getting fat!"

I looked at her. I must say that, for one who had no body, she was superb.

After that I again left London and did not see her for two years.

A few days after my return I asked after her at my sister's.

"Oh! haven't you heard? The most dreadful tragedy happened there six weeks ago. Kitty and Willy" (they were the two eldest children) "were run over by a motor; poor little Kitty was killed on the spot, and Willy will be lame for life, they say."

Thinking of Kitty blotted out like that—a little thing all shyness, sensibility, and pranks, just as

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Minna had been at her age—I could scarcely ask: “How does poor Minna take it?”

My sister wrinkled her brows.

“I was there,” she said, “when they brought the children in. It was awful to see Tom—he broke down utterly. He’s been quite changed ever since.”

“But Minna?”

“Minna—yes. I shall never forget the expression of her face that first minute. It reminded me of—I don’t know what—like nerves moving under the skin. Dreadful! And then, ten minutes later, it was quite calm; you’d have thought nothing had happened. She’s very wonderful. I’ve watched her since, and I don’t—I really don’t believe she feels it!”

“How is she looking?”

“Oh! just the same—very well and handsome. Rather too fat.”

It was with very curious feelings that I went next day to see Minna. Truly she looked magnificent in her black clothes. Her curves had become ampler, her complexion deeper, perhaps a little coarse, and her drawl was more pronounced. Her husband came in while I was there. The poor man was indeed a changed Quaker. He seemed to have shrivelled. When she put her

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hand on his shoulder, I noticed with surprise that he jibbed away and seemed to avoid the gaze of her rather short-sighted, beautiful brown eyes that had grown appreciably warmer. It was strange indeed—his body had become so meagre and hers had so splendidly increased! We made no mention of the tragedy while he was there, but when he had left us I hazarded the question:

“How is poor little Willy?”

Her eyes shone, and she said, with a sort of beautiful earnestness:

“You mustn't call him that. He's not a bit unhappy. We hold the thought together. It's coming wonderfully!”

In a sudden outburst of sympathy I said:

“I'm so sorry. It must be terrible for you all.”

Her brow contracted just a little.

“Yes! I can't get Tom—if only he would see that it's nothing, really—that there's no such thing as the body. He's simply wearing himself away; he's grown quite thin; he's—” She stopped. And there rose up in me a kind of venom, as if I felt that she was about to say ‘—no longer fit to be my mate.’ And, trying to keep that feeling out of my eyes, I looked at the magnificent creature. How marvellously she had

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flourished under the spell of her creed! How beautifully preserved and encased against the feelings of this life she had become! How grandly she had cured her sensitive and neurasthenic girlhood! How nobly, against the disease of self-consciousness and self-absorption, she had put on the armour of a subtler and deeper self-absorption!

And suddenly I pitied or I envied her—Ah! which? For, to achieve immunity from her own suffering, I perceived that for the suffering of others she had become incapable of caring two brass buttons.

HATHOR: A MEMORY

Hathor of the old Egyptians! Divine cow, with the mild, lustrous eyes, the proud and gentle step; immortally desirable, ever fruitful; veiled and radiant with that soft devotional glow which wraps all the greatest works of art, causing all who behold to feel a thrill and sweetness, a longing to put out hands and worship. Far from earthly lust; divine cow with the crescent horns—Hathor of the old Egyptians! . . .

In camp at Sennourès of the Fayoum it has fallen dark, and dinner is over when the dancer summoned by Mahmoud Ibrahim arrives. Pretty she is as the dusk, as a tiger-cat, a firefly, a flower of the hibiscus, her skin but little darker than our own; her eyes clear agate-green, her teeth whiter than milk, a gold crescent through her right nostril, and her fine chin blue from tattooing. Quite a woman of the world, too, in her greetings.

In the tent made holy by embroidered texts from the Koran, ourselves and Hallilah (parent of all the gods); Mahmoud Ibrahim in drago-

HATHOR: A MEMORY

man's best robes; Sadik in white waiter's dress; and the ten Arabs in black night-cloaks—camel-boy "Daisy" with his queer child-voice and his quaint ear-wrappings; Mabrouk, imp with a past and a future; dusky, sweet-tempered "Comedy"; the holy Ahmet, more excited than he should be; green camel-boy and white camel-boy, all teeth and expectation; Karim, smiling; and the three dark, solemn camel-men who play the pipes, for once in animation: fifteen of us to sit, kneel, crouch, and wait; only cook, and the watchman—ah! and Samara—absent.

And soon our dancer comes in again, with her drummer, and her brother—whose agate eyes are finer than her own—to pipe for her. She has taken off her cloak now, and is clothed in beads and netting, with bare waist, and dark, heavy skirt. Standing by the tent-pole she looks slowly round at us; then, lifting her upper lip square above her teeth and curling her tongue, begins to sing, showing us the very back of her mouth, and passing through her short straight nose tones like the clapping together of metal discs. And while she sings she moves slowly round, with wide-stretched arms, and hands clinking little bells that make the memory of castanets seem vulgar.

"She is a good one, this," says Mahmoud Ibrahim.

HATHOR: A MEMORY

And now she ceases to sing, and begins to dance. She makes but little movement with her feet, protruding her over-developed middle violently, rhythmically, and passing her ardent gaze from face to face. And as she writhes before them each Arab visage around the tent becomes all teeth and eyes. Out beyond the dark excitement of those faces the peaceful sky is glittering with stars; the clear-cut palm-trees, under a moon still crescent, shiver in the wind. And out there Samara, our tall, gaunt young camel-man, stalks up and down, his eyes fixed on the ground. That dance, what is it, but the crudest love-making to us all here in the warm tent?

"She is nearly a top-hole one, this," says Mahmoud Ibrahim.

And suddenly we see Samara crouching with the others in the opening of the tent. The only one who does not smile, he watches her, holding his thin dark face in his thin dark hand; then lo! as though he can bear no more of such attraction, he leaps up, and again begins hovering outside, like a flame in the wind.

But she—she dances on, writhing, protruding her middle, clinking her bells. And all the time the imp Mabrouk and the camel-men laugh, and gurgle their delight, and stretch out their arms toward her; until at last the holy Ahmet, unable

HATHOR: A MEMORY

to control emotion, puts up his hands about her waist. Ah! What is this that comes swooping down, flinging at him fiery words, and springing back into the night?

“See Samara!” says Mahmoud Ibrahim; “he is jealous. ‘Come over here!’ My lord! She is a fine one!”

But at last she has sung all her songs, danced all her dances, even the Sleep one, drunk all the wine, smoked the last cigarette, finished the Turkish Delight. So we thank and leave her.

When the camp is quiet I come out to watch the circle of the palm-trees under Hathor’s crescent horns, to listen to the “chump-chump” of the camels, to the soft talk passing from dark figures crouching by the watch-fire. And Mahmoud Ibrahim comes up to me.

“Most of the men are gone to the village—the holy Ahmet and all! The fools, they get excited. Certainly she is a good one; pretty, but too thin!” He sighs, and looks up at the stars. “It was in camp here ten years ago, we had the best I ever saw. I went all the way to Cairo to fetch her; we paid her fifteen pounds. Ah! she was beautiful; and I was very young. After the dance was over I went to her; I was trembling, I certainly was trembling. She was pretty as a flower.

HATHOR: A MEMORY

I asked her to speak to me just five minutes; but she looked at me—she certainly looked at me as if I was not there. I had not much money then, you see. And last week in Cairo I met her in the street. I would never have known her—never. But she said to me: ‘Will you not speak to me? Do you not remember years ago how I came, to dance at your camp in the Fayoum?’ I remembered her then; we paid her fifteen pounds. She was not proud any more!” Mahmoud Ibrahim shakes his comely head. “She certainly is hidjeous now; and she cried, poor woman, she cried!”

Save for the camels chumping there is silence; beneath the palm-trees we see a tall black figure standing beneath the crescent of the moon—Flame in the wind—for once quite still!

“Look!” says Mahmoud Ibrahim: “Samara! This one would not have anything to say to him. He has not much money, you see!”

Once more that night I come out of my tent. The men are sleeping, huddled with the silent camels in dark clumps on the grey sand. The watchman sleeps over all. Even the wind sleeps; and the crescent moon is passing down. . . .

Ah! Hathor! Love and Beauty! Far from earthly lust, immortal cow with the soft, lustrous eyes, and horns like the crescent moon!

SEKHET: A DREAM

Sekhet! She who devours the evil souls in the underworld! She with the dark head of a lioness and the dark body of a naked woman; one leg striding, hands clenched to her sides, and eyes, not woman's and not lion's, staring into the darkness, looking for her next meal! There she stands by day, by night, ever in the blackness, watching! No wonder the simple folk think she eats their children!

It was after seeing Sekhet in her dim cell at Karnak that I dreamed. . . .

The Five Judges of the dead were sitting in a lemon grove outside the walls of Karnak. And where the lemon grove ended, stood we—the dead—waiting to come up for judgment—thousands on thousands of us, stretching away in the Egyptian dust, over the plain of Thebes. The five judges sat in a row. Sombor, that little judicial, lean one, with long, parchmenty, sunken face and fiery dark slits of eyes, held in his thin fingers a flower of the papyrus. Diarnak, tall, and sol-

SEKHET: A DREAM

dierly, sat upright, never moving, his grave visage clothed in a peaked beard, while a bat, in the sunlight, flitted round his head. Membron, whose broad and sacerdotal face shone as if he anointed it at night, now smiled and now was solemn, balancing in one hand a piece of gold, in the other a little image. Marrosquin, the cultured, with his paunchy curves, having a face lined, pursy, subtle, stroked a cat curled up on his rounded knees. Buttah, that short and red-faced man of business, with his grey beard, his little, piggy eyes, his large gold signet-ring, seemed slumbering.

