

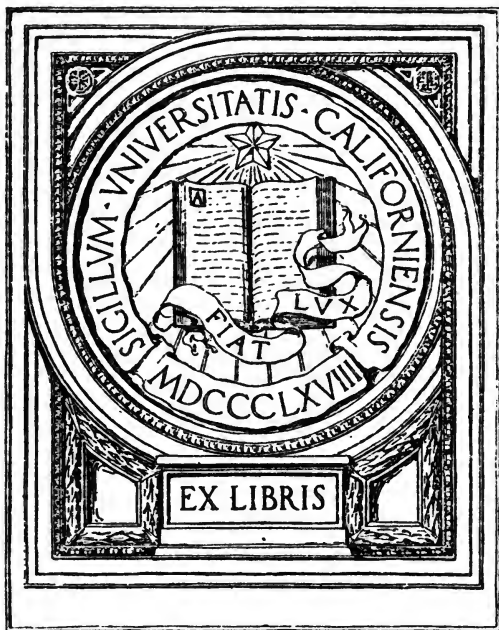
Orpheus in Mayfair

By Maurice Baring

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ORPHEUS IN MAYFAIR
AND OTHER STORIES
AND SKETCHES



ORPHEUS IN MAYFAIR

AND OTHER STORIES AND
SKETCHES

BY

MAURICE BARING

MILLS & BOON, LIMITED
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To
ETHEL SMYTH

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NOTE

MOST of the stories and sketches in this book have appeared in the *Morning Post*. One of them was published in the *Westminster Gazette*. I have to thank the editors and proprietors concerned for their kindness in allowing me to republish them.



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I
ORPHEUS IN MAYFAIR



HERACLIUS THEMISTOCLES MARGARITIS was a professional musician. He was a singer and a composer of songs; he wrote poetry in Romaic, and composed tunes to suit his sunny rhymes. But it was not thus that he earned his daily bread, and he was poor, very poor. To earn his livelihood he gave lessons, music lessons during the day, and in the evening lessons in Greek, ancient and modern, to such people (and these were rare) who wished to learn these languages. He was a young man, only twenty-four, and he had married, before he came of age, an Italian girl called Tina. They had come to England in order to make their fortune. They lived in apartments in the Hereford Road, Bayswater.

They had two children, a little girl and a little boy; they were very much in love with each other, as happy as birds, and as poor as church mice. For Heraclius Themistocles got but few pupils, and although he had sung in public at one or two concerts, and had not been received unfavourably, he failed to obtain engagements to sing in private houses, which was his ambition. He hoped by this means to become well known, and then to be able to give recitals of his own where he would

reveal to the world those tunes in which he knew the spirit of Hellas breathed. The whole desire of his life was to bring back and to give to the world the forgotten but undying Song of Greece. In spite of this, the modest advertisement which was to be found at concert agencies announcing that Mr Heraclius Themistocles Margaritis was willing to attend evening parties and to give an exhibition of Greek music, ancient and modern, had as yet met with no response. After he had been a year in England the only steps towards making a fortune were two public performances at charity matinees, one or two pupils in pianoforte playing, and an occasional but rare engagement for stray pupils at a school of modern languages.

It was in the middle of the second summer after his arrival that an incident occurred which proved to be the turning point of his career. A London hostess was giving a party in honour of a foreign Personage. It had been intimated that some kind of music would be expected. The hostess had neither the means nor the desire to secure for her entertainment stars of the first magnitude, but she gathered together some lesser lights — a violinist, a pianist, and a singer of French drawing-room melodies. On the morning of the day on which her concert was to be given, the hostess received a telegram from the singer of French drawing-room melodies to say that she had got

a bad cold, and could not possibly sing that night. The hostess was in despair, but a musical friend of hers came to the rescue, and promised to obtain for her an excellent substitute, a man who sang Greek songs.

When Margaritis received the telegram from Arkwright's Agency that he was to sing that night at A— House, he was overjoyed, and could scarcely believe his eyes. He at once communicated the news to Tina, and they spent hours in discussing what songs he should sing, who the good fairy could have been who recommended him, and in building castles in the air with regard to the result of this engagement. He would become famous; they would have enough money to go to Italy for a holiday; he would give concerts; he would reveal to the modern world the music of Hellas.

About half-past four in the afternoon Margaritis went out to buy himself some respectable evening studs from a large emporium in the neighbourhood. When he returned, singing and whistling on the stairs for joy, he was met by Tina, who to his astonishment was quite pale, and he saw at a glance that something had happened.

"They've put me off!" he said. "Or it was a mistake. I knew it was too good to be true."

"It's not that," said Tina, "it's Carlo!" Carlo

was their little boy, who was nearly four years old.

“What?” said Margaritis.

Tina dragged him into their little sitting-room. “He is ill,” she said, “very ill, and I don’t know what’s the matter with him.”

Margaritis turned pale. “Let me see him,” he said. “We must get a doctor.”

“The doctor is coming : I went for him at once,” she said. And then they walked on tiptoe into the bedroom where Carlo was lying in his cot, tossing about, and evidently in a raging fever. Half an hour later the doctor came. Margaritis and Tina waited, silent and trembling with anxiety, while he examined the child. At last he came from the bedroom with a grave face. He said that the child was very seriously ill, but that if he got through the night he would very probably recover.

“I must send a telegram,” said Margaritis to Tina. “I cannot possibly go.” Tina squeezed his hand, and then with a brave smile she went back to the sick-room.

Margaritis took a telegraph form out of a shabby leather portfolio, sat down before the dining-table on which the cloth had been laid for tea (for the sitting-room was the dining-room also), and wrote out the telegram. And as he wrote his tears fell on the writing and smudged it. His grief

overcame him, and he buried his face in his hands and sobbed. "What the Fates give with one hand," he thought to himself, "they take away with another!" Then he heard himself, he knew not why, invoking the gods of Greece, the ancient gods of Olympus, to help him. And at that moment the whole room seemed to be filled with a strange light, and he saw the wonderful figure of a man with a shining face and eyes that seemed infinitely sad and at the same time infinitely luminous. The figure held a lyre, and said to him in Greek:—

"It is well. All will be well. I will take your place at the concert!"

When the vision vanished, the half-written telegram on his table had disappeared also.

The party at A—— House that night was brilliant rather than large. In one of the drawing-rooms there was a piano, in front of which were six or seven rows of gilt chairs. The other rooms were filled with shifting groups of beautiful women, and men wearing orders and medals. There was a continuous buzz of conversation, except in the room where the music was going on; and even there in the background there was a subdued whispering. The violinist was playing some elaborate nothings, and displaying astounding facility, but the audience did not seem to be much

interested, for when he stopped, after some faint applause, conversation broke loose like a torrent.

“ I do hope,” said some one to the lady next him, “ that the music will be over soon. One gets wedged in here, one doesn’t dare move, and one has to put up with having one’s conversation spoilt and interrupted.”

“ It’s an extraordinary thing,” answered the lady, “ that nobody dares give a party in London without some kind of entertainment. It *is* such a mistake ! ”

At that moment the fourth and last item on the programme began, which was called “ Greek Songs by Heraclius Themistocles Margaritis.”

“ He certainly looks like a Greek,” said the lady who had been talking ; “ in fact if his hair was cut he would be quite good-looking.”

“ It’s not my idea of a Greek,” whispered her neighbour. “ He is too fair. I thought Greeks were dark.”

“ Hush ! ” said the lady, and the first song began. It was a strange thread of sound that came upon the ears of the listeners, rather high and piercing, and the accompaniment (Margaritis accompanied himself) was twanging and monotonous like the sound of an Indian tom-tom. The same phrase was repeated two or three times over, the melody seemed to consist of only a very few notes, and to come over and over again with extra-

ordinary persistence. Then the music rose into a high shrill call and ended abruptly.

“What has happened?” asked the lady. “Has he forgotten the words?”

“I think the song is over,” said the man. “That’s one comfort at any rate. I hate songs which I can’t understand.”

But their comments were stopped by the beginning of another song. The second song was soft and very low, and seemed to be almost entirely on one note. It was still shorter than the first one, and ended still more abruptly.

“I don’t believe he’s a Greek at all,” said the man. “His songs are just like the noise of bag-pipes.”

“I daresay he’s Scotch,” said the lady. “Scotchmen are very clever. But I must say his songs are short.”

An indignant “Hush!” from a musician with long hair who was sitting not far off heralded the beginning of the third song. It began on a high note, clear and loud, so that the audience was startled, and for a moment or two there was not a whisper to be heard in the drawing-room. Then it died away in a piteous wail, like the scream of a sea-bird, and the high insistent note came back once more, and this process seemed to be repeated several times till the sad scream prevailed, and stopped suddenly. A little desultory clapping

was heard, but it was instantly suppressed when the audience became aware that the song was not over.

“He’s going on again,” whispered the man. A low, long note was heard like the drone of a bee, which went on, sometimes rising and sometimes getting lower, like a strange throbbing sob; and then once more it ceased. The audience hesitated a moment, being not quite certain whether the music was really finished or not. Then when they saw Margaritis rise from the piano, some meagre well-bred applause was heard, and an immense sigh of relief. The people streamed into the other rooms, and the conversation became loud and general.

The lady who had talked went quickly into the next room to find out what was the right thing to say about the music, and if possible to get the opinion of a musician.

Sir Anthony Holdsworth, who had translated Pindar, was talking to Ralph Enderby, who had written a book on “Modern Greek Folk Lore.”

“It hurts me,” said Sir Anthony, “to hear ancient Greek pronounced like that. It is impossible to distinguish the words; besides which it’s wrong to pronounce ancient Greek like modern Greek. Did you understand it?”

“No,” said Ralph Enderby, “I did not. If it is modern Greek it was certainly wrongly pro-

nounced. I think the man must be singing some kind of Asiatic dialect—unless he's a fraud."

Hard by there was another group discussing the music: Blythe, the musical critic, and Lawson, who had the reputation of being a great connoisseur.

"He's distinctly clever," Blythe was saying; "the songs are amusing 'pastiche' of Eastern folk song."

"Yes, I think he's clever," said Lawson, "but there's nothing original in it, and besides, as I expect you noticed, two of the songs were gross plagiarisms of De Bussy."

"Clever, but not original," said the lady to herself. "That's it." And two hostesses who overheard this conversation made up their minds to get Margaritis for their parties, for they scented the fact that he would ultimately be talked about. But most of the people did not discuss the music at all.

As soon as the music had stopped, James Reddaway, who was a Member of Parliament, left the house and went home. He was engrossed in politics, and had little time at his disposal for anything else. As soon as he got home he went up to his wife's bedroom; she had not been able to go to the party owing to a sudden attack of neuralgia. She asked him to tell her all about it.

"Well," he said, "there were the usual people there, and there was some music: some violin

and piano playing, to which I didn't listen. After that a man sang some Greek songs, and a curious thing happened to me. When it began I felt my head swimming, and then I entirely lost account of my surroundings. I forgot the party, the drawing-room and the people, and I seemed to be sitting on the rocks of a cliff near a small bay ; in front of me was the sea : it was a kind of blue green, but far more blue or at least of quite a different kind of blue than any I have seen. It was transparent, and the sky above it was like a turquoise. Behind me the cliff merged into a hill which was covered with red and white flowers, as bright as a Persian carpet. On the beach in front, a tall man was standing, wading in the water, little bright waves sparkling round his feet. He was tall and dark, and he was spearing a lot of little silver fish which were lying on the sand with a small wooden trident ; and somewhere behind me a voice was singing. I could not see where it came from, but it was wonderfully soft and delicious, and a lot of wild bees came swarming over the flowers, and a green lizard came right up close to me, and the air was burning hot, and there was a smell of thyme and mint in it. And then the song stopped, and I came to myself, and I was back again in the drawing-room. Then when the man began to sing again, I again lost consciousness, and I seemed to be in a dark orchard

on a breathless summer night. And somewhere near me there was a low white house with an opening which might have been a window, shrouded by creepers and growing things. And in it there was a faint light. And from the house came the sound of a sad love-song; and although I had never heard the song before I understood it, and it was about the moon and the Pleiads having set, and the hour passing, and the voice sang, 'But I sleep alone!' And this was repeated over and over again, and it was the saddest and most beautiful thing I had ever heard. And again it stopped, and I was back again in the drawing-room. Then when the singer began his third song I felt cold all over, and at the same time half suffocated, as people say they feel when they are nearly drowning. I realised that I was in a huge, dark, empty space, and round me and far off in front of me were vague shadowy forms; and in the distance there was something which looked like two tall thrones, pillared and dim. And on one of the thrones there was the dark form of a man, and on the other a woman like a queen, pale as marble, and unreal as a ghost, with great grey eyes that shone like moons. In front of them was another form, and he was singing a song, and the song was so sad and so beautiful that tears rolled down the shadowy cheeks of the ghosts in front of me. And all at once the singer gave a great cry of joy, and

something white and blinding flashed past me and disappeared, and he with it. But I remained in the same place with the dark ghosts far off in front of me. And I seemed to be there an eternity till I heard a cry of desperate pain and anguish, and the white form flashed past me once more, and vanished, and with it the whole thing, and I was back again in the drawing-room, and I felt faint and giddy, and could not stay there any longer."

II

THE CRICKET MATCH

AN INCIDENT AT A PRIVATE SCHOOL

To Winston Churchill



IT was a Saturday afternoon in June. St James's School was playing a cricket match against Chippenfield's. The whole school, which consisted of forty boys, with the exception of the eleven who were playing in the match, were gathered together near the pavilion on the steep, grassy bank which faced the cricket ground. It was a swelteringly hot day. One of the masters was scoring in the pavilion; two of the boys sat under the post and board where the score was recorded in big white figures painted on the black squares. Most of the boys were sitting on the grass in front of the pavilion.