And Sombor spoke: "My brothers, Sekhet waits!"

Then I saw that the first of us already stood before them—a young man, tall, and of an amiable, weak countenance. On his lips, which dribbled a light froth, faint curly smiles were wandering; and his tragic eyes watered freely in the sunlight.

"Here, sirs," he said. And thus they spoke.

SOMBOR. Your name? Varhet? You died last night? Speak the truth, which we know already. Drink?

VARHET. Yes, sirs.

SEKHET: A DREAM

DIARNAK. How many times convicted?

VARHET. Never, sirs. There was no policeman in my village.

DIARNAK. Name of village?

BUTTAH. Look 'ere, Diarnak! Keep to the point! Now, just tell us why you took to drink, young man.

VARHET. I hardly know, sirs. It made things seem brighter.

BUTTAH. Well, I like a drop o' Scotch as much as any one—not to exceed. Go on, young man.

VARHET. Yes, sir. The more I drank the less happy I was; and the less happy I was the more I drank.

BUTTAH. I quite understand. You wanted to have an 'appy time. I do myself; an' I may as well say that, what with hard work, and a game o' skittles, and a little religious life, I'm as jolly as most.

VARHET (*eagerly*). Yes, sirs; that was it. I only wished myself and everybody happy. And when I found that I could not be, I took my gun and shot myself.

BUTTAH. Naow! You shouldn't 'ave done that! That was extravagant. If there's one thing I can't pass over, it's extravagance.

SEKHET: A DREAM

SOMBOR. You shot yourself. Ha!

MARROSQVIN. So violent! Why not a softer death, Varhet?

VARHET. Sir, I lived in a very simple village.

MEMBRON. You destroyed the temple of your body?

VARHET. Sir, it was getting worse and worse, doing no good to me or any one; I thought——

DIARNAK. A soldier the less in the world! Beyond forgiveness.

SOMBOR. Have you any intelligible defence, Varhet?

VARHET. Sirs, since I died, I've thought somehow, it might have saved me if I could have described happiness, when I was feeling miserable.

MARROSQVIN. You mean, you might have made a romantic writer? Very interesting! I have always felt that the foundation of optimism in art is the ill health or misery of the artist.

BUTTAH. Here! Keep to the point, Marrosquin.

SOMBOR. Vote! Those for Sekhet?

MARROSQVIN. One moment! By his own confession this man has a touch of the artist in him. I think we might——!

SOMBOR. Marrosquin! If this unhappy drunkard is allowed to take his life with impunity,

SEKHET: A DREAM

vast numbers of men who are not happy will do the same. And who are these unhappy ones? Those in judging whom I hold my office; who make Diarnak's soldiers; provide Membron with the best opportunities for his discourses; minister to your cultured comfort, Marrosquin; and create the fortune of Buttah, backbone of his country. These men who would rashly kill themselves are the very foundations of society. Let us have no more of this. Vote! For Sekhet? All, save Marrosquin. Take him down!

Smiling, and looking from face to face with his watery, tragic eyes, Varhet was placed beneath the largest lemon-tree. And the second of us stepped out. This man was very burnt and dirty—about fifty years of age, with black eyes peering out of matted hair and beard, and his clothes so forlorn and patched that he looked like nothing but a mop made out of ends of cloth.

DIARNAK. Name? Nain? Speak, Nain!

NAIN. I am a tramp.

DIARNAK. That we see.

NAIN. I died an hour ago.

SEKHET: A DREAM

DIARNAK. What of?

NAIN. Not bein' moved on.

BUTTAH. What! How's that?

NAIN. They took an' kept me in *one* place. I stuck it a month. Then I got the *Wanderlust* an' slid out for good.

DIARNAK. What is the meaning of these clothes, then? The regulations——

NAIN. I arst 'em to give me my own clothes to die in; an' they 'ad mercy on me.

MEMBRON. While respecting the liberty of the subject, Society is bound to restrain those whom it finds inconvenient.

MARROSQUIN. He smells atr-rocious!

SOMBOR. You are, then, one of those miserable scoundrels who won't work.

NAIN. Well, what then?

SOMBOR. There is no sentence too severe for you.

DIARNAK. How is it you did not become a soldier?

BUTTAH. Diarnak, don't insult the flag! My man, you're an extravagant feller. In my opinion you deserve all you'll get. You were born tired.

NAIN. I was.

DIARNAK. Any defence?

SEKHET: A DREAM

NAIN. None, but this here *Wanderlust*.

SOMBOR. Vote!

MARROSQUIN. One moment! This is really interesting. *Wanderlust!* My good man—describe it for us!

NAIN. It's like this, as you might say. There you are, workin' the bloomin' handle, or layin' the bloomin' bricks, or brushin' the bloomin' street, same as you 'ave for a month; and, suddenly, you gets a feelin' 'ere. An' you says to yourself: What oh! An' you goes on turnin' the bloomin' 'andle or layin' the bloomin' bricks. But next day you slides out.

MARROSQUIN. My dear good man, that is inarticulate. What—what, exactly, do you feel?

NAIN. Gov'nor, as you presses me, I should say it was like catchin' a smell o' rain in a dry country. After that you can't stick no more dry country, till next time.

MARROSQUIN. Ah! now—I understand. Very pictur-resque! The touch of the artist there. I almost think we might—

DIARNAK. Marrosquin! By my new regulations this man was to stay and do steady work in one place. He has died and broken them. If we let him off, my new regulations too are dead.

SEKHET: A DREAM

MARROSQUIN. Still—the *Wanderlust!* So poetic!

BUTTAH. I never 'ad it myself!

SOMBOR. The majority of men are disinclined to work; if this man is not condemned, the majority of men will know they need not work.

MEMBRON. We must face facts, but not be cynical. I personally am inclined to work; with the doubtful exception of Marrosquin, we are all inclined to work.

DIARNAK. We govern, however.

SOMBOR. Yes; we work at what we like. Most men do not.

MARROSQUIN. True; still, it seems hard——

BUTTAH. Marrosquin, if you'd been brought up to industry as I was, you'd 'ave no patience with these jokers who can't stick their jobs, nohow.

MARROSQUIN. Heaven forbid!

DIARNAK. Vote! For Sekhet? All, but Marrosquin. Remove him!

Nain was placed beneath the lemon-tree, and the third of us stepped forth. This was a young woman of a good height and figure, in a dress open at the neck, and not long enough to hide her ankles. Her short, broad face, with its pale hair, was pretty and amiable; but her bistro-

SEKHET: A DREAM

circled eyes of forget-me-not blue were tragic and furtive, passing from countenance to countenance with a frightened caress.

MEMBRON. Your name? Talete! You need not tell us what you are. Any palliating circumstances we shall consider. While noting the deadliness of your sin, we must be charitable. Speak!

TALETE. Whatever I've done, sir, please, a man's done too.

SOMBOR. You dare say that. Vote!

BUTTAH. Now, now, Sombor; you're too quick with the little girl. Give it tongue, my dear. How did you come to die?

TALETE. Of fright.

MARROSQUIN. God bless me!

TALETE. Yes, sir. The police do drop on us so lately—a girl's got no chance. My nerves aren't what they were; and the day before yesterday, when they ran me in again, I died.

BUTTAH. You oughtn't to have done that! How old are you?

TALETE. Twenty-four.

BUTTAH. T't, t't! Very early—very early!

MEMBRON. The reward of sin is unquestionably death.

SEKHET: A DREAM

SOMBOR. One source of evil the less.

DIARNAK. You know the law?

TALETE. Yes, sir. Men has to have girls like me, so the law must run us in, for fear people might say men favoured a gay life.

MARROSQUIN. It is monstr-ous that men, who make the law, should discriminate in favour of themselves.

DIARNAK. The streets must be kept in order.

BUTTAH. Now, my dear, what made you take to this life? It's a wasteful way of goin' on, at the best.

TALETE. If you please, I married when I was sixteen; we didn't get on; and I met somebody I thought I could love properly, but I couldn't; then I met another I was sure was right, and he wasn't; after that I didn't care no more so much; but, though I took them all for a living, I was always looking for *him*——

MARROSQUIN. R-remarkable! The pursuit of perfection! This girl is an artist. I think we might——

MEMBRON. My brethren! Vote!

SOMBOR. Sekhet!

BUTTAH. It goes against the grain; me an' Mrs. Buttah's got daughters. Let her off, I say.

SEKHET: A DREAM

TALETE. Yes, sir; and I've never given any man away.

DIARNAK. Sekhet!

MARROSQUIN. She is pathetic. I am not prepared—

MEMBRON. Two votes to two! Determining judgment—let me review this matter. If we forgive this fallen daughter, as in accordance with strict principle, without entering for the moment on textual criticism, we possibly ought, with what shall we be faced? With the loss of the power to say to the people: Sin at the peril of your souls! This, my brethren, is extremely dangerous. We should always remember that the heart of our creed is sympathy and compassion, but we must gravely distrust sentiment, and mercy. Spiritually compelled to remark that I do not condemn her, I am not prepared to forego my power to give judgment. For, brethren, we should ever bear in mind that if *we* did not condemn, perhaps no one would; or that if, by chance, they did, it would be derogatory to the dignity of us, who are acknowledged by ourselves to be the arbiters of morality. While, therefore, giving the utmost weight to compassion, I regard it as my professional duty to say:

SEKHET: A DREAM

Sekhet! The motion is carried by three votes to two. Take her down!

And, as Talete went, I noticed that a dove perched on her shoulder, and sat there cooing; and though her eyes never ceased to furtively implore her judges, she rubbed her cheek against the bird. He who had taken her place was a young man with bright eyes, a little black moustache which he continually twisted, and a perfectly straight back to his dark head.

MARROSQUIN. Your name? Arva? Quite! You passed away from us in what manner?

ARVA. Flying.

MARROSQUIN. Professional?

ARVA. Not exactly. I'd got through the rest.

MARROSQUIN. Yes, yes. Had you tried morphia, and Monte Carlo?

ARVA. Both. And racing.

MARROSQUIN. I see; confirmed case. I know so many nowadays: "Ludum insolentem ludere pertinax."—Yes, yes!

BUTTAH. So far as I twig, the young man's a gambler. And let me tell him at once he's come to the wrong shop here. There's too much of this gambling goes on.

SEKHET: A DREAM

MARROSQUIN. Still, we should try and put ourselves in his position. I myself have no temptation that way.

SOMBOR. You haven't the pluck!

MARROSQUIN. That r-remark is uncalled for. (*To ARVA.*) Tell us why you have run through everything like this.

DIARNAK. And be brief.

ARVA. I was born at a good pace.

MARROSQUIN. A charming phrase. This young man is an artist.

ARVA. That, and the papers.

MEMBRON. While deploring the tendency of the press to snippets and sensationalism, we must do justice to some excellent qualities.

BUTTAH. I can forgive a lot in the young, but this feverishness isn't English. I never felt it myself but once, an' then Mrs. Buttah soon had me right with a mustard plaster. It's chaps like you that keeps stocks on the jump.

DIARNAK. That exceed the limit.

MEMBRON. That support our national vice.

ARVA. Well, what do you expect, with the show humming round a fellow as it does now?

MARROSQUIN. We quite understand that you were born without ballast. Have you anything further to say in your defence?

SEKHET: A DREAM

ARVA. Will any of you lay me six to four I don't beat Sekhet over the first quarter?

BUTTAH. Young man! No levity!

MEMBRON. I fear that he is hopeless.

MARROSQUIN. I confess that I have a certain admiration for this type. I do not see my way to Sekhet, but shall be glad to record the other votes.

BUTTAH. Sekhet!

DIARNAK. The army has been cheated of another soldier. Sekhet!

MEMBRON. The church of a son. Sekhet!

SOMBOR. I like pluck. I will give him the benefit of a doubt.

MARROSQUIN. I feel for you, young man, but the judgment is Sekhet, by three votes to two!

ARVA. Right! I've had a run for my money.

And Arva was placed beneath the lemon-tree. Then I saw them come and lead forth him who was standing next to me. Of what evil could one who had so noble a mien be guilty? Attired in white, tall, and with a fine-shaped head, deep eyes, and a full beard, he moved me to a feeling of reverence. Quietly he waited to be questioned, and it seemed to me that our judges were uneasy.

SEKHET: A DREAM

Then Buttah, turning his little eyes upward, spoke:

BUTTAH. Well, sir! Give it a name, will you? Khanzi? How do you spell it? Just so! Now; Mr. Khanzi, perhaps you'll be so good as to tell us how you came to drop this mortal coil, as the poet says?

KHANZI. There was no more a place for me.

BUTTAH. Do I understand you to say, sir, that you were crowded out?

KHANZI. I died of refusal from door to door.

MEMBRON. Ah! I seem to— Usher, draw the curtains!

DIARNAK. Khanzi, I know you.

BUTTAH. I don't; and I'm not sure I want to. If you wish to make a statement, I'm not the one to stop you; but I don't think it'll make much impression on us. You seem to me a very outlandish party.

KHANZI. Brothers!

SOMBOR. Don't call us brothers, or it will be the worse for you.

KHANZI. Companions! From day to day and year to year I have wandered, as the wind wanders from leaf to leaf. I have passed from pool to pool and seen my image shine,

SEKHET: A DREAM

and die in the dark water. I am ignorant, with no merit save love of all that lives. The dew falls, and the stars come out, and I rest a moment, and pass on. Would that I might stay forever with each living thing!

BUTTAH. They won't have you. Is that it?

KHANZI. I have no goods, I have no name. I have heard them say: "If we take him in, we lose all. Power and wealth we shall have none, only love! What use is that?"

When Khanzi had spoken these words there was a very long silence, each judge sitting with his hand before his face. It was Buttah who at last made utterance.

BUTTAH. Well, what shall we do about him? I've heard of this here love, but never yet met a bagman that travelled in it. Would you gentlemen like to ask him a question or two? Usher, hand me my toupie; the glare's shockin'.

SOMBOR. It would appear that you are a dissolving agent.

KHANZI. The wind sweeps and loosens all things, yet the wind binds all things together.

SOMBOR. Speak plainly. Are you or are you not opposed to those who sit in judgment?

SEKHET: A DREAM

KHANZI. Gentle sir, he that gives me shelter no longer cares to judge; he loves too much.

SOMBOR. No judgments! No power! I see!

DIARNAK. Khanzi! Do you or do you not obey orders?

KHANZI. Sir, I obey all orders; but where I am no orders are given. All is service for love.

DIARNAK. No orders! Enough!

MEMBRON. Khanzi! I remember that once we gave you trial, and you were not successful. Love, no doubt, is the ideal, but to rack people, body and soul, is more efficacious; we have been induced by long experience to preach the first and practise the second. Have you anything to say why after all these centuries we should make further trial of you?

KHANZI. Brother, I am not allowed to plead, or stay where I am not wanted. I can but alight here and there, as the rain, and the songs of birds, and sunlight sinking to earth between the leaves. If you cannot welcome me with a whole heart, then bid me go!

MEMBRON. You ask for the impossible. There is no such thing as a whole heart.

MARROSQUIN. Khanzi! Whenever I read of you in books, see you in pictures, hear your voice in music, I am moved to admiration; and now

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that I see you in the flesh I desire to keep you with us if it be possible. But one question I must put to you. Will you or will you not destroy that comfortable elegance of life, that culture, which, I confess, is the *sine qua non* of my existence? I sincerely hope you may be able to answer in the negative.

KHANZI. Friend, what is comfort? Is it to share with all men, to hurt no living thing? Is it to throb with this one's pain, and thrill with that one's joy? If that be comfort, and elegance, and culture, I may gladly stay with you.

MARROSQUIN. Ah! Leave me, please!

BUTTAH. Mr. Khanzi! I tell you frankly that I'm the man in the street; there are 'undreds and thousands like me that have had to make their way in the world. And what I ask myself is this: How should I have done it if I'd took you into partnership? How should I have got on if I'd thought of everybody else as I've thought of Number One? No, sir, that's unpractical, and un-English, and therefore it's unchristian! With all the good-will in the world, the sooner Sekhet has you the better for us all! I say: Sekhet!

SOMBOR (*not removing his hand from before his*

SEKHET: A DREAM

face). Khanzi! Of all offences committed against society, yours is the greatest. For where you are our society cannot be. Where you are there exists no need for myself, nor for Diarnak, no need for Membron, Marrosquin, or Buttah. This is unthinkable. And, since this is unthinkable by us, there can be no question of your fate. Sekhet! Sekhet!

DIARNAK. No more shall you sow disaffection in my ranks. Sekhet!

MEMBRON. Khanzi! I have listened with sympathy to your explanation of your own nature, but I seem to gather from it an implied attack upon myself. I have every wish to tolerate, even to welcome, your theory, but I am unable to perceive how I can reconcile it with my own position. I am therefore reluctantly compelled—Usher! the shutters!—to say: Sekhet!

MARROSQUIN. Alas! Alas! Sekhet!

Then all the judges, covering their faces, in voices that seemed coming from a grave, cried out once more: "Sekhet!" And Khanzi, gazing at them with his deep eyes, lifted his hand in token that he had heard, and stood back with the others beneath the lemon-tree.

SEKHET: A DREAM

My turn had come! But as I was stepping forward Sombor rose. "Take," he said, "those five behind the palm-trees, and let Sekhet off her chain. Enough for to-day, my just and learned brothers. Let us see our judgments carried out." And, followed by the other judges, he passed out of sight behind the palm-trees. Varhet, Nain, Talete, Arva, and Khanzi were taken from the lemon grove. And there came up a queer and sudden gloom, till the sky was the colour of a blackish orange. And the dark sea of those behind us, over the plain of Thebes, was broken by white faces, as it might be by little wave-crests flicked up under a coming storm. Presently, from the far side of the lemon grove, I saw my dragoon, Mahmoud Ibrahim, yellow skirts upraised in hand, come running at full speed. His broad and jocund face was broken between terror and amusement. Pointing with thumb across his shoulder, he gasped out: "Sekhet! She is making a mistake. She is eating the wrong ones! She is eating the judges! She is a good one; she has had four; she is chasing Buttah! My Lord! he is running—he certainly is running! What a life! What a life!" He rolled with laughter. And we heard from the distance a long-drawn "O-ow!" Then silence—silence over

SEKHET: A DREAM

the plain of Thebes, to the uttermost mountains. And the sky was once more blue. . . .
I woke. . . .