St James's won the toss and went in first. After scoring 5 for the first wicket they collapsed; in an hour and five minutes their last wicket fell. They had only made 27 runs. Fortune was against St James's that day. Hitchens, their captain, in whom the school confidently trusted, was caught out in his first over. And Wormald and Bell minor, their two best men, both failed to score.

Then Chippenfield's went in. St James's fast bowlers, Blundell and Anderson minor, seemed unable to do anything against the Chippenfield's batsmen. The first wicket went down at 70.

The boys who were looking on grew listless : three of them, Gordon, Smith, and Hart minor, wandered off from the pavilion further up the slope of the hill, where there was a kind of wooden scaffolding raised for letting off fireworks on the 5th of November. The headmaster, who was a fanatical Conservative, used to burn on that anniversary effigies of Liberal politicians such as Mr Gladstone and Mr Chamberlain, who was at that time a Radical ; while the boys whose politics were Conservative, and who formed the vast majority, cheered, and kicked the Liberals, of whom there were only eight.

Smith, Gordon, and Hart minor, three little boys aged about eleven, were in the third division of the school. They were not in the eleven, nor had they any hopes of ever attaining that glory, which conferred the privilege of wearing white flannel instead of grey flannel trousers, and a white flannel cap with a red Maltese cross on it. To tell the truth, the spectacle of this seemingly endless game, in which they did not have even the satisfaction of seeing their own side victorious, began to weigh on their spirits.

They climbed up on to the wooden scaffolding and organised a game of their own, an utterly childish game, which consisted of one boy throwing some dried horse chestnuts from the top of the scaffolding into the mouth of the boy at

the bottom. They soon became engrossed in their occupation, and were thoroughly enjoying themselves, when one of the masters, Mr Whitehead by name, came towards them with a face like thunder, biting his knuckles, a thing which he did when he was very angry.

“Go indoors at once,” he said. “Go up to the third division school-room and do two hours’ work. You can copy out the Greek irregular verbs.”

The boys, taken completely by surprise, but accepting this decree as they accepted everything else, because it never occurred to them it could be otherwise, trotted off, not very disconsolate, to the school-room. It was very hot out of doors ; it was cool in the third division school-room.

They got out their steel pens, their double-lined copy books, and began mechanically copying out the Greek irregular verbs, with which they were so superficially familiar, and from which they were so fundamentally divorced.

“Whitey,” said Gordon, “was in an awful wax !”

“I don’t care,” said Smith. “I’d just as soon sit here as look on at that beastly match.”

“But why,” said Hart, “have we got to do two hours’ work ?”

“Oh,” said Gordon, “he’s just in a wax, that’s all.”

And the matter was not further discussed. At

six o'clock the boys had tea. The cricket match had, of course, resulted in a crushing and overwhelming defeat for St James's. The rival eleven had been asked to tea; there were cherries for tea in their honour.

When Gordon, Smith, and Hart minor entered the dining-room they at once perceived that an atmosphere of gloom and menacing storm was overhanging the school. Their spirits had hitherto been unflagging; they sat next to each other at the tea-table, but no sooner had they sat down than they were seized by that terrible, uncomfortable feeling so familiar to schoolboys, that something unpleasant was impending, some crime, some accusation; some doom, the nature of which they could not guess, was lying in ambush. This was written on the headmaster's face. The headmaster sat at a square table in the centre of the dining-room. The boys sat round on the further side of three tables which formed the three sides of the square room.

The meal passed in gloomy silence. Gordon, Smith and Hart began a fitful conversation, but a message was immediately passed up to them from Mr Whitehead, who sat at the bottom of one of the tables, to stop talking. At the end of tea the guests filed out of the room.

The headmaster stood up and rapped on his table with a knife.

“The whole school,” he said, “will come to the library in ten minutes’ time.”

The boys left the dining-room. They began to whisper to one another with bated breath. “What’s up?” they asked. “What’s the matter?” And the boys of the second division shook their heads ominously, and pointing to Gordon, Smith, and Hart, said: “You’re in for it this time!” The boys of the first division were too important to take any notice of the rest of the school, and retired to the first division school-room in dignified silence.

Ten minutes later the whole school was assembled in the library, from which one flight of stairs led to the upper storeys. The staircase was shrouded from view by a dark curtain hanging from a Gothic arch; it was through this curtain that the headmaster used dramatically to appear on important occasions, and it was up this staircase that boys guilty of cardinal offences were led off to corporal punishment.

The boys waited in breathless silence. Acute suspense was felt by the whole school, but by none so keenly as by Gordon, Smith, and Hart. These three little boys felt perfectly sick with fear of the unknown and the terror of having in some unknown way made themselves responsible for the calamity which would perhaps vitally affect the whole school.

Presently a rustle was heard, and the headmaster swept down the staircase and through the curtain, robed in the black silk gown of an LL.D. He stood at a high desk which was placed opposite the staircase in front of the boys, who sat, in the order of their divisions, on rows of chairs. The three assistant masters walked in from a side door, also in their gowns, and took seats to the right and left of the headmaster's desk. There was a breathless silence.

The headmaster began to speak in grave and icily cold tones; his face was contracted by a permanent frown.

"I had thought," he said, "that there were in this school some boys who had a notion of gentlemanly behaviour, manly conduct, and common decency. I see that I was mistaken. The behaviour of certain of you to-day—I will not mention them because of their exceeding shame, but you will all know whom I mean. . . ." At this moment all the boys turned round and looked hard at Gordon, Smith, and Hart minor, who blushed scarlet, and whose eyes filled with tears. . . . "The less said about the matter the better," continued the headmaster, "but I confess that it is difficult for me to understand how any one, however young, can be so hardened and so wanton as to behave in the callous and indecent way in which certain of you—I need not mention who—have behaved to-day.

You have disgraced the school in the eyes of strangers ; you have violated the laws of hospitality and courtesy ; you have shown that in St James's there is not a gleam of patriotism, not a spark of interest in the school, not a touch of that ordinary common English manliness, that sense for the interests of the school and the community which makes Englishmen what they are. The boys who have been most guilty in this matter have already been punished, and I do not propose to punish them further ; but I had intended to take the whole school for an expedition to the New Forest next week. That expedition will be put off : in fact it will never take place. Only the eleven shall go, and I trust that another time the miserable idlers and loafers who have brought this shame, this disgrace on the school, who have no self-respect and no self-control, who do not know how to behave like gentlemen, who are idle, vulgar and depraved, will learn by this lesson to mend their ways and to behave better in the future. But I am sorry to say that it is not only the chief offenders, who, as I have already said, have been punished, who are guilty in this matter. Many of the other boys, although they did not descend to the depths of vulgar behaviour reached by the culprits I have mentioned, showed a considerable lack of patriotism by their apathy and their lack of attention while the cricket match was proceeding this afternoon.

I can only hope that this may be a lesson to you all ; but while I trust the chief offenders will feel specially uncomfortable, I wish to impress upon you that you are all, with the exception of the eleven, in a sense guilty."

With these words the headmaster swept out of the room.

The boys dispersed in whispering groups. Gordon, Smith, and Hart minor, when they attempted to speak, were met with stony silence ; they were boycotted and cut by the remaining boys.

Gordon and Smith slept in two adjoining cubicles, and in a third adjoining cubicle was an upper division boy called Worthing. That night, after they had gone to bed, Gordon asked Worthing whether, among all the guilty, one just man had not been found.

" Surely," he said, " Campbell minor, who put up the score during the cricket match, was attentive right through the game, and wouldn't he be allowed to go to the New Forest with the eleven ? "

" No," said Worthing, " he whistled twice."

" Oh ! " said Gordon, " I didn't know that. Of course, he can't go ! "

III

THE SHADOW OF A MIDNIGHT

A GHOST STORY



IT was nine o'clock in the evening. Sasha, the maid, had brought in the samovar and placed it at the head of the long table. Marie Nikolaevna, our hostess, poured out the tea. Her husband was playing Vindt with his daughter, the doctor, and his son-in-law in another corner of the room. And Jameson, who had just finished his Russian lesson—he was working for the Civil Service examination—was reading the last number of the *Rouskoe Slovo*.

“Have you found anything interesting, Frantz Frantzovitch?” said Marie Nikolaevna to Jameson, as she handed him a glass of tea.

“Yes, I have,” answered the Englishman, looking up. His eyes had a clear dreaminess about them, which generally belongs only to fanatics or visionaries, and I had no reason to believe that Jameson, who seemed to be common sense personified, was either one or the other. “At least,” he continued, “it interests me. And it’s odd—very odd.”

“What is it?” asked Marie Nikolaevna.

“Well, to tell you what it is would mean a long story which you wouldn’t believe,” said Jameson; “only it’s odd—very odd.”

“ Tell us the story,” I said.

“ As you won't believe a word of it,” Jameson repeated, “ it's not much use my telling it.”

We insisted on hearing the story, so Jameson lit a cigarette, and began :—

“ Two years ago,” he said, “ I was at Heidelberg, at the University, and I made friends with a young fellow called Braun. His parents were German, but he had lived five or six years in America, and he was practically an American. I made his acquaintance by chance at a lecture, when I first arrived, and he helped me in a number of ways. He was an energetic and kind-hearted fellow, and we became great friends. He was a student, but he did not belong to any *Korps* or *Bursenschaft*, as he was working hard then. Afterwards he became an engineer. When the summer *Semester* came to an end, we both stayed on at Heidelberg. One day Braun suggested that we should go for a walking tour and explore the country. I was only too pleased, and we started. It was glorious weather, and we enjoyed ourselves hugely. On the third night after we had started we arrived at a village called Salzheim. It was a picturesque little place, and there was a curious old church in it with some interesting tombs and relics of the Thirty Years War. But the inn where we put up for the night was even more picturesque than the church. It had once been a convent for nuns, only the greater

part of it had been burnt, and only a quaint gabled house, and a kind of tower covered with ivy, which I suppose had once been the belfry, remained. We had an excellent supper and went to bed early. We had been given two bedrooms, which were airy and clean, and altogether we were satisfied. My bedroom opened into Braun's, which was beyond it, and had no other door of its own. It was a hot night in July, and Braun asked me to leave the door open. I did—we opened both the windows. Braun went to bed and fell asleep almost directly, for very soon I heard his snores.

“ I had imagined that I was longing for sleep, but no sooner had I got into bed than all my sleepiness left me. This was odd, because we had walked a good many miles, and it had been a blazing hot day, and up till then I had slept like a log the moment I got into bed. I lit a candle and began reading a small volume of Heine I carried with me. I heard the clock strike ten, and then eleven, and still I felt that sleep was out of the question. I said to myself: ‘ I will read till twelve and then I will stop.’ My watch was on a chair by my bedside, and when the clock struck eleven I noticed that it was five minutes slow, and set it right. I could see the church tower from my window, and every time the clock struck—and it struck the quarters—the noise boomed through the room.

“ When the clock struck a quarter to twelve I

yawned for the first time, and I felt thankful that sleep seemed at last to be coming to me. I left off reading, and taking my watch in my hand I waited for midnight to strike. This quarter of an hour seemed an eternity. At last the hands of my watch showed that it was one minute to twelve. I put out my candle and began counting sixty, waiting for the clock to strike. I had counted a hundred and sixty, and still the clock had not struck. I counted up to four hundred; then I thought I must have made a mistake. I lit my candle again, and looked at my watch: it was two minutes past twelve. And still the clock had not struck!

“A curious uncomfortable feeling came over me, and I sat up in bed with my watch in my hand and longed to call Braun, who was peacefully snoring, but I did not like to. I sat like this till a quarter past twelve; the clock struck the quarter as usual. I made up my mind that the clock must have struck twelve, and that I must have slept for a minute—at the same time I knew I had not slept—and I put out my candle. I must have fallen asleep almost directly.

“The next thing I remember was waking with a start. It seemed to me that some one had shut the door between my room and Braun’s. I felt for the matches. The match-box was empty. Up to that moment—I cannot tell why—something—an unaccountable dread—had prevented me looking at

the door. I made an effort and looked. It was shut, and through the cracks and through the keyhole I saw the glimmer of a light. Braun had lit his candle. I called him, not very loudly : there was no answer. I called again more loudly : there was still no answer.

“ Then I got out of bed and walked to the door. As I went, it was gently and slightly opened, just enough to show me a thin streak of light. At that moment I felt that some one was looking at me. Then it was instantly shut once more, as softly as it had been opened. There was not a sound to be heard. I walked on tiptoe towards the door, but it seemed to me that I had taken a hundred years to cross the room. And when at last I reached the door I felt I could not open it. I was simply paralysed with fear. And still I saw the glimmer through the key-hole and the cracks.

“ Suddenly, as I was standing transfixed with fright in front of the door, I heard sounds coming from Braun’s room, a shuffle of footsteps, and voices talking low but distinctly in a language I could not understand. It was not Italian, Spanish, nor French. The voices grew all at once louder ; I heard the noise of a struggle and a cry which ended in a stifled groan, very painful and horrible to hear. Then, whether I regained my self-control, or whether it was excess of fright

which prompted me, I don't know, but I flew to the door and tried to open it. Some one or something was pressing with all its might against it. Then I screamed at the top of my voice, and as I screamed I heard the cock crow.

"The door gave, and I almost fell into Braun's room. It was quite dark. But Braun was waked by my screams and quietly lit a match. He asked me gently what on earth was the matter. The room was empty and everything was in its place. Outside the first greyness of dawn was in the sky.

"I said I had had a nightmare, and asked him if he had not had one as well; but Braun said he had never slept better in his life.