Sekhet! She who devours the evil souls in the underworld!

By day, by night, ever in the blackness,
watching!



A SIMPLE TALE

Talking of anti-Semitism one of those mornings, Ferrand said: "Yes, *monsieur*, plenty of those gentlemen in these days esteem themselves Christian, but I have only once met a Christian who esteemed himself a Jew. *C'était très drôle—je vais vous conter cela.*

"It was one autumn in London, and, the season being over, I was naturally in poverty, inhabiting a palace in Westminster at fourpence the night. In the next bed to me that time there was an old gentleman, so thin that one might truly say he was made of air. English, Scotch, Irish, Welsh—I shall never learn to distinguish those little differences in your race—but I well think he was English. Very feeble, very frail, white as paper, with a long grey beard, and caves in the cheeks, and speaking always softly, as if to a woman. . . . For me it was an experience to see an individual so gentle in a palace like that. His bed and bowl of broth he gained in sweeping out the kennels of all those sorts of types who come to sleep there every night. There he

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spent all his day long, going out only at ten hours and a half every night, and returning at midnight less one quarter. Since I had not much to do, it was always a pleasure for me to talk with him; for, though he was certainly a little *toqué*," and Ferrand tapped his temple, "he had great charm, of an old man, never thinking of himself, no more than a fly that turns in dancing all day beneath a ceiling. If there was something he could do for one of those specimens—to sew on a button, clean a pipe, catch beasts in their clothes, or sit to see they were not stolen, even to give up his place by the fire—he would always do it with his smile so white and gentle; and in his leisure he would read the Holy Book! He inspired in me a sort of affection—there are not too many old men so kind and gentle as that, even when they are 'crackey,' as you call it. Several times I have caught him in washing the feet of one of those sots, or bathing some black eye or other, such as they often catch—a man of a spiritual refinement really remarkable; in clothes also so refined that one sometimes saw his skin. Though he had never great thing to say, he heard you like an angel, and spoke evil of no one; but, seeing that he had no more vigour than a swallow, it piqued me much how he would

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go out like that every night in all the weathers at the same hour for so long a promenade of the streets. And when I interrogated him on this, he would only smile his smile of one not there, and did not seem to know very much of what I was talking. I said to myself: 'There is something here to see, if I am not mistaken. One of these good days I shall be your guardian angel while you fly the night.' For I am a connoisseur of strange things, *monsieur*, as you know; though, you may well imagine, being in the streets all day long between two boards of a sacred sandwich does not give you too strong a desire to *flâner* in the evenings. *Eh, bien!* It was a night in late October that I at last pursued him. He was not difficult to follow, seeing he had no more guile than an egg; passing first at his walk of an old shadow into your St. James's Park along where your military types puff out their chests for the nursemaids to admire. Very slowly he went, leaning on a staff—*une canne de promenade* such as I have never seen, nearly six feet high, with an end like a shepherd's crook or the handle of a sword, a thing truly to make the *gamins* laugh—even me it made to smile, though I am not too well accustomed to mock at age and poverty, to watch him march in leaning on that cane. I remember that

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night—very beautiful, the sky of a clear dark, the stars as bright as they can ever be in these towns of our high civilisation, and the leaf-shadows of the plane-trees, colour of grapes on the pavement, so that one had not the heart to put foot on them. One of those evenings when the spirit is light, and policemen a little dreamy and well-wishing. Well, as I tell you, my Old marched, never looking behind him, like a man who walks in sleep. By that big church—which, like all those places, had its air of coldness, far and ungrateful among us others, little human creatures who have built it—he passed, into the great Eaton Square, whose houses ought well to be inhabited by people very rich. There he crossed to lean him against the railings of the garden in the centre, very tranquil, his long white beard falling over hands joined on his staff, in awaiting what—I could not figure to myself at all. It was the hour when your high *bourgeoisie* return from the theatre in their carriages, whose manikins sit, the arms crossed, above horses fat as snails. And one would see through the window some lady *bercée doucement*, with the face of one who has eaten too much and loved too little. And gentlemen passed me, marching for a mouthful of fresh air, *très comme il faut*, their concer-

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tina hats pushed up, and nothing at all in their eyes. I remarked my Old, who, making no movement, watched them all as they went by, till presently a carriage stopped at a house nearly opposite. At once, then, he began to cross the road quickly, carrying his great stick. I observed the lackey pulling the bell and opening the carriage door, and three people coming forth—a man, a woman, a young man. Very high *bourgeoisie*, some judge, knight, mayor—what do I know?—with his wife and son, mounting under the porch. My Old had come to the bottom of the steps, and spoke, in bending himself forward, as if supplicating. At once those three turned their faces, very astonished. Although I was very intrigued, I could not hear what he was saying, for, if I came nearer, I feared he would see me spying on him. Only the sound of his voice I heard, gentle as always; and his hand I saw wiping his forehead, as though he had carried something heavy from very far. Then the lady spoke to her husband, and went into the house, and the young son followed in lighting a cigarette. There rested only that good father of the family, with his grey whiskers and nose a little bent, carrying an expression as if my Old were making him ridiculous. He made a quick ges-

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ture, as though he said, 'Go!' then he too fled softly. The door was shut. At once the lackey mounted, the carriage drove away, and all was as if it had never been, except that my Old was standing there, quite still. But soon he came returning, carrying his staff as if it burdened him. And recoiling in a porch to see him pass, I saw his visage full of dolour, of one overwhelmed with fatigue and grief; so that I felt my heart squeeze me. I must well confess, *monsieur*, I was a little shocked to see this old sainted father asking as it seemed for alms. That is a thing I myself have never done, not even in the greatest poverty—one is not like your 'gentlemen'—one does always some little thing for the money he receives, if it is only to show a drunken man where he lives. And I returned in meditating deeply over this problem, which well seemed to me fit for the angels to examine; and knowing what time my Old was always re-entering, I took care to be in my bed before him. He came in as ever, treading softly so as not to wake us others, and his face had again its serenity, a little 'crackey.' As you may well have remarked, *monsieur*, I am not one of those individuals who let everything grow under the nose without pulling them up to see how they are made. For me the greatest

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pleasure is to lift the skirts of life, to unveil what there is under the surface of things which are not always what they seem, as says your good little poet. For that one must have philosophy, and a certain industry, lacking to all those gentlemen who think they alone are industrious because they sit in chairs and blow into the telephone all day, in filling their pockets with money. Myself, I coin knowledge of the heart—it is the only gold they cannot take from you. So that night I lay awake. I was not content with what I had seen; for I could not imagine why this old man, so unselfish, so like a saint in thinking ever of others, should go thus every night to beg, when he had always in this palace his bed, and that with which to keep his soul within his rags. Certainly we all have our vices, and gentlemen the most revered do, in secret, things they would cough to see others doing; but that business of begging seemed scarcely in his character of an old altruist—for in my experience, *monsieur*, beggars are not less egoist than millionaires. As I say, it piqued me much, and I resolved to follow him again. The second night was of the most different. There was a great wind, and white clouds flying in the moonlight. He commenced his pilgrimage in passing by your House of Commons, as if toward

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the river. I like much that great river of yours. There is in its career something of very grand; it ought to know many things, although it is so silent, and gives to no one the secrets which are confided to it. He had for objective, it seemed, that long row of houses very respectable, which gives on the embankment, before you arrive at Chelsea. It was painful to see the poor Old, bending almost double against that great wind coming from the west. Not too many carriages down here, and few people—a true wilderness, lighted by tall lamps which threw no shadows, so clear was the moon. He took his part soon, as of the other night, standing on the far side of the road, watching for the return of some lion to his den. And presently I saw one coming, accompanied by three lionesses, all taller than himself. This one was bearded, and carried spectacles—a real head of learning; walking, too, with the step of a man who knows his world. Some professor—I said to myself—with his harem. They gained their house at fifty paces from my Old; and, while this learned one was opening the door, the three ladies lifted their noses in looking at the moon. A little of æsthetic, a little of science—as always with that type there! At once I had perceived my Old coming across, blown by the

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wind like a grey stalk of thistle; and his face, with its expression of infinite pain as if carrying the sufferings of the world. At the moment they see him those three ladies drop their noses, and fly within the house as if he were the pestilence, in crying, 'Henry!' And out comes my *monsieur* again, in his beard and spectacles. For me, I would freely have given my ears to hear, but I saw that this good Henry had his eye on me, and I did not budge, for fear to seem in conspiracy. I heard him only say: 'Impossible! Impossible! Go to the proper place!' and he shut the door. My Old remained, with his long staff resting on a shoulder bent as if that stick were of lead. And presently he commenced to march again whence he had come, curved and trembling, the very shadow of a man, passing me, too, as if I were the air. That time also I regained my bed before him, in meditating very deeply, still more uncertain of the psychology of this affair, and resolved once again to follow him, saying to myself: 'This time I shall run all risks to hear.' There are two kinds of men in this world, *monsieur*, one who will not rest content till he has become master of all the toys that make a fat existence—in never looking to see of what they are made; and the other, for whom life is