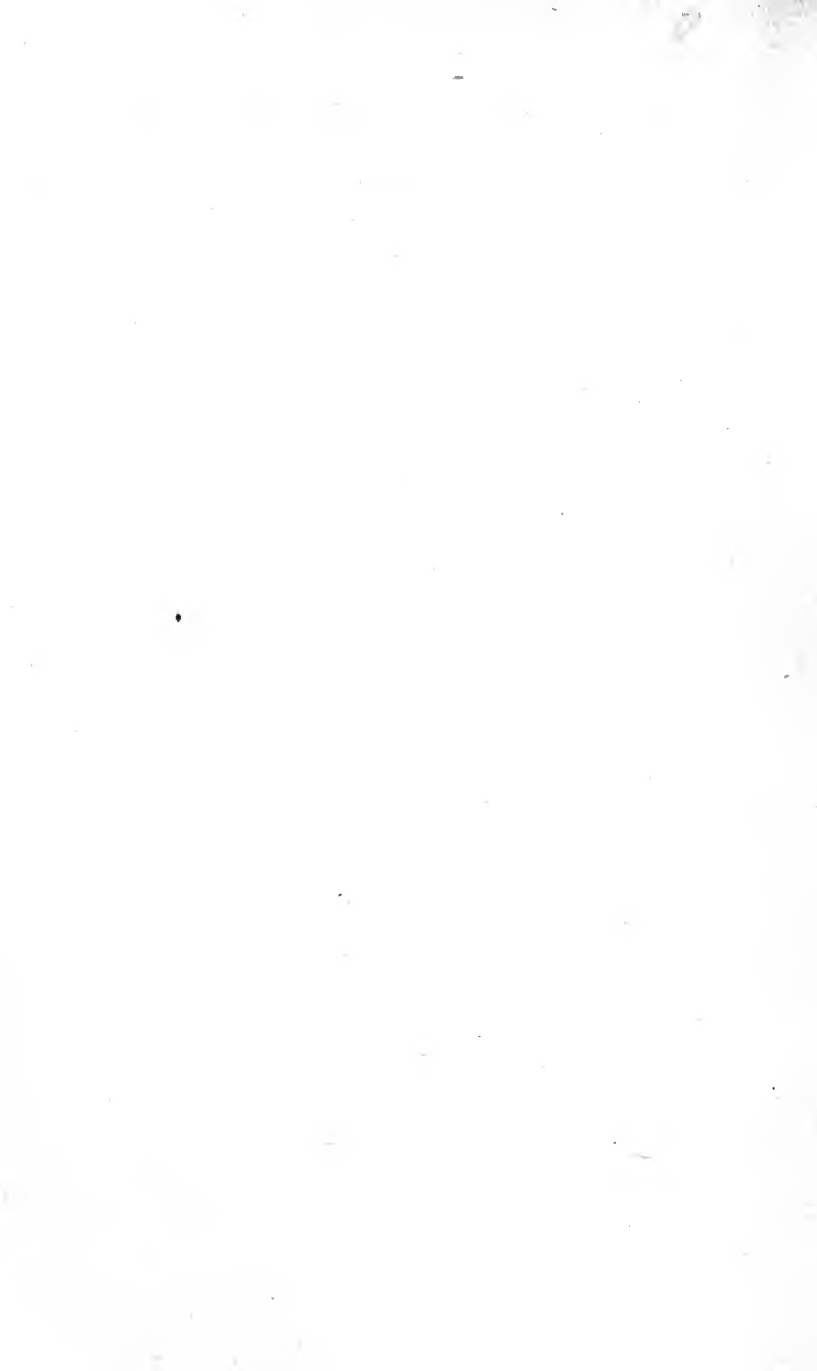
"The next day we went on with our walking tour, and when we got back to Heidelberg Braun sailed for America. I never saw him again, although we corresponded frequently, and only last week I had a letter from him, dated Nijni Novgorod, saying he would be at Moscow before the end of the month.

"And now I suppose you are all wondering what this can have to do with anything that's in the newspaper. Well, listen," and he read out the following paragraph from the *Rouskoe Slovo* :—

"Samara, II, ix. In the centre of the town, in the Hotel —, a band of armed swindlers attacked a German engineer named Braun and demanded money. On his refusal one of the

robbers stabbed Braun with a knife. The robbers, taking the money which was on him, amounting to 500 roubles, got away. Braun called for assistance, but died of his wounds in the night. It appears that he had met the swindlers at a restaurant."

"Since I have been in Russia," Jameson added, "I have often thought that I knew what language it was that was talked behind the door that night in the inn at Salzheim, but now I know it was Russian."



IV
JEAN FRANÇOIS



JEAN FRANÇOIS was a vagabond by nature, a balladmonger by profession. Like many poets in many times, he found that the business of writing verse was more amusing than lucrative; and he was constrained to supplement the earnings of his pen and his guitar by other and more profitable work. He had run away from what had been his home at the age of seven (he was a foundling, and his adopted father was a shoe-maker), without having learnt a trade. When the necessity arose he decided to supplement the art of balladmongering by that of stealing. He was skilful in both arts: he wrote verse, sang ballads, picked pockets (in the city), and stole horses (in the country) with equal facility and success. Some of his verse has reached posterity, for instance the "Ballade du Paradis Peint," which he wrote on white vellum, and illustrated himself with illuminations in red, blue and gold, for the Dauphin. It ends thus in the English version of a Balliol scholar:—

Prince, do not let your nose, your Royal nose,
Your large Imperial nose get out of joint;
Forbear to criticise my perfect prose—
Painting on vellum is my weakest point.

Again, the *ballade* of which the "Envoi" runs:—

Prince, when you light your pipe with radium pills,
Especially invented for the King—
Remember this, the worst of human ills :
Life without matches is a dismal thing,

is, in reality, only a feeble adaptation of his "Priez pour feu le vrai trésor de vie."

But although Jean François was not unknown during his lifetime, and although, as his verse testifies, he knew his name would live among those of the enduring poets after his death, his life was one of rough hardship, brief pleasures, long anxieties, and constant uncertainty. Sometimes for a few days at a time he would live in riotous luxury, but these rare epochs would immediately be succeeded by periods of want bordering on starvation. Besides which he was nearly always in peril of his life; the shadow of the gallows darkened his merriment, and the thought of the wheel made bitter his joy. Yet in spite of this hazardous and harassing life, in spite of the sharp and sudden transitions in his career, in spite of the menace of doom, the hint of the wheel and the gallows, his fund of joy remained undiminished, and this we see in his verse, which reflects with equal vividness his alternate moods of infinite enjoyment and unmitigated despair. For instance, the only two triolets which have survived

from his " Trente deux Triolets joyeux and tristes " are an example of his twofold temperament. They run thus in the literal and exact translations of them made by an eminent official :—

I wish I was dead,
 And lay deep in the grave.
 I've a pain in my head,
 I wish I was dead.
 In a coffin of lead—
 With the Wise and the Brave—
 I wish I was dead,
 And lay deep in the grave.

This passionate utterance immediately preceded, in the original text, the following verses in which his buoyant spirits rise once more to the surface :—

Thank God I'm alive
 In the light of the Sun !
 It's a quarter to five ;
 Thank God I'm alive !
 Now the hum of the hive
 Of the world has begun,
 Thank God I'm alive
 In the light of the Sun !

A more plaintive, in fact a positively wistful note, which is almost incongruous amongst the definite and sharply defined moods of Jean François, is struck in the sonnet of which only the first line has reached us : " I wish I had a hundred thousand

pounds." ("Voulientiers serais pauvre avec dix mille escus.") But in nearly all his verse, whether joyous as in the "Chant de vin et vie," or gloomy as in the "Ballade des Treize Pendus," there is a curious recurrent aspiration towards a warm fire, a sure and plentiful supper, a clean bed, and a long, long sleep. Whether Jean François moped or made merry, and in spite of the fact that he enjoyed his roving career and would not have exchanged it for the throne of an Emperor or the money-bags of Croesus, there is no doubt that he experienced the burden of an immense fatigue. He was never quite warm enough; always a little hungry; and never got as much sleep as he desired. A place where he could sleep his fill represented the highest joys of Heaven to him; and he looked forward to Death as a traveller looks forward to a warm inn where (its terrible threshold once passed), a man can sleep the clock round. Witness the sonnet which ends (the translation is mine) :—

For thou hast never turned
A stranger from thy gates or hast denied,
O hospitable Death, a place to rest.

And it is of his death and not of his life or works which I wish to tell, for it was singular. He died on Christmas Eve, 1432. The winter that year in the north of France was, as is well known, terrible

for its severe cold. The rich stayed at home, the poor died, and the unfortunate third estate of gipsies, balladmongers, tinkers, tumblers, and thieves had no chance of displaying their dexterity. In fact, they starved. Ever since the 1st of December Jean François had been unable to make a silver penny either by his song or his sleight of hand. Christmas was drawing near, and he was starving ; and this was especially bitter to him, as it was his custom (for he was not only a lover of good cheer, but a good Catholic and a strict observer of fasts and feasts) to keep the great day of Christendom fittingly. This year he had nothing to keep it with. Luck seemed to be against him ; for three days before Christmas he met in a dark side street of the town the rich and stingy *Sieur de Ranquet*. He picked the pocket of that nobleman, but owing to the extreme cold his fingers faltered, and he was discovered. He ran like a hare and managed easily enough to outstrip the miser, and to conceal himself in a den where he was well known. But unfortunately the matter did not end there. The *Sieur de Ranquet* was influential at Court ; he was implacable as well as avaricious, and his disposition positively forbade him to forgive any one who had nearly picked his pocket. Besides which he knew that Jean had often stolen his horses. He made a formal complaint at high quarters, and a warrant was issued against Jean,

offering a large sum in silver coin to the man who should bring him, alive or dead, to justice.

Now the police were keenly anxious to make an end of Jean. They knew he was guilty of a hundred thefts, but such was his skill that they had never been able to convict him ; he had often been put in prison, but he had always been released for want of evidence. This time no mistake was possible. So Jean, aware of the danger, fled from the city and sought a gipsy encampment in a neighbouring forest, where he had friends. These gipsy friends of his were robbers, outlaws, murderers and horse-stealers all of them, and hardened criminals ; they called themselves gipsies, but it was merely a courtesy title.

On Christmas Eve—it was snowing hard—Jean was walking through the forest towards the town, ready for a desperate venture, for in the camp they were starving, and he was sick almost to death of his hunted, miserable life. As he plunged through the snow he heard a moan, and he saw a child sitting at the roots of a tall tree crying. He asked what was the matter. The child—it was a little boy about five years old—said that it had run away from home because its nurse had beaten it, and had lost its way.

“ Where do you live ? ” asked Jean.

“ My father is the *Sieur de Ranquet*,” said the child.

At that moment Jean heard the shouts of his companions in the distance.

“ I want to go home,” said the little boy quietly. “ You must take me home,” and he put his hand into Jean’s hand and looked up at him and smiled.

Jean thought for a moment. The boy was richly dressed ; he had a large ruby cross hanging from a golden collar worth many hundred gold pieces. Jean knew well what would happen if his gipsy companions came across the child. They would kill it instantly.

“ All right,” said Jean, “ climb on my back.”

The little boy climbed on to his back, and Jean trudged through the snow. In an hour’s time they reached the Sieur de Ranquet’s castle ; the place was alive with bustling men and flaring torches, for the Sieur’s heir had been missed.

The Sieur looked at Jean and recognised him immediately. Jean was a public character, and especially well known to the Sieur de Ranquet. A few words were whispered. The child was sent to bed, and the archers civilly lead Jean to his dungeon. Jean was tired and sleepy. He fell asleep at once on the straw. They told him he would have to get up early the next morning, in time for a long cold journey. The gallows, they added, would be ready.

But in the night Jean dreamed a dream : he saw a child in glittering clothes and with a shining

face who came into the dungeon and broke the bars.

The child said : “ I am little St Nicholas, the children’s friend, and I think you are tired, so I’m going to take you to a quiet place.”

Jean followed the child, who led him by the hand till they came to a nice inn, very high up on the top of huge mountains. There was a blazing log fire in the room, a clean warm bed, and the windows opened on a range of snowy mountains, bright as diamonds. And the stars twinkled in the sky like the candles of a Christmas tree.

“ You can go to bed here,” said St Nicholas, “ nobody will disturb you, and when you do wake you will be quite happy and rested. Good-night, Jean.” And he went away.

The next day in the dawn, when the archers came to fetch Jean, they found he was fast asleep. They thought it was almost a pity to wake him, because he looked so happy and contented in his sleep ; but when they tried they found it was impossible.

V

THE FLUTE OF CHANG LIANG

To P. Kershaw

THE village was called Moe-tung. It was on the edge of the big main road which leads from Liao-yang to Ta-shi-chiao. It consisted of a few baked mud-houses, a dilapidated temple, a well, a clump of willows, and a pond. One of the houses I knew well ; in its square open yard, in which the rude furniture of toil lay strewn about, I had halted more than once for my midday meal, when riding from Liao-yang to the South. I had been entertained there by the owner of the house, a brawny husbandman and his fat brown children, and they had given me eggs and Indian corn. Now it was empty ; the house was deserted ; the owner, his wife and his children, had all gone, to the city probably, to seek shelter. We occupied the house ; and the Cossacks at once made a fire with the front door and any fragments of wood they could find. The house was converted into a stable and a kitchen, and the officers' quarters were established in another smaller building across the road, on the edge of a great plain, which was bright green with the standing giant millet.

This smaller cottage had an uncultivated garden in front of it, and a kind of natural summer-house made by the twining of a pumpkin plant which

spread its broad leaves over some stakes. We lay down to rest in this garden. About five miles to the north of us was the town of Liao-yang ; to the east in the distance was a range of pale blue hills, and immediately in front of us to the south, and scarcely a mile off, was the big hill of Sho-shantze. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and we had been on the move since two o'clock in the morning. The Cossacks brought us tea and pancakes, and presently news came from the town that the big battle would be fought the next day : the big battle, the real battle, which had been expected for so long and which had been constantly put off. There was a complete stillness everywhere. The officers unpacked their valises and their camp-beds. Every one arranged his bed and his goods in his chosen place, and it seemed as if we had merely begun once more to settle down for a further period of siesta in the long picnic which had been going on for the last two months. Nobody was convinced, in spite of the authentic news which we had received, that the Japanese would attack the next day.

The sunset faded into a twilight of delicious summer calm.

From the hills in the east came the noise of a few shots fired by the batteries there, and a captive balloon soared slowly, like a soap-bubble, into the eastern sky. I walked into the village ; here and

there fires were burning, and I was attracted by the sight of the deserted temple in which the wooden painted gods were grinning, bereft of their priest and of their accustomed dues. I sat down on the mossy steps of the little wooden temple, and somewhere, either from one of the knolls hard by or from one of the houses, came the sound of a flute, or rather of some primitive wooden pipe, which repeated over and over again a monotonous and piercingly sad little tune. I wondered whether it was one of the soldiers playing, but I decided this could not be the case, as the tune was more eastern than any Russian tune. On the other hand, it seemed strange that any Chinaman should be about. The tune continued to break the perfect stillness with its iterated sadness, and a vague recollection came into my mind of a Chinese legend or poem I had read long ago in London, about a flute-player called Chang Liang. But I could not bring my memory to work; its tired wheels all seemed to be buzzing feebly in different directions, and my thoughts came like thistledown and seemed to elude all efforts of concentration. And so I capitulated utterly to my drowsiness, and fell asleep as I sat on the steps of the temple.

I thought I had been sleeping for a long time and had woken before the dawn: the earth was misty, although the moon was shining; and I was no longer in the temple, but back once more at the

edge of the plain. "They must have fetched me back while I slept," I thought to myself. But when I looked round I saw no trace of the officers, nor of the Cossacks, nor of the small house and the garden, and, stranger still, the millet had been reaped and the plain was covered with low stubble, and on it were pitched some curiously-shaped tents, which I saw were guarded by soldiers. But these soldiers were Chinamen, and yet unlike any Chinamen I had ever seen; for some of them carried halberds, the double-armed halberds of the period of Charles I., and others, halberds with a crescent on one side, like those which were used in the days of Henry VII. And I then noticed that a whole multitude of soldiers were lying asleep on the ground, armed with two-edged swords and bows and arrows. And their clothes seemed unfamiliar and brighter than the clothes which Chinese soldiers wear nowadays.

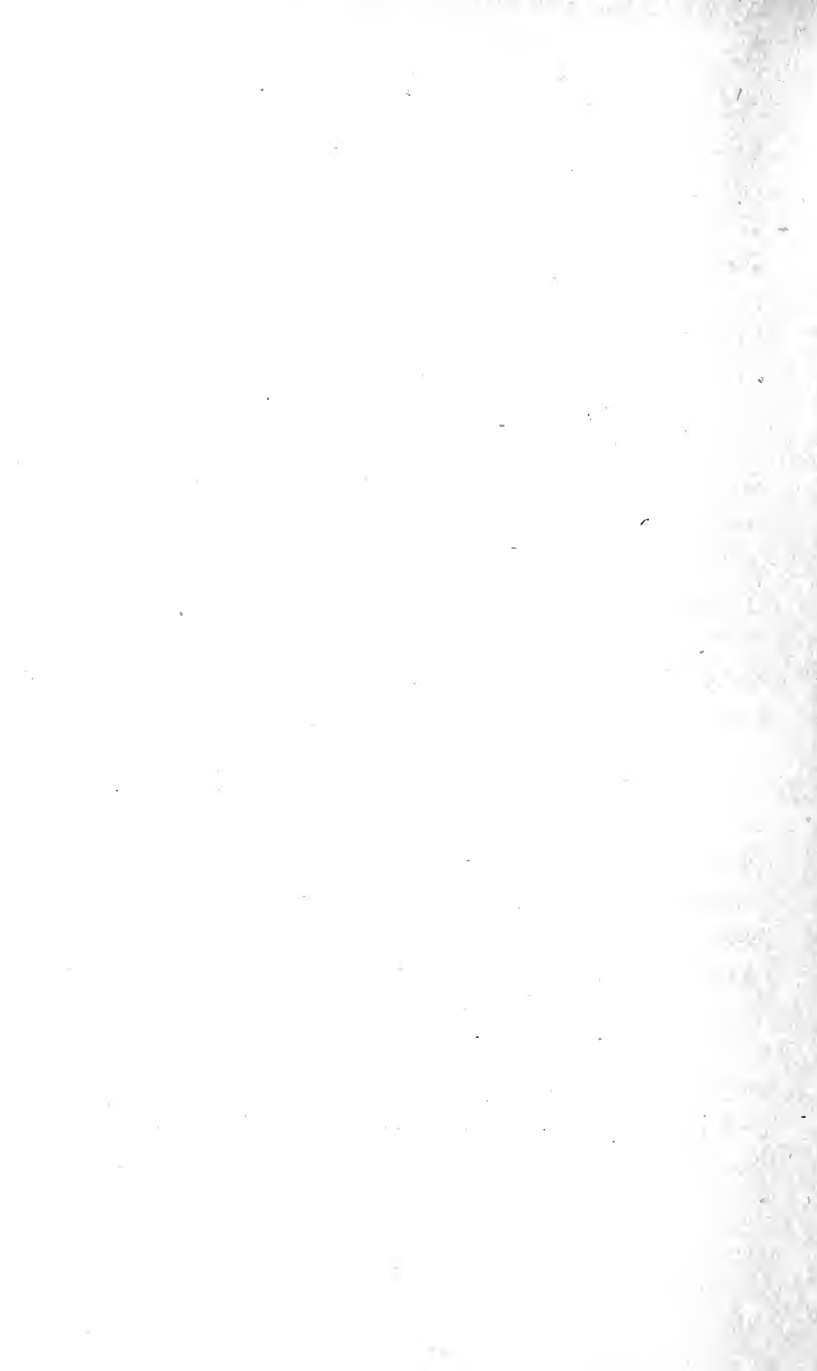
As I wondered what all this meant, a note of music came stealing through the night, and at first it seemed to be the same tune as I heard in the temple before I dropped off to sleep; but presently I was sure that this was a mistake, for the sound was richer and more mellow, and like that of a bell, only of an enchanted bell, such as that which is fabled to sound beneath the ocean. And the music seemed to rise and fall, to grow clear and full, and just as it was floating nearer and nearer, it died

away in a sigh : but as it did so the distant hills seemed to catch it and to send it back in the company of a thousand echoes, till the whole night was filled and trembling with an unearthly chorus. The sleeping soldiers gradually stirred and sat listening spellbound to the music. And in the eyes of the sentries, who were standing as motionless as bronze statues in front of the tents, I could see the tears glistening. And the whole of the sleeping army awoke from its slumber and listened to the strange sound. From the tents came men in glittering silks (the Generals, I supposed) and listened also. The soldiers looked at each other and said no word. And then all at once, as though obeying some silent word of command given by some unseen captain, one by one they walked away over the plain, leaving their tents behind them. They all marched off into the east, as if they were following the music into the heart of the hills, and soon, of all that great army which had been gathered together on the plain, not one man was left. Then the music changed and seemed to grow different and more familiar, and with a start I became aware that I had been asleep and dreaming, and that I was sitting on the temple steps once more in the twilight, and that not far off, round a fire, some soldiers were singing. It was a dream, and my sleep could not have been a long one, for it was still twilight and the darkness had not yet come.

Fully awake now, I remembered clearly the old legend which had haunted me, and had taken shape in my dream. It was that of an army which on the night before the battle had heard the flute of Chang Liang. By his playing he had brought before the rude soldiers the far-off scenes of their childhood, which they had not looked upon for years—the sights and the sounds of their homes, the faces and the spots which were familiar to them and dear. And they, as they heard this music, and felt these memories well up in their hearts, were seized with a longing and a desire for home so potent and so imperative that one by one they left the battlefield in silence, and when the enemy came at the dawn, they found the plain deserted and empty, for in one minute the flute of Chang Liang had stolen the hearts of eight thousand men.

And I felt certain that I had heard the flute of Chang Liang this night and that the soldiers had heard it too ; for now round a fire a group of them were listening to the song of one of their comrades, a man from the south, who was singing of the quiet waters of the Don, and of a Cossack who had come back to his native land after many days and found his true love wedded to another. I felt it was the flute of Chang Liang which had prompted the southerner to sing, and without doubt the men saw before them the great moon shining over the broad village street in the dark July and August nights,

and heard the noise of dancing and song and the cheerful rhythmic accompaniment of the concertina. Or (if they came from the south) they saw the smiling thatched farms, whitewashed, or painted in light green distemper, with vines growing on their walls ; or again, they felt the smell of the beanfields in June, and saw in their minds' eye the panorama of the melting snows, when at a fairy touch the long winter is defeated, the meadows are flooded, and the trees seem to float about in the shining water like shapes invoked by a wizard. They saw these things and yearned towards them with all their hearts, here in this uncouth country where they were to fight a strange people for some unaccountable reason. But Chang Liang had played his flute to them in vain. It was in vain that he had tried to lure them back to their homes, and in vain that he had melted their hearts with the memories of their childhood. For the battle began at dawn the next morning, and when the enemy attacked they found an army there to meet them ; and the battle lasted for two days on this very spot ; and many of the men to whom Chang Liang had brought back through his flute the sights and the sounds of their childhood, were fated never to hear again those familiar sounds, nor to see the land and the faces which they loved.



VI
“WHAT IS TRUTH?”

To E. I. Huber

SITTING opposite me in the second-class carriage of the express train which was crawling at a leisurely pace from Moscow to the south was a little girl who looked as if she were about twelve years old, with her mother. The mother was a large fair-haired person, with a good-natured expression. They had a dog with them, and the little girl, whose whole face twitched every now and then from St Vitus' dance, got out at nearly every station to buy food for the dog. On the same side of the carriage, in the opposite corner, another lady (thin, fair, and wearing a pince-nez) was reading the newspaper. She and the mother of the child soon made friends over the dog. That is to say, the dog made friends with the strange lady and was reproved by its mistress, and the strange lady said: "Please don't scold him. He is not in the least in my way, and I like dogs." They then began to talk.

The large lady was going to the country. She and her daughter had been ordered to go there by the doctor. She had spent six weeks in Moscow under medical treatment, and they had now been told to finish this cure with a thorough rest in the country air. The thin lady asked her the name

of her doctor, and before ascertaining what was the disease in question, recommended another doctor who had cured a friend of hers, almost as though by miracle, of heart disease. The large lady seemed interested and wrote down the direction of the marvellous physician. She was herself suffering, she said, from a nervous illness, and her daughter had St Vitus' dance. They were so far quite satisfied with their doctor. They talked for some time exclusively about medical matters, comparing notes about doctors, diseases, and remedies. The thin lady said she had been cured of all her ills by aspirin and cinnamon.

In the course of the conversation the stout lady mentioned her husband, who, it turned out, was the head of the gendarmerie in a town in Siberia, not far from Irkutsk. This seemed to interest the thin lady immensely. She at once asked what were his political views, and what she herself thought about politics.

The large lady seemed to be reluctant to talk politics and evaded the questions for some time, but after much desultory conversation, which always came back to the same point, she said:—

“My husband is a Conservative; they call him a ‘Black Hundred,’ but it’s most unfair and untrue, because he is a very good man and very just. He has his own opinions and he is sincere. He does not believe in the revolution or in the re-

volutionaries. He took the oath to serve the Emperor when everything went quietly and well, and now, although I have often begged him to leave the Service, he says it would be very wrong to leave just because it is dangerous. ‘ I have taken the oath,’ he says, ‘ and I must keep it.’ ”

Here she stopped, but after some further questions on the part of the thin lady, she said : “ I never had time or leisure to think of these questions. I was married when I was sixteen. I have had eight children, and they all died one after the other except this one, who was the eldest. I used to see political exiles and prisoners, and I used to feel sympathy for them. I used to hear about people being sent here and there, and sometimes I used to go down on my knees to my husband to do what he could for them, but I never thought about there being any particular idea at the back of all this.” Then after a short pause she added : “ It first dawned on me at Moscow. It was after the big strike, and I was on my way home. I had been staying with some friends in the country, and I happened by chance to see the funeral of that man Bauman, the doctor, who was killed. I was very much impressed when I saw that huge procession go past, all the men singing the funeral march, and I understood that Bauman himself had nothing to do with it. Who cared about Bauman ? But I understood that he was a symbol. I saw that there

must be a big idea which moves all these people to give up everything, to go to prison, to kill, and be killed. I understood this for the first time at that funeral. I cried when the crowd went past. I understood there was a big idea, a great cause behind it all. Then I went home.

“There were disorders in Siberia: you know in Siberia we are much freer than you are. There is only one society. The officials, the political people, revolutionaries, exiles, everybody, in fact, all meet constantly. I used to go to political meetings, and to see and talk with the Liberal and revolutionary leaders. Then I began to be disappointed because what had always struck me as unjust was that one man, just because he happened to be, say, Ivan Pavlovitch, should be able to rule over another man who happened to be, say, Ivan Ivanovitch. And now that these Republics were being made, it seemed that the same thing was beginning all over again—that all the places of authority were being seized and dealt out amongst another lot of people who were behaving exactly like those who had authority before. The arbitrary authority was there just the same, only it had changed hands, and this puzzled me very much, and I began to ask myself, ‘Where is the truth?’”

“What did your husband think?” asked the thin lady.

“My husband did not like to talk about these

things,” she answered. “ He says, ‘ I am in the Service, and I have to serve. It is not my business to have opinions.’ ”

“ But all those Republics didn’t last very long,” rejoined the thin lady.