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tobacco and a crust of bread, and liberty to take all to pieces, so that his spirit may feel good within him. Frankly, I am of that kind. I rest never till I have found out why this is that; for me mystery is the salt of life, and I must well eat of it. I put myself again, then, to following him the next night. This time he traversed those little dirty streets of your great Westminster, where all is mixed in a true pudding of lords and poor wretches at two sous the dozen; of cats and policemen; kerosene flames, abbeys, and the odour of fried fish. Ah! truly it is frightful to see your low streets in London; that gives me a conviction of hopelessness such as I have never caught elsewhere; piquant, too, to find them so near to that great House which sets example of good government to all the world. There is an irony so ferocious there, *monsieur*, that one can well hear the good God of your *bourgeois* laugh in every wheel that rolls, and the cry of each cabbage that is sold; and see him smile in the smoky light of every flare, and in the candles of your cathedral, in saying to himself: 'I have well made this world. Is there not variety here?—*en voilà une bonne soupe!*' This time, however, I attended my Old like his very shadow, and could hear him sighing as he marched, as if he also found the

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atmosphere of those streets too strong. But all of a sudden he turned a corner, and we were in the most quiet, most beautiful little street I have seen in all your London. It was of small, old houses, very regular, which made as if they inclined themselves in their two rows before a great church at the end, grey in the moonlight, like a mother. There was no one in that street, and no more cover than hair on the head of a pope. But I had some confidence now that my Old would not remark me standing there so close, since in these pilgrimages he seemed to remark nothing. Leaning on his staff, I tell you he had the air of an old bird in a desert, reposing on one leg by a dry pool, his soul looking for water. It gave me that notion one has sometimes in watching the rare spectacles of life—that sentiment which, according to me, pricks artists to their work. We had not stayed there too long before I saw a couple marching from the end of the street, and thought: ‘Here they come to their nest.’ Vigorous and gay they were, young married ones, eager to get home; one could see the white neck of the young wife, the white shirt of the young man, gleaming under their cloaks. I know them well, those young couples in great cities, without a care, taking all things, the world

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before them, *très amoureux*, without, as yet, children; jolly and pathetic, having life still to learn—which, believe me, *monsieur*, is a sad enough affair for nine rabbits out of ten. They stopped at the house next to where I stood; and, since my Old was coming fast as always to the feast, I put myself at once to the appearance of ringing the bell of the house before me. This time I had well the chance of hearing. I could see, too, the faces of all three, because I have by now the habit of seeing out of the back hair. The pigeons were so anxious to get to their nest that my Old had only the time to speak, as they were in train to vanish. ‘Sir, let me rest in your doorway!’ *Monsieur*, I have never seen a face so hopeless, so cribbled with fatigue, yet so full of a gentle dignity as that of my Old while he spoke those words. It was as if something looked from his visage surpassing what belongs to us others, so mortal and so cynic as human life must well render all who dwell in this earthly paradise. He held his long staff upon one shoulder, and I had the idea, sinister enough, that it was crushing his body of a spectre down into the pavement. I know not how the impression came, but it seemed to me that this devil of a stick had the nature of a heavy cross reposing on his shoulder; I had

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pain to prevent myself turning, to find if in truth 'I had them' as your drunkards say. Then the young man called out: 'Here's a shilling for you, my friend!' But my Old did not budge, answering always: 'Sir, let me rest in your doorway!' As you may well imagine, *monsieur*, we were all in the silence of astonishment, I pulling away at my bell next door, which was not ringing, seeing I took care it did not; and those two young people regarding my Old with eyes round as moons, out of their pigeon-house, which I could well see was prettily feathered. Their hearts were making seesaw, I could tell; for at that age one is still impressionable. Then the girl put herself to whispering, and her husband said those two words of your young 'gentlemen,' 'Awfully sorry!' and put out his hand, which held now a coin large as a saucer. But again my Old only said: 'Sir, let me rest in your doorway!' And the young man drew back his hand quickly as if he were ashamed, and saying again, 'Sorry!' he shut the door. I have heard many sighs in my time—they are the good little accompaniments to the song we sing, we others who are in poverty; but the sigh my Old pushed then—how can I tell you—had an accent as if it came from Her, the faithful companion, who

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marches in holding the hands of men and women so that they may never make the grand mistake to imagine themselves for a moment the good God. Yes, *monsieur*, it was as if pushed by Suffering herself, that bird of the night, never tired of flying in this world where they talk always of cutting her wings. Then I took my resolution, and, coming gently from behind, said: 'My Old—what is it? Can I do anything for you?' Without looking at me, he spoke as to himself: 'I shall never find one who will let me rest in his doorway. For my sin I shall wander forever!' At this moment, *monsieur*, there came to me an inspiration so clear that I marvelled I had not already had it a long time before. He thought himself the Wandering Jew! I had well found it. This was certainly his fixed idea, of a cracked old man! And I said: 'My Jew, do you know this? In doing what you do, you have become as Christ, in a world of wandering Jews!' But he did not seem to hear me, and only just as we arrived at our palace became again that old gentle being, thinking never of himself."

Behind the smoke of his cigarette, a smile curled Ferrand's red lips under his long nose a little on one side.

"And, if you think of it, *monsieur*, it is well

A SIMPLE TALE

like that. Provided there exists always that good man of a Wandering Jew, he will certainly have become as Christ, in all these centuries of being refused from door to door. Yes, yes, he must well have acquired charity the most profound that this world has ever seen, in watching the crushing virtue of others. All those gentry, of whom he asks night by night to let him rest in their doorways, they tell him where to go, how to *ménager* his life, even offer him money, as I had seen; but, to let him rest, to trust him in their houses—this strange old man—as a fellow, a brother voyager—that they will not; it is hardly in the character of good citizens in a Christian country. And, as I have indicated to you, this Old of mine, cracked as he was, thinking himself that Jew who refused rest to the good Christ, had become, in being refused for ever, the most Christ-like man I have ever encountered on this earth, which, according to me, is composed almost entirely of those who have themselves the character of the Wandering Jew.”

Puffing out a sigh of smoke, Ferrand added: “I do not know whether he continued to pursue his idea, for I myself took the road next morning, and I have never seen him since.”

ULTIMA THULE

Ultima Thule! The words come into my head this winter night. That is why I write down the story, as I know it, of a little old friend.

I used to see him first in Kensington Gardens, where he came in the afternoons, accompanied by a very small girl. One would see them silent before a shrub or flower, or with their heads inclined to heaven before a tree, or leaning above water and the ducks, or stretched on their stomachs watching a beetle, or on their backs watching the sky. Often they would stand holding crumbs out to the birds, who would perch about them, and even drop on their arms little white marks of affection and esteem. They were admittedly a noticeable couple. The child, who was fair-haired and elfinlike, with dark eyes and a pointed chin, wore clothes that seemed somewhat hard put to it. And, if the two were not standing still, she went along pulling at his hand, eager to get there; and, since he was a very little light old man, he seemed always in advance of

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his own feet. He was garbed, if I remember, in a daverdy brown overcoat and broad-brimmed soft grey hat, and his trousers, what was visible of them, were tucked into half-length black gaiters which tried to join with very old brown shoes. Indeed, his costume did not indicate any great share of prosperity. But it was his face that riveted attention. Thin, cherry-red, and wind-dried as old wood, it had a special sort of brightness, with its spikes and waves of silvery hair, and blue eyes that seemed to shine. Rather mad, I used to think. Standing by the rails of an enclosure, with his withered lips pursed and his cheeks drawn in till you would think the wind might blow through them, he would emit the most enticing trills and pipings, exactly imitating various birds.

Those who rouse our interest are generally the last people we speak to, for interest seems to set up a kind of special shyness; so it was long before I made his acquaintance. But one day by the Serpentine, I saw him coming along alone, looking sad, but still with that queer brightness about him. He sat down on my bench with his little dried hands on his thin little knees, and began talking to himself in a sort of whisper. Presently I caught the words: "God cannot be

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like us." And for fear that he might go on uttering such precious remarks that were obviously not intended to be heard, I had either to go away or else address him. So, on an impulse, I said:

"Why?"

He turned without surprise.

"I've lost my landlady's little girl," he said. "Dead! And only seven years old."

"That little thing! I used to watch you."

"Did you? Did you? I'm glad you saw her."

"I used to see you looking at flowers, and trees, and those ducks."

His face brightened wistfully. "Yes; she was a great companion to an old man like me." And he relapsed into his contemplation of the water. He had a curious, precise way of speaking, that matched his pipchinesque little old face. At last he again turned to me those blue youthful eyes that seemed to shine out of a perfect little nest of crow's-feet.

"We were great friends! But I couldn't expect it. Things don't last, do they?" I was glad to notice that his voice was getting cheerful. "When I was in the orchestra at the Harmony Theatre, it never used to occur to me that some day I shouldn't play there any more. One felt

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like a bird. That's the beauty of music, sir. You lose yourself; like that blackbird there." He imitated the note of a blackbird so perfectly that I could have sworn the bird started.

"Birds and flowers! Wonderful things; wonderful! Why, even a buttercup—!" He pointed at one of those little golden flowers with his toe. "Did you ever see such a marvellous thing?" And he turned his face up at me. "And yet, somebody told me once that they don't agree with cows. Now can that be? I'm not a countryman—though I was born at Kingston."