“ No,” continued the other ; “ we never had a Republic, and after a time they arrested the chief agitator, who was the soul of the revolutionary movement in our town, a wonderful orator. I had heard him speak several times and been carried away. When he was arrested I saw him taken to prison, and he said ‘ Good-bye ’ to the people, and bowed to them in the street in such an exaggerated theatrical way that I was astonished and felt uncomfortable. Here, I thought, is a man who can sacrifice himself for an idea, and who seemed to be thoroughly sincere, and yet he behaves theatrically and poses as if he were not sincere. I felt more puzzled than ever, and I asked my husband to let me go and see him in prison. I thought that perhaps after talking to him I could solve the riddle, and find out once for all who was right and who was wrong. My husband let me go, and I was admitted into his cell.

“ ‘ You know who I am,’ I said, ‘ since I am here, and I am admitted inside these locked doors ? ’ He nodded. Then I asked him whether I could be of any use to him. He said that he had all that he wanted ; and like this the ice was broken, and I

asked him presently if he believed in the whole movement. He said that until the 17th of October, when the Manifesto had been issued, he had believed with all his soul in it; but the events of the last months had caused him to change his mind. He now thought that the work of his party, and, in fact, the whole movement, which had been going on for over fifty years, had really been in vain. ‘We shall have,’ he said, ‘to begin again from the very beginning, because the Russian people are not ready for us yet, and probably another fifty years will have to go by before they are ready.’

“I left him very much perplexed. He was set free not long afterwards, in virtue of some manifesto, and because there had been no disorders in our town and he had not been the cause of any bloodshed. Soon after he came out of prison my husband met him, and he said to my husband: ‘I suppose you will not shake hands with me?’ And my husband replied: ‘Because our views are different there is no reason why both of us should not be honest men,’ and he shook hands with him.”

The conversation now became a discussion about the various ideals of various people and parties holding different political views. The large lady kept on expressing the puzzled state of mind in which she was.

The whole conversation, of which I have given

a very condensed report, was spread over a long time, and often interrupted. Later they reached the subject of political assassination, and the large lady said :—

“About two months after I came home that year, one day when I was out driving with my daughter in a sledge the revolutionaries fired six shots at us from revolvers. We were not hit, but one bullet went through the coachman’s cap. Ever since then I have had nervous fits and my daughter has had St Vitus’ dance. We have to go to Moscow every year to be treated. And it is so difficult. I don’t know how to manage. When I am at home I feel as if I ought to go, and when I am away I never have a moment’s peace, because I cannot help thinking the whole time that my husband is in danger. A few weeks after they shot at us I met some of the revolutionary party at a meeting, and I asked them why they had shot at myself and my daughter. I could have understood it if they had shot at my husband. But why at us? He said: ‘When the wood is cut down, the chips fly about.’¹ And now I don’t know what to think about it all.

“Sometimes I think it is all a mistake, and I feel that the revolutionaries are posing and playing a part, and that so soon as they get the upper-hand they will be as bad as what we have

¹ A Russian proverb.

now; and then I say to myself, all the same they are acting in a cause, and it is a great cause, and they are working for liberty and for the people. And, then, would the people be better off if they had their way? The more I think of it the more puzzled I am. Who is right? Is my husband right? Are they right? Is it a great cause? How can they be wrong if they are imprisoned and killed for what they believe? Where is the truth, and what is truth?”

VII
A LUNCHEON-PARTY



MRS BERGMANN was a widow. She was American by birth and marriage, and English by education and habits. She was a fair, beautiful woman, with large eyes and a white complexion. Her weak point was ambition, and ambition with her took the form of luncheon-parties.

It was one summer afternoon that she was seized with the great idea of her life. It consisted in giving a luncheon-party which should be more original and amusing than any other which had ever been given in London. The idea became a mania. It left her no peace. It possessed her like venom or like madness. She could think of nothing else. She racked her brains in imagining how it could be done. But the more she was harassed by this aim the further off its realisation appeared to her to be. At last it began to weigh upon her. She lost her spirits and her appetite ; her friends began to remark with anxiety on the change in her behaviour and in her looks. She herself felt that the situation was intolerable, and that success or suicide lay before her.

One evening towards the end of June, as she was sitting in her lovely drawing-room in her

house in Mayfair, in front of her tea-table, on which the tea stood untasted, brooding over the question which unceasingly tormented her, she cried out, half aloud :—

“ I’d sell my soul to the devil if he would give me what I wish.”

At that moment the footman entered the room and said there was a gentleman downstairs who wished to speak to her.

“ What is his name ? ” asked Mrs Bergmann.

The footman said he had not caught the gentleman’s name, and he handed her a card on a tray.

She took the card. On it was written :—

MR NICHOLAS L. SATAN,
1, Pandemonium Terrace,
BURNING MARLE, HELL.

Telephone, No. 1 Central.

“ Show him up,” said Mrs Bergmann, quite naturally, as though she had been expecting the visitor. She wondered at her own behaviour, and seemed to herself to be acting inevitably, as one does in dreams.

Mr Satan was shown in. He had a professional air about him, but not of the kind that suggests needy or even learned professionalism. He was dark ; his features were sharp and regular, his eyes keen, his complexion pale, his mouth vigorous, and

his chin prominent. He was well dressed in a frock coat, black tie, and patent leather boots. He would never have been taken for a conjurer or a shop-walker, but he might have been taken for a slightly depraved Art-photographer who had known better days. He sat down near the tea-table opposite Mrs Bergmann, holding his top hat, which had a slight mourning band round it, in his hand.

"I understand, madam," he spoke with an even American intonation, "you wish to be supplied with a guest who will make all other luncheon-parties look, so to speak, like thirty cents."

"Yes, that is just what I want," answered Mrs Bergmann, who continued to be surprised at herself.

"Well, I reckon there's no one living who'd suit," said Mr Satan, "and I'd better supply you with a celebrity of *a* former generation." He then took out a small pocket-book from his coat pocket, and quickly turning over its leaves he asked in a monotonous tone: "Would you like a Philosopher? Anaxagoras, Aristotle, Aurelius, M.?"

"Oh! no," answered Mrs Bergmann with decision, "they would ruin any luncheon."

"A Saint?" suggested Mr Satan, "Antony, Ditto of Padua, Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm?"

"Good heavens, no," said Mrs Bergmann.

“ A Theologian, good arguer ? ” asked Mr Satan, “ Aquinas, T ? ”

“ No,” interrupted Mrs Bergmann, “ for heaven’s sake don’t always give me the A’s, or we shall never get on to anything. You’ll be offering me Adam and Abel next.”

“ I beg your pardon,” said Mr Satan, “ Latimer, Laud—Historic Interest, Church and Politics combined,” he added quickly.

“ I don’t want a clergyman,” said Mrs Bergmann.

“ Artist ? ” said Mr Satan, “ Andrea del Sarto, Angelo, M., Apelles ? ”

“ You’re going back to the A’s,” interrupted Mrs Bergmann.

“ Bellini, Benvenuto Cellini, Botticelli ? ” he continued imperturbably.

“ What’s the use of them when I can get Sargent every day ? ” asked Mrs Bergmann.

“ A man of action, perhaps ? Alexander, Bonaparte, Cæsar, J., Cromwell, O., Hannibal ? ”

“ Too heavy for luncheon,” she answered, “ they would do for *dinner*.”

“ Plain statesman ? Bismarck, Count ; Chatham, Lord ; Franklin, B. ; Richelieu, Cardinal.”

“ That would make the members of the Cabinet feel uncomfortable,” she said.

“ A Monarch ? Alfred ; beg pardon, he’s an A. Richard III., Peter the Great, Louis XI., Nero ? ”

"No," said Mrs Bergmann. "I can't have a Royalty. It would make it too stiff."

"I have it," said Mr Satan, "a highwayman: Dick Turpin; or a housebreaker: Jack Sheppard or Charles Peace?"

"Oh! no," said Mrs Bergmann, "they might steal the Sèvres."

"A musician? Bach or Beethoven?" he suggested.

"He's getting into the B's now," thought Mrs Bergmann. "No," she added aloud, "we should have to ask him to play, and he can't play Wagner, I suppose, and musicians are so touchy."

"I think I have it," said Mr Satan, "a wit: Dr Johnson, Sheridan, Sidney Smith?"

"We should probably find their jokes dull *now*," said Mrs Bergmann, thoughtfully.

"Miscellaneous?" inquired Mr Satan, and, turning over several leaves of his notebook, he rattled out the following names: "Alcibiades, kind of statesman; Beau Brummel, fop; Cagliostro, conjurer; Robespierre, politician; Charles Stuart, Pretender; Warwick, King-maker; Borgia, A., Pope; Ditto, C., toxicologist; Wallenstein, mercenary; Bacon, Roger, man of science; Ditto, F., dishonest official; Tell, W., patriot; Jones, Paul, pirate; Lucullus, glutton; Simon Stylites, eccentric; Casanova, loose liver; Casabianca,

cabin-boy ; Chicot, jester ; Sayers, T., prize-fighter ; Cook, Captain, tourist ; Nebuchadnezzar, food-faddist ; Juan, D., lover ; Froissart, war correspondent ; Julian, apostate ? ”

“ Don’t you see,” said Mrs Bergmann, “ we must have some one everybody has heard of ? ”

“ David Garrick, actor and wit ? ” suggested Mr Satan.

“ It’s no good having an actor nobody has seen act,” said Mrs Bergmann.

“ What about a poet ? ” asked Mr Satan, “ Homer, Virgil, Dante, Byron, Shakespeare ? ”

“ Shakespeare ! ” she cried out, “ the very thing. Everybody has heard of Shakespeare, more or less, and I expect he’d get on with everybody, and wouldn’t feel offended if I asked Alfred Austin or some other poet to meet him. Can you get me Shakespeare ? ”

“ Certainly,” said Mr Satan, “ day and date ? ”

“ It must be Thursday fortnight,” said Mrs Bergmann. “ And what, ah—er—your terms ? ”

“ The usual terms,” he answered. “ In return for supernatural service rendered you during your lifetime, your soul reverts to me at your death.”

Mrs Bergmann’s brain began to work quickly. She was above all things a practical woman, and she immediately felt she was being defrauded.

“ I cannot consent to such terms,” she said.

“Surely you recognise the fundamental difference between this proposed contract and those which you concluded with others—with Faust, for instance? They sold the full control of their soul after death on condition of your putting yourself at their entire disposal during the whole of their lifetime, whereas you ask me to do the same thing in return for a few hours’ service. The proposal is preposterous.”

Mr Satan rose from his chair. “In that case, madam,” he said, “I have the honour to wish you a good afternoon.”

“Stop a moment,” said Mrs Bergmann, “I don’t see why we shouldn’t arrive at a compromise. I am perfectly willing that you should have the control over my soul for a limited number of years—I believe there are precedents for such a course—let us say a million years.”

“Ten million,” said Mr Satan, quietly but firmly.

“In that case,” answered Mrs Bergmann, “we will take no notice of leap year, and we will count 365 days in every year.”

“Certainly,” said Mr Satan, with an expression of somewhat ruffled dignity, “we always allow leap year, but, of course, thirteen years will count as twelve.”

“Of course,” said Mrs Bergmann with equal dignity.

“Then perhaps you will not mind signing the

contract at once," said Mr Satan, drawing from his pocket a type-written page.

Mrs Bergmann walked to the writing-table and took the paper from his hand.

"Over the stamp, please," said Mr Satan.

"Must I—er—sign it in blood?" asked Mrs Bergmann, hesitatingly.

"You can if you like," said Mr Satan, "but I prefer red ink; it is quicker and more convenient."

He handed her a stylograph pen.

"Must it be witnessed?" she asked.

"No," he replied, "these kind of documents don't need a witness."

In a firm, bold handwriting Mrs Bergmann signed her name in red ink across the sixpenny stamp. She half expected to hear a clap of thunder and to see Mr Satan disappear, but nothing of the kind occurred. Mr Satan took the document, folded it, placed it in his pocket-book, took up his hat and gloves, and said:

"Mr William Shakespeare will call to luncheon on Thursday week. At what hour is the luncheon to be?"

"One-thirty," said Mrs Bergmann.

"He may be a few minutes late," answered Mr Satan. "Good afternoon, madam," and he bowed and withdrew.

Mrs Bergmann chuckled to herself when she was alone. "I have done him," she thought to herself,

“because ten million years in eternity is nothing. He might just as well have said one second as ten million years, since anything less than eternity in eternity is nothing. It is curious how stupid the devil is in spite of all his experience. Now I must think about my invitations.”

II

The morning of Mrs Bergmann's luncheon had arrived. She had asked thirteen men and nine women.

But an hour before luncheon an incident happened which nearly drove Mrs Bergmann distracted. One of her guests, who was also one of her most intimate friends, Mrs Lockton, telephoned to her saying she had quite forgotten, but she had asked on that day a man to luncheon whom she did not know, and who had been sent to her by Walford, the famous professor. She ended the message by saying she would bring the stranger with her.

“What is his name?” asked Mrs Bergmann, not without intense irritation, meaning to put a veto on the suggestion.

“His name is——” and at that moment the telephone communication was interrupted, and in spite of desperate efforts Mrs Bergmann was unable to get on to Mrs Lockton again. She reflected

that it was quite useless for her to send a message saying that she had no room at her table, because Angela Lockton would probably bring the stranger all the same. Then she further reflected that in the excitement caused by the presence of Shakespeare it would not really much matter whether there was a stranger there or not. A little before half-past one the guests began to arrive. Lord Pantry of Assouan, the famous soldier, was the first comer. He was soon followed by Professor Morgan, an authority on Greek literature; Mr Peebles, the ex-Prime Minister; Mrs Hubert Baldwin, the immensely popular novelist; the fascinating Mrs Rupert Duncan, who was lending her genius to one of Ibsen's heroines at that moment; Miss Medea Tring, one of the latest American beauties; Corporal, the portrait-painter; Richard Giles, critic and man of letters; Hereward Blenheim, a young and rising politician, who before the age of thirty had already risen higher than most men of sixty; Sir Horace Silvester, K.C.M.G., the brilliant financier, with his beautiful wife Lady Irene; Professor Leo Newcastle, the eminent man of science; Lady Hyacinth Gloucester, and Mrs Milden, who were well known for their beauty and charm; Osmond Hall, the paradoxical playwright; Monsieur Faubourg, the psychological novelist; Count Sciarra, an Italian nobleman, about fifty years old, who had written a history of the Popes,

and who was now staying in London; Lady Herman, the beauty of a former generation, still extremely handsome; and Willmott, the successful actor-manager. They were all assembled in the drawing-room upstairs, talking in knots and groups, and pervaded by a feeling of pleasurable excitement and expectation, so much so that conversation was intermittent, and nearly everybody was talking about the weather. The Right Hon. John Lockton, the eminent lawyer, was the last guest to arrive.

“Angela will be here in a moment,” he explained; “she asked me to come on first.”

Mrs Bergmann grew restless. It was half-past one, and no Shakespeare. She tried to make her guests talk, with indifferent success. The expectation was too great. Everybody was absorbed by the thought of what was going to happen next. Ten minutes passed thus, and Mrs Bergmann grew more and more anxious.

At last the bell rang, and soon Mrs Lockton walked upstairs, leading with her a quite insignificant, ordinary-looking, middle-aged, rather portly man with shiny black hair, bald on the top of his head, and a blank, good-natured expression.

“I’m so sorry to be so late, Louise dear,” she said. “Let me introduce Mr—— to you.” And whether she had forgotten the name or not, Mrs Bergmann did not know or care at the time, but it was mum-

bled in such a manner that it was impossible to catch it. Mrs Bergmann shook hands with him absent-mindedly, and, looking at the clock, saw that it was ten minutes to two.

“ I have been deceived,” she thought to herself, and anger rose in her breast like a wave. At the same time she felt the one thing necessary was not to lose her head, or let anything damp the spirits of her guests.

“ We’ll go down to luncheon directly,” she said. “ I’m expecting some one else, but he probably won’t come till later.” She led the way and everybody trooped downstairs to the dining-room, feeling that disappointment was in store for them. Mrs Bergmann left the place on her right vacant ; she did not dare fill it up, because in her heart of hearts she felt certain Shakespeare would arrive, and she looked forward to a *coup de théâtre*, which would be quite spoilt if his place was occupied. On her left sat Count Sciarra ; the unknown friend of Angela Lockton sat at the end of the table next to Willmott.

The luncheon started haltingly. Angela Lockton’s friend was heard saying in a clear voice that the dust in London was very trying.

“ Have you come from the country ? ” asked M. Faubourg. “ I myself am just returned from Oxford, where I once more admired your admirable English lawns—*vos pelouses séculaires*.”

“ Yes,” said the stranger, “ I only came up to town to-day, because it seems indeed a waste and a pity to spend the finest time of the year in London.”

Count Sciarra, who had not uttered a word since he had entered the house, turned to his hostess and asked her whom she considered, after herself, to be the most beautiful woman in the room, Lady Irene, Lady Hyacinth, or Mrs Milden ?

“ Mrs Milden,” he went on, “ has the smile of La Gioconda, and hands and hair for Leonardo to paint. Lady Gloucester,” he continued, leaving out the Christian name, “ is English, like one of Shakespeare’s women, Desdemona or Imogen ; and Lady Irene has no nationality, she belongs to the dream worlds of Shelley and D’Annunzio : she is the guardian Lady of Shelley’s ‘ *Sensitiva*,’ the vision of the lily.

‘ *Quale un vaso liturgico d’argento.*’

And you, madame, you take away all my sense of criticism. ‘ *Vous me troublez trop pour que je définisse votre genre de beauté.*’ ”

Mrs Milden was soon engaged in a deep tête-à-tête with Mr Peebles, who was heard every now and then to say, “ Quite, quite.” Miss Tring was holding forth to Silvester on French sculpture, and Silvester now and again said : “ Oh ! really ! ” in the tone of intense interest which his friends

knew indicated that he was being acutely bored. Lady Hyacinth was discussing Socialism with Osmond Hall, Lady Herman was discussing the theory of evolution with Professor Newcastle, Mrs Lockton, the question of the French Church, with Faubourg; and Blenheim was discharging molten fragments of embryo exordiums and perorations on the subject of the stage to Willmott; in fact, there was a general buzz of conversation.

“Have you been to see Antony and Cleopatra?” asked Willmott of the stranger.

“Yes,” said the neighbour, “I went last night; many authors have treated the subject, and the version I saw last night was very pretty. I couldn’t get a programme so I didn’t see who——”

“I think my version,” interrupted Willmott, with pride, “is admitted to be the best.”

“Ah! it is your version!” said the stranger. “I beg your pardon, I think you treated the subject very well.”

“Yes,” said Willmott, “it is ungrateful material, but I think I made something fine of it.”

“No doubt, no doubt,” said the stranger.

“Do tell us,” Mrs Baldwin was heard to ask M. Faubourg across the table, “what the young generation are doing in France? Who are the young novelists?”

“There are no young novelists worth mentioning,” answered M. Faubourg.

Miss Tring broke in and said she considered "Le Visage Emerveillé," by the Comtesse de Noailles, to be the most beautiful book of the century, with the exception, perhaps, of the "Tagebuch einer Verlorenen."

But from the end of the table Blenheim's utterance was heard preponderating over that of his neighbours. He was making a fine speech on the modern stage, comparing an actor-manager to Napoleon, and commenting on the campaigns of the latter in detail.

Quite heedless of this Mr Willmott was carrying on an equally impassioned but much slower monologue on his conception of the character of Cyrano de Bergerac, which he said he intended to produce. "Cyrano," he said, "has been maligned by Coquelin. Coquelin is a great artist, but he did not understand Cyrano. Cyrano is a dreamer, a poet; he is a martyr of thought like Tolstoi, a sacrifice to wasted, useless action, like Hamlet; he is a Molière come too soon, a Bayard come too late, a John the Baptist of the stage, calling out in vain in the wilderness—of bricks and mortar; he is misunderstood;—an enigma, an anachronism, a premature herald, a false dawn."

Count Sciarra was engaged in a third monologue at the head of the table. He was talking at the same time to Mrs Bergmann, Lady Irene, and Lady Hyacinth about the devil. "Ah que j'aime le

diable !” he was saying in low, tender tones. “The devil who creates your beauty to lure us to destruction, the devil who puts honey into the voice of the siren, the dolce sirena—

“*Che i marinari in mezzo il mar dismaga*”

(and he hummed this line in a sing-song two or three times over)—“the devil who makes us dream and doubt, and who made life interesting by persuading Eve to eat the silver apple—what would life have been if she had not eaten the apple? We should all be in the silly trees of the Garden of Eden, and I should be sitting next to you” (he said to Mrs Bergmann), “without knowing that you were beautiful; *que vous êtes belle et que vous êtes désirable; que vous êtes puissante et câline, que je fais naufrage dans une mer d’amour—e il naufragio m’è dolce in questo mare—en un mot, que je vous aime.*”

“Life outside the garden of Eden has many drawbacks,” said Mrs Bergmann, who, although she was inwardly pleased by Count Sciarra’s remarks, saw by Lady Irene’s expression that she thought he was mad.

“*Aucun ‘drawback,’*” answered Sciarra, “*n’égalerait celui de contempler les divins contours féminins sans un frisson. Pensez donc si Madame Bergmann——*”

“Count Sciarra,” interrupted Mrs Bergmann,

terrified of what was coming next, "do tell me about the book you are writing on Venice."

Mrs Lockton was at that moment discussing portraiture in novels with M. Faubourg, and during a pause Miss Tring was heard to make the following remark: "And is it true, M. Faubourg, that 'Cécile' in 'La Mauvaise Bonté' is a portrait of some one you once loved and who treated you very badly?"

M. Faubourg, a little embarrassed, said that a creative artist made a character out of many originals.

Then, seeing that nobody was saying a word to his neighbour, he turned round and asked him if he had been to the Academy.

"Yes," answered the stranger; "it gets worse every year, doesn't it?"

"But Mr Corporal's pictures are always worth seeing," said Faubourg.

"I think he paints men better than women," said the stranger; "he doesn't flatter people, but of course his pictures are very clever."

At this moment the attention of the whole table was monopolised by Osmond Hall, who began to discuss the scenario of a new play he was writing. "My play," he began, "is going to be called 'The King of the North Pole.' I have never been to the North Pole, and I don't mean to go there. It's not necessary to have first-hand knowledge of technical

subjects in order to write a play. People say that Shakespeare must have studied the law, because his allusions to the law are frequent and accurate. That does not prove that he knew law any more than the fact that he put a sea in Bohemia proves that he did not know geography. It proves he was a dramatist. He wanted a sea in Bohemia. He wanted lawyer's 'shop.' I should do just the same thing myself. I wrote a play about doctors, knowing nothing about medicine: I asked a friend to give me the necessary information. Shakespeare, I expect, asked his friends to give him the legal information he required."

Every allusion to Shakespeare was a stab to Mrs Bergmann.

"Shakespeare's knowledge of the law is very thorough," broke in Lockton.

"Not so thorough as the knowledge of medicine which is revealed in my play," said Hall.

"Shakespeare knew law by intuition," murmured Willmott, "but he did not guess what the modern stage would make of his plays."

"Let us hope not," said Giles.

"Shakespeare," said Faubourg, "was a psychologist; he had the power, I cannot say it in English, *de deviner ce qu'il ne savait pas en puisant dans le fond et le tréfond de son âme.*"

"Gammon!" said Hall; "he had the power of asking his friends for the information he required."

“ Do you really think,” asked Giles, “ that before he wrote ‘ Time delves the parallel on beauty’s brow,’ he consulted his lawyer as to a legal metaphor suitable for a sonnet ? ”

“ And do you think,” asked Mrs Duncan, “ that he asked his female relations what it would feel like to be jealous of Octavia if one happened to be Cleopatra ? ”

“ Shakespeare was a married man,” said Hall, “ and if his wife found the MSS. of his sonnets lying about he must have known a jealous woman.”

“ Shakespeare evidently didn’t trouble his friends for information on natural history,” said Professor Newcastle ; “ his remarks on the cuckoo and the bee are ridiculous.”

“ Ridiculous for a writer on natural history, not for a playwright,” said Hall. “ I myself should not mind what liberty I took with the cuckoo, the bee, or even the basilisk. I should not trouble you for accurate information on the subject ; I should not even mind saying the cuckoo lays eggs in its own nest if it suited the dramatic situation.”

The whole of this conversation was torture to Mrs Bergmann.

“ Shakespeare,” said Lady Hyacinth, “ had a universal nature ; one can’t help thinking he was almost like God.”

“That’s what people will say of me a hundred years hence,” said Hall; “only it is to be hoped they’ll leave out the ‘almost.’”

“Shakespeare understood love,” said Lady Herman, in a loud voice; “he knew how a man makes love to a woman. If Richard III. had made love to me as Shakespeare describes him doing it, I’m not sure that I could have resisted him. But the finest of all Shakespeare’s men is Othello. That’s a real man. Desdemona was a fool. It’s not wonderful that Othello didn’t see through Iago; but Desdemona ought to have seen through him. The stupidest woman can see through a clever man like him; but, of course, Othello was a fool too.”

“Yes,” broke in Mrs Lockton, “if Napoleon had married Desdemona he would have made Iago marry one of his sisters.”

“I think Desdemona is the most pathetic of Shakespeare’s heroines,” said Lady Hyacinth; “don’t you think so, Mr Hall?”

“It’s easy enough to make a figure pathetic, who is strangled by a nigger,” answered Hall. “Now if Desdemona had been a negress Shakespeare would have started fair.”

“If only Shakespeare had lived later,” sighed Willmott, “and understood the condition of the modern stage, he would have written quite differently.”

“ If Shakespeare had lived now he would have written novels,” said Faubourg.

“ Yes,” said Mrs Baldwin, “ I feel sure you are right there.”

“ If Shakespeare had lived now,” said Sciarra to Mrs Bergmann, “ we shouldn’t notice his existence ; he would be just un monsieur comme tout le monde—like that monsieur sitting next to Faubourg,” he added in a low voice.

“ The problem about Shakespeare,” broke in Hall, “ is not how he wrote his plays. I could teach a poodle to do that in half an hour. But the problem is—What made him leave off writing just when he was beginning to know how to do it? It is as if I had left off writing plays ten years ago.”

“ Perhaps,” said the stranger, hesitatingly and modestly, “ he had made enough money by writing plays to retire on his earnings and live in the country.”

Nobody took any notice of this remark.

“ If Bacon was really the playwright,” said Lockton, “ the problem is a very different one.”

“ If Bacon had written Shakespeare’s plays,” said Silvester, “ they wouldn’t have been so bad.”

“ There seems to me to be only one argument,” said Professor Morgan, “ in favour of the Bacon theory, and that is that the range of mind displayed in Shakespeare’s plays is so great that it

would have been child's play for the man who wrote Shakespeare's plays to have written the works of Bacon."

"Yes," said Hall, "but because it would be child's play for the man who wrote my plays to have written your works and those of Professor Newcastle—which it would—it doesn't prove that you wrote my plays."

"Bacon was a philosopher," said Willmott, "and Shakespeare was a poet—a dramatic poet; but Shakespeare was also an actor, an actor-manager, and only an actor-manager could have written the plays."