"The cows do well enough on them," I said, "in my part of the world. In fact, the farmers say they like to see buttercups."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. I was always sorry to think they disagreed."

When I got up to go, he rose, too.

"I take it as very kind of you," he said, "to have spoken to me."

"The pleasure was mine. I am generally to be found hereabouts in the afternoons any time you like a talk."

"Delighted," he said; "delighted. I make friends of the creatures and flowers as much as possible, but they can't always make us understand." And after we had taken off our respect-

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ive hats, he reseated himself, with his hands on his knees.

Next time I came across him standing by the rails of an enclosure, and, in his arms, an old and really wretched-looking cat.

"I don't like boys," he said, without preliminary of any sort. "What do you think they were doing to this poor old cat? Dragging it along by a string to drown it; see where it's cut into the fur! I think boys despise the old and weak!" He held it out to me. At the ends of those little sticks of arms the beast looked more dead than alive; I had never seen a more miserable creature.

"I think a cat," he said, "is one of the most marvellous things in the world. Such a depth of life in it."

And, as he spoke, the cat opened its mouth as if protesting at that assertion. It *was* the sorriest-looking beast.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Take it home; it looks to me as if it might die."

"You don't think that might be more merciful?"

"It depends; it depends. I shall see. I fancy a little kindness might do a great deal for it. It's got plenty of spirit. I can see from its eye."

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"May I come along with you a bit?"

"Oh!" he said; "delighted."

We walked on side by side, exciting the derision of nearly every one we passed—his face looked so like a mother's when she is feeding her baby!

"You'll find this'll be quite a different cat to-morrow," he said. "I shall have to get in, though, without my landlady seeing; a funny woman! I have two or three strays already."

"Can I help in any way?"

"Thank you," he said. "I shall ring the area bell, and as she comes out below I shall go in above. She'll think it's boys. They *are* like that."

"But doesn't she do your rooms, or anything?"

A smile puckered his face. "I've only one; I do it myself. Oh, it'd never do to have her about, even if I could afford it. But," he added, "if you're so kind as to come with me to the door, you might engage her by asking where Mr. Thompson lives. That's me. In the musical world my name was Moronelli; not that I have Italian blood in me, of course."

"And shall I come up?"

"Honoured; but I live very quietly."

We passed out of the gardens at Lancaster Gate, where all the house-fronts seem so successful, and out of it into a little street that was ex-

ULTIMA THULE

tremely like a grubby child trying to hide under its mother's skirts. Here he took a newspaper from his pocket and wrapped it round the cat.

"She's a funny woman," he repeated; "Scotch descent, you know." Suddenly he pulled an area bell and scuttled up the steps.

When he had opened the door, however, I saw before him in the hall a short, thin woman dressed in black, with a sharp and bumpy face. Her voice sounded brisk and resolute.

"What have you got there, Mr. Thompson?"

"Newspaper, Mrs. March."

"Oh, indeed! Now, you're not going to take that cat up-stairs!"

The little old fellow's voice acquired a sudden shrill determination. "Stand aside, please. If you stop me, I'll give you notice. The cat is going up. It's ill, and it is going up."

It was then I said:

"Does Mr. Thompson live here?"

In that second he shot past her, and ascended.

"That's him," she said; "and I wish it wasn't, with his dirty cats. Do you want him?"

"I do."

"He lives at the top." Then, with a grudging apology: "I can't help it; he tries me—he's very trying."

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"I am sure he is."

She looked at me. The longing to talk that comes over those who answer bells all day, and the peculiar Scottish desire to justify oneself, rose together in that face which seemed all promontories dried by an east wind.

"Ah!" she said; "he is. I don't deny his heart; but he's got no sense of anything. Goodness knows what he hasn't got up there. I wonder I keep him. An old man like that ought to know better; half-starving himself to feed them." She paused, and her eyes, that had a cold and honest glitter, searched me closely.

"If you're going up," she said, "I hope you'll give him good advice. He never lets me in. I wonder I keep him."

There were three flights of stairs, narrow, clean, and smelling of oilcloth. Selecting one of two doors at random, I knocked. His silvery head and bright, pinched face were cautiously poked out.

"Ah!" he said; "I thought it might be her!"

The room, which was fairly large, had a bare floor with little on it save a camp-bed and chest of drawers with jug and basin. A large bird-cage on the wall hung wide open. The place smelt of soap and a little of beasts and birds. Into the walls, whitewashed over a green wall-

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paper which stared through in places, were driven nails with their heads knocked off, onto which bits of wood had been spiked, so that they stood out as bird-perches high above the ground. Over the open window a piece of wire netting had been fixed. A little spirit-stove and an old dressing-gown hanging on a peg completed the accoutrements of a room which one entered with a certain diffidence. He had not exaggerated. Besides the new cat, there were three other cats and four birds, all—save one, a bullfinch—invalids. The cats kept close to the walls, avoiding me, but wherever my little old friend went, they followed him with their eyes. The birds were in the cage, except the bullfinch, which had perched on his shoulder.

“How on earth,” I said, “do you manage to keep cats and birds in one room?”

“There is danger,” he answered, “but I have not had a disaster yet. Till their legs or wings are mended, they hardly come out of the cage; and after that they keep up on my perches. But they don’t stay long, you know, when they’re once well. That wire is only put over the window while they’re mending; it’ll be off to-morrow, for this lot.”

“And then they’ll go?”

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"Yes. The sparrow first, and then the two thrushes."

"And this fellow?"

"Ask him," he said. "Would *you* go, bully?" But the bullfinch did not deign to answer.

"And were all those cats, too, in trouble?"

"Yes," he said. "They wouldn't want me if they weren't."

Thereupon he began to warm some blue-looking milk, contemplating the new cat, which he had placed in a round basket close to the little stove, while the bullfinch sat on his head. It seemed time to go.

"Delighted to see you, sir," he said, "any day." And, pointing up at the bullfinch on his head, he added: "Did you ever see anything so wonderful as that bird? The size of its heart! Really marvellous!"

To the rapt sound of that word marvellous, and full of the memory of his mysterious brightness while he stood pointing upward to the bird perched on his thick, silvery hair, I went.

The landlady was still at the bottom of the stairs, and began at once: "So you found him! I don't know why I keep him. Of course, he was kind to my little girl." I saw tears gather in her eyes.

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“With his cats and his birds, I wonder I keep him! But where would he go? He’s no relations, and no friends—not a friend in the world, I think! He’s a character. Lives on air—feeding them cats! I’ve no patience with them, eating him up. He never lets me in. Cats and birds! I wonder I keep him. Losing himself for those rubbishy things! It’s my belief he was always like that; and that’s why he never got on. He’s no sense of anything.”

And she gave me a shrewd look, wondering, no doubt, what the deuce I had come about.

I did not come across him again in the gardens for some time, and went at last to pay him a call. At the entrance to a mews just round the corner of his grubby little street, I found a knot of people collected round one of those bears that are sometimes led through the less conspicuous streets of our huge towns. The yellowish beast was sitting up in deference to its master’s rod, uttering little grunts, and moving its uplifted snout from side to side, in the way bears have. But it seemed to be extracting more amusement than money from its audience.

“Let your bear down off its hind legs and I’ll give you a penny.” And suddenly I saw my little old friend under his flopping grey hat,

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amongst the spectators, all taller than himself. But the bear's master only grinned and prodded the animal in the chest. He evidently knew a good thing when he saw it.

"I'll give you twopence to let him down."

Again the bear-man grinned. "More!" he said, and again prodded the bear's chest. The spectators were laughing now.

"Threepence! And if you don't let him down for that, I'll hit you in the eye."

The bear-man held out his hand. "All a-right," he said, "threepence; I let him down."

I saw the coins pass and the beast dropping on his forefeet; but just then a policeman coming in sight, the man led his bear off, and I was left alone with my little old friend.

"I wish I had that poor bear," he said; "I could teach him to be happy. But, even if I could buy him, what could I do with him up there? She's such a funny woman."

He looked quite dim, but brightened as we went along.

"A bear," he said, "is really an extraordinary animal. What wise little eyes he has! I do think he's a marvellous creation! My cats will have to go without their dinner, though. I was going to buy it with that threepence."

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I begged to be allowed the privilege.

"Willingly!" he said. "Shall we go in here? They like cod's head best."

While we stood waiting to be served I saw the usual derisive smile pass over the fishmonger's face. But my little old friend by no means noticed it; he was too busy looking at the fish. "A fish is a marvellous thing, when you come to think of it," he murmured. "Look at its scales. Did you ever see such mechanism?"

We bought five cod's heads, and I left him carrying them in a bag, evidently lost in the anticipation of five cats eating them.

After that I saw him often, going with him sometimes to buy food for his cats, which seemed ever to increase in numbers. His talk was always of his strays, and the marvels of creation, and that time of his life when he played the flute at the Harmony Theatre. He had been out of a job, it seemed, for more than ten years; and, when questioned, only sighed and answered: "Don't talk about it, please!"

His bumpy landlady never failed to favour me with a little conversation. She was one of those women who have terrific consciences, and terrible grudges against them.

"I never get out," she would say.

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"Why not?"

"Couldn't leave the house."

"It won't run away!"

But she would look at me as if she thought it might, and repeat:

"Oh! I never get out."

An extremely Scottish temperament.

Considering her descent, however, she was curiously devoid of success, struggling on apparently from week to week, cleaning, and answering the bell, and never getting out, and wondering why she kept my little old friend; just as he struggled on from week to week, getting out and collecting strays, and discovering the marvels of creation, and finding her a funny woman. Their hands were joined, one must suppose, by that dead child.

One July afternoon, however, I found her very much upset. He had been taken dangerously ill three days before.

"There he is," she said; "can't touch a thing. It's my belief he's done for himself, giving his food away all these years to those cats of his. I shooed 'em out to-day, the nasty creatures; they won't get in again."

"Oh!" I said, "you shouldn't have done that. It'll only make him miserable."

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She founced her head up. "Hoh!" she said; "I wonder I've kept him all this time, with his birds and his cats dirtying my house. And there he lies, talking gibberish about them. He made me write to a Mr. Jackson, of some theatre or other—I've no patience with him. And that little bullfinch all the time perching on his pillow, the dirty little thing! I'd have turned it out, too, only it wouldn't let me catch it."

"What does the doctor say?"

"Double pneumonia—caught it getting his feet wet, after some stray, I'll be bound. I'm nursing him. There has to be some one with him all the time."

He was lying very still when I went up, with the sunlight falling across the foot of his bed, and, sure enough, the bullfinch perching on his pillow. In that high fever he looked brighter than ever. He was not exactly delirious, yet not exactly master of his thoughts.

"Mr. Jackson! He'll be here soon. Mr. Jackson! He'll do it for me. I can ask him, if I die. A funny woman. I don't want to eat; I'm not a great eater—I want my breath, that's all."

At sound of his voice the bullfinch fluttered off the pillow and flew round and round the room,

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as if alarmed at something new in the tones that were coming from its master.

Then he seemed to recognise me. "I think I'm going to die," he said; "I'm very weak. It's lucky, there's nobody to mind. If only he'd come soon. I wish"—and he raised himself with feeble excitement—"I wish you'd take that wire off the window; I want my cats. She turned them out. I want him to promise me to take them, and bully-boy, and feed them with my money, when I'm dead."

Seeing that excitement was certainly worse for him than cats, I took the wire off. He fell back, quiet at once; and presently, first one and then another cat came stealing in, till there were four or five seated against the walls. The moment he ceased to speak the bullfinch, too, came back to his pillow. His eyes looked most supernaturally bright, staring out of his little, withered-up old face at the sunlight playing on his bed; he said just audibly: "Did you ever see anything more wonderful than that sunlight? It's really marvellous!" After that he fell into a sort of doze or stupor. And I continued to sit there in the window, relieved, but rather humiliated, that he had not asked me to take care of his cats and bullfinch.

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Presently there came the sound of a motor-car in the little street below. And almost at once the landlady appeared. For such an abrupt woman, she entered very softly.

"Here he is," she whispered.

I went out and found a gentleman, perhaps sixty years of age, in a black coat, buff waist-coat, gold watch-chain, light trousers, patent-leather boots, and a wonderfully shining hat. His face was plump and red, with a glossy grey moustache; indeed, he seemed to shine everywhere, save in the eyes, which were of a dull and somewhat liverish hue.

"Mr. Jackson?"

"The same. How is the little old chap?"

Opening the door of the next room, which I knew was always empty, I beckoned Mr. Jackson in.

"He's really very ill; I'd better tell you what he wants to see you about."

He looked at me with that air of "You can't get at me—whoever you may be," which belongs to the very successful.

"Right-o!" he said. "Well?"

I described the situation. "He seems to think," I ended, "that you'll be kind enough to charge yourself with his strays, in case he should die."

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Mr. Jackson prodded the unpainted wash-stand with his gold-headed cane.

“Is he really going to kick it?”

“I’m afraid so; he’s nothing but skin, bone, and spirit, as it is.”

“H’m! Stray cats, you say, and a bird! Well, there’s no accounting. He was always a cracky little chap. So that’s it! When I got the letter I wondered what the deuce! We pay him his five quid a quarter regular to this day. To tell truth, he deserved it. Thirty years he was at our shop; never missed a night. First-rate flute he was. He ought never to have given it up, though I always thought it showed a bit of heart in him. If a man don’t look after number one, he’s as good as gone; that’s what I’ve always found. Why, I was no more than he was when I started. Shouldn’t have been worth a plum if I’d gone on his plan, that’s certain.” And he gave that profound chuckle which comes from the very stomach of success. “We were having a rocky time at the Harmony; had to cut down everything we could—music, well, that came about first. Little old Moronelli, as we used to call him—old Italian days before English names came in, you know—he was far the best of the flutes; so I went to him and said: ‘Look here, Moronelli, which of

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these other boys had better go?' 'Oh!' he said—I remember his funny little old mug now—'has one of them to go, Mr. Jackson? Timminsa'—that was the elder—'he's a wife and family; and Smetoni'—Smith, you know—'he's only a boy. Times are bad for flutes.' 'I know it's a bit hard,' I said, 'but this theatre's goin' to be run much cheaper; one of 'em's got to get.' 'Oh!' he said, 'dear me!' he said. What a funny little old chap it was! Well—what do you think? Next day I had his resignation. Give you my word I did my best to turn him. Why, he was sixty then if he was a day—at sixty a man don't get jobs in a hurry. But, not a bit of it! All he'd say was: 'I shall get a place all right!' But that's it, you know—he never did. Too long in one shop. I heard by accident he was on the rocks; that's how I make him that allowance. But that's the sort of hopeless little old chap he is—no idea of himself. Cats! Why not? I'll take his old cats on; don't you let him worry about that. I'll see to his bird, too. If I can't give 'em a better time than ever they have here, it'll be funny!" And, looking round the little empty room, he again uttered that profound chuckle: "Why, he was with us at the Harmony thirty years—that's time, you know; *I* made my fortune in it."

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"I'm sure," I said, "it'll be a great relief to him."

"Oh! Ah! That's all right. You come down to my place"—he handed me a card: 'Mr. Cyril Porteus Jackson, Ultima Thule, Wimbledon'—"and see how I fix 'em 'up. But if he's really going to kick it, I'd like to have a look at the little old chap, just for old times' sake."

We went, as quietly as Mr. Jackson's bright boots would permit, into his room, where the landlady was sitting gazing angrily at the cats. She went out without noise, flouncing her head as much as to say: "Well, now you can see what I have to go through, sitting up here. I never get out."

Our little old friend was still in that curious stupor. He seemed unconscious, but his blue eyes were not closed, staring brightly out before them at things we did not see. With his silvery hair and his flushed frailty, he had an unearthly look. After standing perhaps three minutes at the foot of the bed, Mr. Jackson whispered:

"Well, he does look queer. Poor little old chap! You tell him from me I'll look after his cats and bird; he needn't worry. And now, I think I won't keep the car. Makes me feel a bit throaty, you know. Don't move; he might come to."

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And, leaning all the weight of his substantial form on those bright and creaking toes, he made his way to the door, flashed at me a diamond ring, whispered hoarsely: "So long! That'll be all right!" and vanished. And soon I heard the whirring of his car and just saw the top of his shiny hat travelling down the little street.

Some time I sat on there, wanting to deliver that message. An uncanny vigil in the failing light, with those five cats—yes, five at least—lying or sitting against the walls, staring like sphinxes at their motionless protector. I could not make out whether it was he in his stupor with his bright eyes that fascinated them, or the bullfinch perched on his pillow, whom they knew perhaps might soon be in their power. I was glad when the landlady came up and I could leave the message with her.

When she opened the door to me next day at six o'clock I knew that he was gone. There was about her that sorrowful, unmistakable importance, that peculiar mournful excitement, which hovers over houses where death has entered.

"Yes," she said, "he went this morning. Never came round after you left. Would you like to see him?"

We went up.

He lay, covered with a sheet, in the darkened

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room. The landlady pulled the window-curtains apart. His face, as white now almost as his silvery head, had in the sunlight a radiance like that of a small, bright angel gone to sleep. No growth of hair, such as comes on most dead faces, showed on those frail cheeks that were now smooth and lineless as porcelain. And on the sheet above his chest the bullfinch sat, looking into his face.

The landlady let the curtains fall, and we went out.

"I've got the cats in here"—she pointed to the room where Mr. Jackson and I had talked—"all ready for that gentleman when he sends. But that little bird, I don't know what to do; he won't let me catch him, and there he sits. It makes me feel all funny."

It had made me feel all funny, too.

"He hasn't left the money for his funeral. Dreadful, the way he never thought about himself. I'm glad I kept him, though." And, not to my astonishment, she suddenly began to cry.

A wire was sent to Mr. Jackson, and on the day of the funeral I went down to 'Ultima Thule,' Wimbledon, to see if he had carried out his promise.

He had. In the grounds, past the vinery, an

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outhouse had been cleaned and sanded, with cushions placed at intervals against the wall, and a little trough of milk. Nothing could have been more suitable or luxurious.

"How's that?" he said. "I've done it thoroughly." But I noticed that he looked a little glum.

"The only thing," he said, "is the cats. First night they seemed all right; and the second, there were three of 'em left. But to-day the gardener tells me there's not the ghost of one anywhere. It's not for want of feeding. They've had tripe, and liver, and milk—as much as ever they liked. And cod's heads, you know—they're very fond of them. I must say it's a bit of a disappointment to me."