"What do you think of the Bacon theory?" asked Faubourg of the stranger.

"I think," said the stranger, "that we shall soon have to say eggs and Shakespeare instead of eggs and Bacon."

This remark caused a slight shudder to pass through all the guests, and Mrs Bergmann felt sorry that she had not taken decisive measures to prevent the stranger's intrusion.

"Shakespeare wrote his own plays," said Sciarra, "and I don't know if he knew law, but he knew *le cœur de la femme*. Cleopatra bids her slave find out the colour of Octavio's hair; that is just what my wife, my Angelica, would do if I were to marry some one in London while she was at Rome."

“ Mr Gladstone used to say,” broke in Lockton, “ that Dante was inferior to Shakespeare, because he was too great an optimist.”

“ Dante was not an optimist,” said Sciarra, “ about the future life of politicians. But I think they were both of them pessimists about man and both optimists about God.”

“ Shakespeare,” began Blenheim ; but he was interrupted by Mrs Duncan who cried out :—

“ I wish he were alive now and would write me a part, a real woman’s part. The women have so little to do in Shakespeare’s plays. There’s Juliet ; but one can’t play Juliet till one’s forty, and then one’s too old to look fourteen. There’s Lady Macbeth ; but she’s got nothing to do except walk in her sleep and say, ‘ Out, damned spot ! ’ There were no actresses in his days, and of course it was no use writing a woman’s part for a boy.”

“ You should have been born in France,” said Faubourg, “ Racine’s women are created for you to play.”

“ Ah ! you’ve got Sarah,” said Mrs Duncan, “ you don’t want anyone else.”

“ I think Racine’s boring,” said Mrs Lockton, “ he’s so artificial.”

“ Oh ! don’t say that,” said Giles, “ Racine is the most exquisite of poets, so sensitive, so acute, and so harmonious.”

" I like Rostand better," said Mrs Lockton.

" Rostand ! " exclaimed Miss Tring, in disgust, " he writes such bad verses—du caoutchouc—he's so vulgar."

" It is true," said Willmott, " he's an amateur. He has never written professionally for his bread but only for his pleasure."

" But in that sense," said Giles, " God is an amateur."

" I confess," said Peebles, " that I cannot appreciate French poetry. I can read Rousseau with pleasure, and Bossuet ; but I cannot admire Corneille and Racine."

" Everybody writes plays now," said Faubourg, with a sigh.

" I have never written a play," said Lord Pantry.

" Nor I," said Lockton.

" But nearly everyone at this table has," said Faubourg. " Mrs Baldwin has written ' Matilda,' Mr Giles has written a tragedy called ' Queen Swafrod,' I wrote a play in my youth, my ' Le Ménétrier de Parme ' ; I'm sure Corporal has written a play. Count Sciarra must have written several ; have you ever written a play ? " he said, turning to his neighbour, the stranger.

" Yes," answered the stranger, " I once wrote a play called ' Hamlet.' "

" You were courageous with such an original before you," said Faubourg, severely.

“ Yes,” said the stranger, “ the original was very good, but I think,” he added modestly, “ that I improved upon it.”

“ Encore un faiseur de paradoxes ! ” murmured Faubourg to himself in disgust.

In the meantime Willmott was giving Professor Morgan the benefit of his views on Greek art, punctuated with allusions to Tariff Reform and devolution for the benefit of Blenheim.

Luncheon was over and cigarettes were lighted. Mrs Bergmann had quite made up her mind that she had been cheated, and there was only one thing for which she consoled herself, and that was that she had not waited for luncheon but had gone down immediately, since so far all her guests had kept up a continuous stream of conversation, which had every now and then become general, though they still every now and then glanced at the empty chair and wondered what the coming attraction was going to be. Mrs Milden had carried on two almost uninterrupted tête-à-têtes, first with one of her neighbours, then with the other. In fact everybody had talked, except the stranger, who had hardly spoken, and since Faubourg had turned away from him in disgust, nobody had taken any further notice of him.

Mrs Baldwin, remarking this, good-naturedly leant across the table and asked him if he had come to London for the Wagner cycle.

“No,” he answered, “I came for the Horse Show at Olympia.”

At this moment Count Sciarra, having finished his third cigarette, turned to his hostess and thanked her for having allowed him to meet the most beautiful women of London in the most beautiful house in London, and in the house of the most beautiful hostess in London.

“J’ai vu chez vous,” he said, “le lys argenté et la rose blanche, mais vous êtes la rose écarlate, la rose d’amour dont le parfum vivra dans mon cœur comme un poison doré (and here he hummed in a sing-song):—‘Io son, cantava, Io son, dolce sirena’ Addio, dolce sirena.”

Then he suddenly and abruptly got up, kissed his hostess’s hand vehemently three times, and said he was very sorry, but he must hasten to keep a pressing engagement. He then left the room.

Mrs Bergmann got up and said, “Let us go upstairs.” But the men had most of them to go, some to the House of Commons, others to fulfil various engagements.

The stranger thanked Mrs Bergmann for her kind hospitality and left. And the remaining guests, seeing that it was obvious that no further attraction was to be expected, now took their leave reluctantly and went, feeling that they had been cheated.

Angela Lockton stayed a moment.

“Who were you expecting, Louise, dear?” she asked.

“Only an old friend,” said Mrs Bergmann, “whom you would all have been very glad to see. Only as he doesn’t want anybody to know he’s in London, I couldn’t tell you all who he was.”

“But tell me now,” said Mrs Lockton; “you know how discreet I am.”

“I promised not to, dearest Angela,” she answered; “and, by the way, what was the name of the man you brought with you?”

“Didn’t I tell you? How stupid of me!” said Mrs Lockton. “It’s a very easy name to remember: Shakespeare, William Shakespeare.”



VIII
FÊTE GALANTE

To Cecilia Fisher



“THE King said that nobody had ever danced as I danced to-night,” said Columbine.

“He said it was more than dancing, it was magic.”

“It is true,” said Harlequin, “you never danced like that before.”

But Pierrot paid no heed to their remarks, and stared vacantly at the sky. They were sitting on the deserted stage of the grass amphitheatre where they had been playing. Behind them were the clumps of cypress trees which framed a vista of endless wooden garden and formed their drop scene. They were sitting immediately beneath the wooden framework made of two upright beams and one horizontal, which formed the primitive proscenium, and from which little coloured lights had hung during the performance. The King and Queen and their lords and ladies who had looked on at the living puppet show had all left the amphitheatre; they had put on their masks and their dominoes, and were now dancing on the lawns, whispering in the alleys and the avenues, or sitting in groups under the tall dark trees. Some of them were in boats on the lake, and everywhere one went, from the dark boscsages, came sounds of music, thin, tinkling tunes played on guitars by

skilled hands, and the bird-like twittering and whistling of flageolets.

“The King said I looked like a moon fairy,” said Columbine to Pierrot. Pierrot only stared at the sky and laughed inanely. “If you persist in slighting me like this,” she whispered in his ear, in a whisper which was like a hiss, “I will abandon you for ever. I will give my heart to Harlequin, and you shall never see me again.” But Pierrot continued to stare at the sky, and laughed once more inanely. Then Columbine got up, her eyes flashing with rage; taking Harlequin by the arm she dragged him swiftly away. They danced across the grass semi-circle of the amphitheatre and up the steps away into the alleys. Pierrot was left alone with Pantaloon, who was asleep, for he was old and clowning fatigued him. Then Pierrot left the amphitheatre also, and putting a black mask on his face he joined the revellers who were everywhere dancing, whispering, talking, and making music in subdued tones. He sought out a long lonely avenue, in one side of which there nestled, almost entirely concealed by bushes and undergrowth, a round open Greek temple. Right at the end of the avenue a foaming waterfall splashed down into a large marble basin, from which a tall fountain rose, white and ghostly, and made a sobbing noise. Pierrot went towards the temple, then he turned back and walked right into the

undergrowth through the bushes, and lay down on the grass, and listened to the singing of the night-jar. The whole garden that night seemed to be sighing and whispering; there was a soft warm wind, and a smell of mown hay in the air, and an intoxicating sweetness came from the bushes of syringa. Columbine and Harlequin also joined the revellers. They passed from group to group, with aimless curiosity, pausing sometimes by the artificial ponds and sometimes by the dainty groups of dancers, whose satin and whose pearls glimmered faintly in the shifting moonlight, for the night was cloudy. At last they too were tired of the revel, they wandered towards a more secluded place and made for the avenue which Pierrot had sought. On their way they passed through a narrow grass walk between two rows of closely cropped yew hedges. There on a marble seat a tall man in a black domino was sitting, his head resting on his hands; and between the loose folds of his satin cloak, one caught the glint of precious stones. When they had passed him Columbine whispered to Harlequin: "That is the King. I caught sight of his jewelled collar." They presently found themselves in the long avenue at the end of which were the waterfall and the fountain. They wandered on till they reached the Greek temple, and there suddenly Columbine put her finger on her lips. Then she led Harlequin

back a little way and took him round through the undergrowth to the back of the temple, and, crouching down in the bushes, bade him look. In the middle of the temple there was a statue of Eros holding a torch in his hands. Standing close beside the statue were two figures, a man dressed as a Pierrot, and a beautiful lady who wore a grey satin domino. She had taken off her mask and pushed back the hood from her hair, which was encircled by a diadem made of something shining and silvery, and a ray of moonlight fell on her face, which was as delicate as the petal of a flower. Pierrot was masked; he was holding her hand and looking into her eyes, which were turned upwards towards his.

“It is the Queen!” whispered Columbine to Harlequin. And once more putting her finger on her lips, she deftly led him by the hand and noiselessly threaded her way through the bushes and back into the avenue, and without saying a word ran swiftly with him to the place where they had seen the King. He was still there, alone, his head resting upon his hands.

In the temple the Queen was upbraiding her lover for his temerity in having crossed the frontier into the land from which he had been banished for ever, and for having dared to appear at the court revel disguised as Pierrot. “Remember,” she was

saying, "the enemies that surround us, the dreadful peril, and the doom that awaits us." And her lover said: "What is doom, and what is death? You whispered to the night and I heard. You sighed and I am here!" He tore the mask from his face, and the Queen looked at him and smiled. At that moment a rustle was heard in the undergrowth, and the Queen started back from him, whispering: "We are betrayed! Fly!" And her lover put on his mask and darted through the undergrowth, following a path which he and no one else knew, till he came to an open space where his squire awaited him with horses, and they galloped away safe from all pursuit.

Then the King walked into the temple and led the Queen back to the palace without saying a word; but the whole avenue was full of dark men bearing torches and armed with swords, who were searching the undergrowth. And presently they found Pierrot who, ignorant of all that had happened, had been listening all night to the song of the night-jar. He was dragged to the palace and cast into a dungeon, and the King was told. But the revel did not cease, and the dancing and the music continued softly as before. The King sent for Columbine and told her she should have speech with Pierrot in his prison, for haply he might have something to confess to her. And Columbine was taken to Pierrot's dungeon, and the King followed her

without her knowing it, and concealed himself behind the door, which he set ajar.

Columbine upbraided Pierrot and said: "All this was my work. I have always known that you loved the Queen. And yet for the sake of past days, tell me the truth. Was it love or a joke, such as those you love to play?"

Pierrot laughed inanely. "It was a joke," he said. "It is my trade to make jokes. What else can I do?"

"You love the Queen nevertheless," said Columbine, "of that I am sure, and for that I have had my revenge."

"It was a joke," said Pierrot, and he laughed again.

And though she talked and raved and wept, she could get no other answer from him. Then she left him, and the King entered the dungeon.

"I have heard what you said," said the King, "but to me you must tell the truth. I do not believe it was you who met the Queen in the temple; tell me the truth, and your life shall be spared."

"It was a joke," said Pierrot, and he laughed. Then the King grew fierce and stormed and threatened. But his rage and threats were in vain! for Pierrot only laughed. Then the King appealed to him as man to man and implored him to tell him the truth; for he would have given his kingdom

to believe that it was the real Pierrot who had met the Queen and that the adventure had been a joke. Pierrot only repeated what he had said, and laughed and giggled inanely.

At dawn the prison door was opened and three masked men led Pierrot out through the courtyard into the garden. The revellers had gone home, but here and there lights still twinkled and flickered and a stray note or two of music was still heard. Some of the latest of the revellers were going home. The dawn was grey and chilly ; they led Pierrot through the alleys to the grass amphitheatre, and they hanged him on the horizontal beam which formed part of the primitive proscenium where he and Columbine had danced so wildly in the night. They hanged him and his white figure dangled from the beam as though he were still dancing ; and the new Pierrot, who was appointed the next day, was told that such would be the fate of all mummers who went too far, and whose jokes and pranks overstepped the limits of decency and good breeding.



IX
THE GARLAND

THE *Referendarius* had three junior clerks to carry on the business of his department, and they in their turn were assisted by two scribes, who did most of the copying and kept the records. The work of the Department consisted in filing and annotating the petitions and cases which were referred from the lower Courts, through the channel of the *Referendarius*, to the Emperor.

The three clerks and their two scribes occupied a high marble room in the spacious office. It was as yet early in April, but, nevertheless, the sun out of doors was almost fierce. The high marble rooms of the office were cool and stuffy at the same time, and the spring sunshine without, the soft breeze from the sea, the call of the flower-sellers in the street, and the lazy murmur of the town had, in these shaded, musty, and parchment-smelling halls, diffused an atmosphere of laziness which inspired the clerks in question with an overwhelming desire to do nothing.

There was, indeed, no pressing work on hand. Only from time to time the *Referendarius*, who occupied a room to himself next door to theirs, would communicate with them through a hole in the wall, demanding information on some point

or asking to be supplied with certain documents. Then the clerks would make a momentary pretence of being busy, and ultimately the scribes would find either the documents or the information which were required.