As he spoke, a sandy cat which I perfectly remembered, for it had only half its left ear, appeared in the doorway, and stood, crouching, with its green eyes turned on us; then, hearing Mr. Jackson murmur, "Puss, puss!" it ran for its life, slinking almost into the ground, and vanished among some shrubs.

Mr. Jackson sighed. "Perversity of the brutes!" he said. He led me back to the house through a conservatory full of choice orchids. A gilt bird-cage was hanging there, one of the

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largest I had ever seen, replete with every luxury the heart of bird could want.

"Is that for the bullfinch?" I asked him.

"Oh!" he said; "didn't you know? The little beggar wouldn't let himself be caught, and the second morning, when they went up, there he lay on the old chap's body, dead. I thought it was very touchin'. But I kept the cage hung up for you to see that I should have given him a good time here. Oh, yes, 'Ultima Thule' would have done him well!"

And from a bright leather case Mr. Jackson offered me a cigar.

The question I had long been wishing to ask him slipped out of me then:

"Do you mind telling me why you called your house 'Ultima Thule'?"

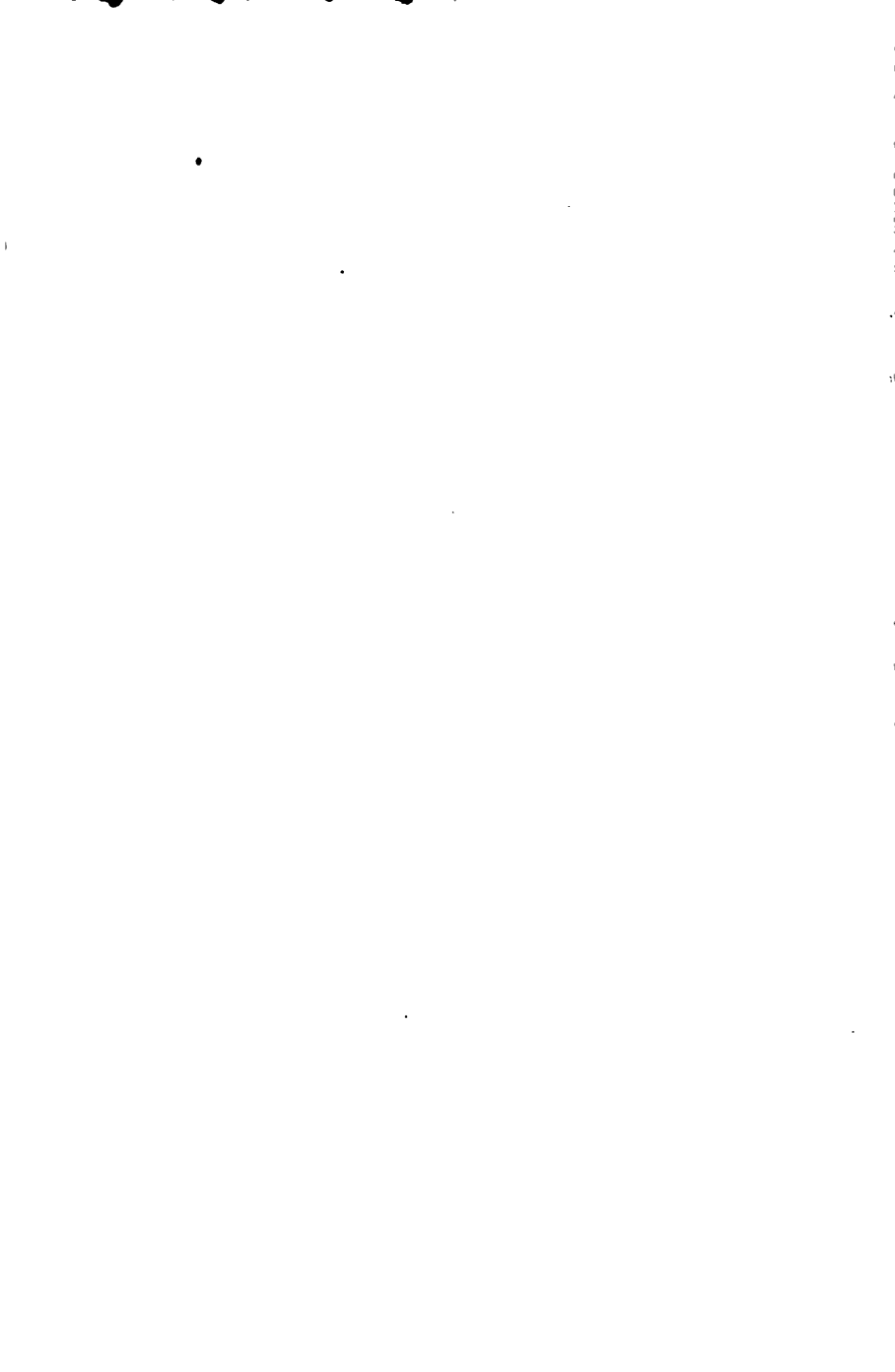
"Why?" he said. "Found it on the gate. Think it's rather distingué, don't you?" and he uttered his profound chuckle.

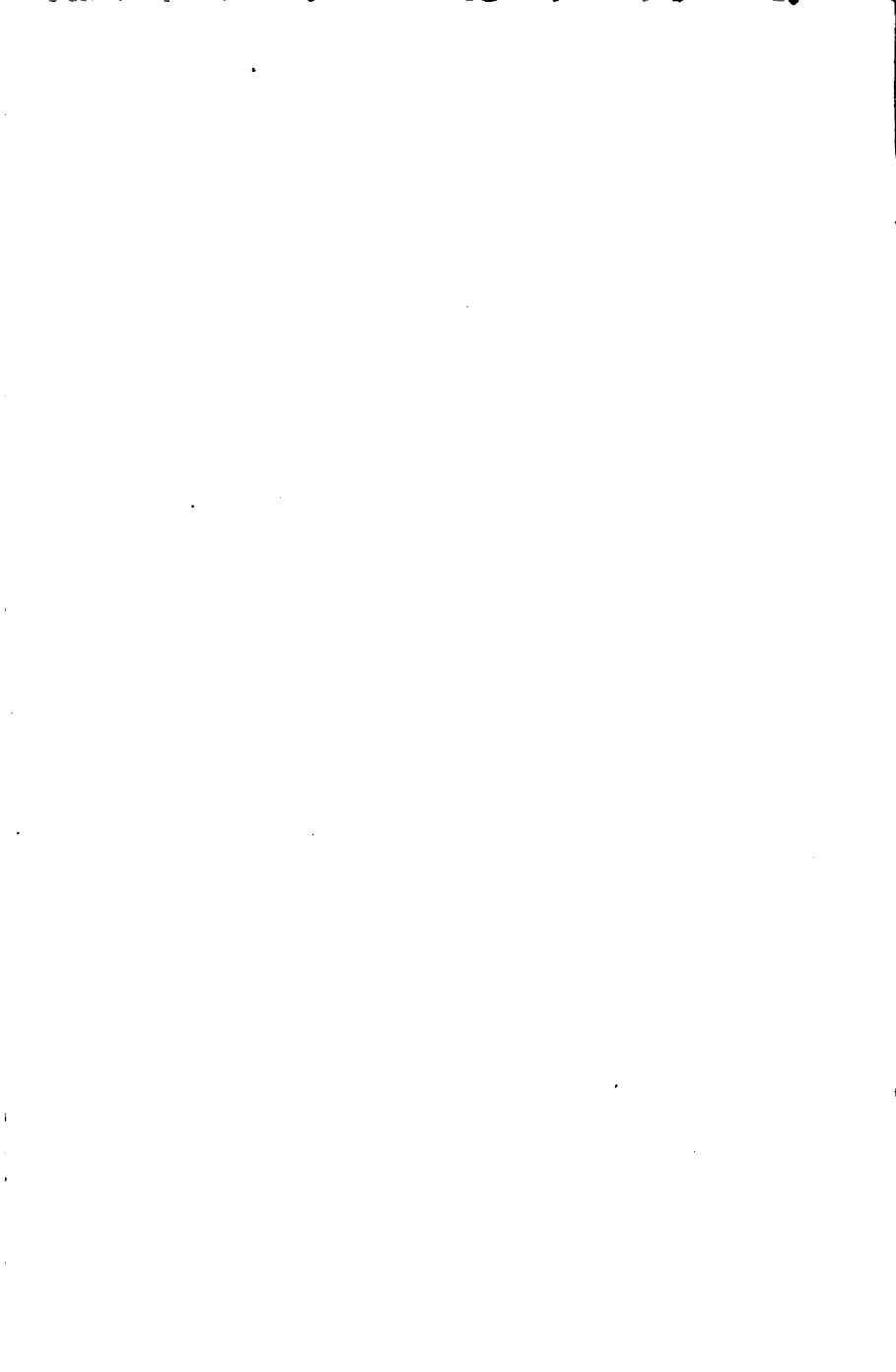
"First-rate. The whole place is the last word in comfort."

"Very good of you to say so," he said. "I've laid out a goodish bit on it. A man must have a warm corner to end his days in. 'Ultima Thule,' as you say—it isn't bad. There's success about it, somehow."

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And with that word in my ears, and in my eyes a vision of the little old fellow in *his* 'Ultima Thule,' with the bullfinch lying dead on a heart that had never known success, I travelled back to town.






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