As it was, the clerks were all of them engaged in occupations which were remote from official work. The eldest of them, Cephalus by name—a man who was distinguished from the others by a certain refined sobriety both in his dark dress and in his quiet demeanour—was reading a treatise on algebra ; the second, Theophilus, a musician, whose tunic was as bright as his flaming hair, was mending a small organ ; and the third, Rufinus, a rather pale, short-sighted, and untidy youth, was scribbling on a tablet. The scribes were busy sorting old records and putting them away in their permanent places.

Presently an official strolled in from another department. He was a middle-aged, corpulent, and cheerful-looking man, dressed in gaudy coloured tissue, on which all manner of strange birds were depicted. He was bursting with news.

“ Phocas is going to win,” he said. “ It is certain.”

Cephalus looked vaguely up from his book and said : “ Oh ! ”

Theophilus and Rufinus paid no attention to the remark.

“ Well,” continued the new-comer cheerfully, “ Who will come to the races with me ? ”

As soon as he heard the word races, Rufinus looked up from his scribbling. “ I will come,” he said, “ if I can get leave.”

“ I did not know you cared for that sort of thing,” said Cephalus.

Rufinus blushed and murmured something about going every now and then. He walked out of the room, and sought the *Referendarius* in the next room. This official was reading a document. He did not look up when Rufinus entered, but went on with his reading. At last, after a prolonged interval, he turned round and said : “ What is it ? ”

“ May I go to the races ? ” asked Rufinus.

“ Well,” said the high official, “ what about your work ? ”

“ We’ve finished everything,” said the clerk.

The Head of the Department assumed an air of mystery and coughed.

“ I don’t think I can very well see my way to letting you go,” he said. “ I am very sorry,” he added quickly, “ and if it depended on me you should go at once. But He,” he added—he always alluded to the Head of the Office as He—“ does not like it. He may come in any moment and find you gone. Besides, there’s that index to go on with. No ; I’m afraid I can’t let you go to-day. Now, if it had been yesterday you could have gone.”

“ I should only be away an hour,” said Rufinus, tentatively.

“ He might choose just that hour to come round. If it depended only on me you should go at once,” and he laughed and slapped Rufinus on the back, jocularly.

The clerk did not press the point further.

“ You’d better get on with that index,” said the high official as Rufinus withdrew.

He told the result of his interview to his sporting friend, who started out by himself to the Hippodrome.

Rufinus settled down to his index. But he soon fell into a mood of abstraction. The races and the games did not interest him in the least. It was something else which attracted him. And, as he sat musing, the vision of the Hippodrome as he had last seen it rose clearly before him. He saw the seaweed-coloured marble ; the glistening porticoes, adorned with the masterpieces of Greece, crowded with women in gemmed embroideries and men in white tunics hemmed with broad purple ; he saw the Generals with their barbaric officers—Bulgarians, Persians, Arabs, Slavs—the long line of savage-looking prisoners in their chains, and the golden breastplates of the standard-bearers. He saw the immense silk *velum* floating in the azure air over that rippling sea of men, those hundreds of thousands who swarmed on the marble steps of

the Hippodrome. He saw the Emperor in his high-pillared box, on his circular throne of dull gold, surrounded by slaves fanning him with jewel-coloured plumes, and fenced round with golden swords.

And opposite him, on the other side of the Stadium, the Empress, mantled in a stiff pontifical robe, laden with heavy embroidered stuffs, her little head framed like a portrait in a square crown of gold and diamonds, whence chains of emeralds hung down to her breast; motionless as an idol, impassive as a gilded mummy.

He saw the crowd of gorgeous women, grouped like Eastern flowers around her: he saw one woman. He saw one form as fresh as a lily of the valley, all white amidst that hard metallic splendour; frail as a dewy anemone, slender as the moist narcissus. He saw one face like the chalice of a rose, and amidst all those fiery jewels two large eyes as soft as dark violets. And the sumptuous Court, the plumes, the swords, the standards, the hot, vari-coloured crowd melted away and disappeared, so that when the Emperor rose and made the sign of the Cross over his people, first to the right, then to the left, and thirdly over the half-circle behind him, and the singers of Saint Sofia and the Church of the Holy Apostles mingled their bass chant with the shrill trebles of the chorus of the Hippodrome, to the sound of silver organs, he thought that the

great hymn of praise was rising to her and to her alone ; and that men had come from the uttermost parts of the earth to pay homage to her, to sing her praise, to kneel to her—to her, the wondrous, the very beautiful : peerless, radiant, perfect.

A voice, followed by a cough, called from the hole in the wall ; but Rufinus paid no heed, so deeply sunk was he in his vision.

“ Rufinus, the Chief is calling you,” said Cephalus.

Rufinus started, and hurried to the hole in the wall. The Head of the Department gave him a message for an official in another department.

Rufinus hurried with the message downstairs and delivered it. On his way back he passed the main portico on the ground floor. He walked out into the street : it was empty. Everybody was at the games.

A dark-skinned country girl passed him singing a song about the swallow and the spring. She was bearing a basket full of anemones, violets, narcissi, wild roses, and lilies of the valley.

“ Will you sell me your flowers ? ” he asked, and he held out a silver coin.

“ You are welcome to them,” said the girl. “ I do not need your money.”

He took the flowers and returned to the room upstairs. The flowers filled the stuffy place with an unwonted and wonderful fragrance.

Then he sat down and appeared to be once more busily engrossed in his index. But side by side with the index he had a small tablet, and on this, every now and then, he added or erased a word to a short poem in six lines. The poem began thus :—

πέμπω σοί, Ῥοδόκλεια, τόδε στέφος.

The sense of it was something like this :—

Rhodocleia, flowers of spring
I have woven in a ring ;
Take this wreath, my offering,
Rhodocleia.

Here's the lily, here the rose
Her full chalice shall disclose ;
Here's narcissus wet with dew,
Windflower and the violet blue.
Wear the garland I have made ;
Crowned with it, put pride away ;
For the wreath that blooms must fade ;
Thou thyself must fade some day,
Rhodocleia.¹

¹ For a beautiful translation of this epigram, which is also an exquisite English lyric, see Mr Andrew Lang's "Ban et Arrière-Ban," under the title "Golden Eyes."



X
THE SPIDER'S WEB

To K. L.



HE heard the bell of the Badia sound hour after hour, and still sleep refused its solace. He got up and looked through the narrow window. The sky in the East was soft with that luminous intensity, as of a melted sapphire, that comes just before the dawn. One large star was shining next to the paling moon. He watched the sky as it grew more and more transparent, and a fresh breeze blew from the hills. It was the second night that he had spent without sleeping, but the weariness of his body was as nothing compared with the aching emptiness which possessed his spirit. Only three days ago the world had seemed to him starred and gemmed like the Celestial City—an enchanted kingdom, waiting like a sleeping Princess for the kiss of the adventurous conqueror; and now the colours had faded, the dream had vanished, the sun seemed to be deprived of his glory, and the summer had lost its sweetness.

His eye fell upon some papers which were lying loose upon his table. There was an unfinished sonnet which he had begun three days ago. The octet was finished and the first two lines of the sestet. He would never finish it now. It had no longer any reason to be; for it was a cry to

ears which were now deaf, a question, an appeal, which demanded an answering smile, a consenting echo ; and the lips, the only lips which could frame that answer, were dumb. He remembered that Casella, the musician, had asked him a week ago for the text of a *canzone* which he had repeated to him one day. He had promised to let him have it. The promise had entirely gone out of his mind. Then he reflected that because the ship of his hopes and dreams had been wrecked there was no reason why he should neglect his obligations to his fellow-travellers on the uncertain sea.

He sat down and transcribed by the light of the dawn in his exquisite handwriting the stanzas which had been the fruit of a brighter day. And the memory of this dead joy was exceedingly bitter to him, so that he sat musing for some time on the unutterable sadness which the ghosts of perished joys bring to man in his misery, and a line of Virgil buzzed in his brain ; but not, as of yore, did it afford him the luxury of causeless melancholy, but like a cruel finger it touched his open wound. The ancients, he thought, knew how to bear misfortune.

Levius fit patientia
Quidquid corrigere est nefas.

As the words occurred to him he thought how much better equipped he was for the bitter trial,

since had he not the certain hope of another life, and of meeting his beloved in the spaces of endless felicity? Surely then he should be able to bear his sorrow with as great a fortitude as the pagan poets, who looked forward to nothing but the dust; to whom the fabled dim country beyond the Styx was a cheerless dream, and to whom a living dog upon the earth was more worthy of envy than the King of all Elysium. He must learn of the ancients.

The magic of the lemon-coloured dawn had vanished now before the swift daylight. Many bells were ringing in the city, and the first signs of life were stirring in the streets. He searched for a little book, and read of the consolation which Cicero gave to Lælius in the *De Amicitia*. But he had not read many lines before he closed the book. His wound was too fresh for the balm of reason and philosophy.

“Later,” he thought, “this will strengthen and help me, but not to-day; to-day my wound must bleed and be allowed to bleed, for all the philosophy in the world cannot lessen the fact that yesterday she was and to-day she is not.”

He felt a desire to escape from his room, which had been the chapel of such holy prayers, the shrine where so many fervent tapers of hope had burnt, where so sweet an incense of dream had risen. He left his room and hurried down the narrow stone stairs into the street. As he left

the house he turned to his right and walked on till he reached Or San Michele ; there he turned to his right again and walked straight on till he reached the churches of Santa Reparata and San Giovanni. He entered San Giovanni and said a brief prayer ; then he took the nearest street, east of Santa Reparata, to the Porta a ballo, and found himself beyond the walls of the city. He walked towards Fiesole.

The glory of the sunrise was still in the sky, the fragrance of the dawning summer (it was the 11th of June) was in the air. He walked towards the East. The corn on the hills was green, and pink wild roses fringed every plot of wheat. The grass was wet with dew. The city glittered in the plain beneath, clean and fresh in the dazzling air ; it seemed a part of the pageant of summer, an unreal piece of imagery, distinct and clear-cut, yet miraculous, like a mirage seen in mid-ocean. " Truly," he thought, " this is the city of the flower, and the lily is its fitting emblem."

But while his heart went out towards his native town he felt a sharp pang as he remembered that the flower of flowers, the queen of the lilies, had been mowed down by the scythe, and the city which to him had heretofore been an altar was now a tomb. The lovely Virgilian dirge,

Manibus date lilia plenis . . .

His saltem accumulẽm donis et fungar inani
Munere,

rang in his ears, and he thought that he too must bring a gift and scatter lilies on her grave ; handfuls of lilies ; but they must be unfading flowers, wet with immortal tears. He pondered on this gift. It must be a gift of song, a temple built in verse. But he was still unsatisfied. No dirge, however tender and solemn ; no elegy, however soft and majestic ; no song, however piteous, could be a sufficient offering for the glorious being who had died in her youth and beauty. But what could he fashion or build ? He thought with envy of Arnolfo and of Giotto : the one with his bricks could have built a tomb which would prove to be one of the wonders of the world, and the other with his brush could have fixed her features for ever, for the wonder of future generations. And yet was not his instrument the most potent of all, his vehicle the most enduring ? Stones decayed, and colours faded, but verse remained, outliving bronze and marble. Yes, his monument should be more lasting than all the masterpieces of Giotto, than all the proud designs of Arnolfo ; but how should it be ?

He had reached a narrow lane at the foot of a steep hill covered with corn and dotted with olives. He lay down under a hedge in the shade. The sun was shining on two large bramble bushes which grew on the hedge opposite him. Above him, on his right, was a tall cypress tree standing by itself,

and the corn plots stretched up behind him till they reached the rocky summits tufted with firs. Between the two bramble bushes a spider had spun a large web, and he was sitting in the midst of it awaiting his prey. But the bramble and the web were still wet with the morning dew, whose little drops glistened in the sunshine like diamonds. Every tiny thread and filament of the web was dewy and lit by the newly-awakened sun. He lay on his back in the shade and pondered on the shape and nature of his gift of song, and on the deathless flowers that he must grow and gather and lay upon her tomb.

The spider's web caught his eye, and from where he lay the sight was marvellous. The spider seemed like a small globe of fire in the midst of a number of concentric silvery lines studded with dewy gems; it was like a miniature sun in the midst of a system of gleaming stars. The delicate web with its shining films and dewdrops seemed to him as he lay there to be a vision of the whole universe, with all its worlds and stars revolving around the central orb of light. It was as though a veil had been torn away and he were looking on the naked glory of the spheres, the heart of Heaven, the very home of God.

He looked and looked, his whole spirit filled with ineffable awe and breathless humility. He lay gazing on the chance miracle of nature till a

passing cloud obscured the sun, and the spider's web wore once more its ordinary appearance. Then he arose with tears in his eyes and gave a great sigh of thankfulness.

“ I have found it,” he thought, “ I will say of her what has never yet been said of any woman. I will paint all Hell, all Purgatory, and all that is in them, to make more glorious the glory of her abode, and I will reveal to man that glory. I will show her in the circle of spotless flame, among the rivers and rings of eternal light, which revolve around the inmost heart, the fiery rose, and move obedient to the Love which moves the sun.” And his thought shaped itself into verse and he murmured to himself :

L'amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle.



XI
EDWARD II. AT BERKELEY
CASTLE

BY AN EYE-WITNESS
(With apologies to Mr H. Belloc)

THE King had not slept for three nights. He looked at his face in the muddy pool of water which had settled in the worn flagstones of his prison floor, and noticed that his beard was of a week's growth. Beads of sweat stood on his forehead, and his eyes were bloodshot. In the room next door, which was the canteen, the soldiers were playing on a drum. Over the tall hills the dawn was ruffling the clouds. There was a faint glimmer on the waters of the river. The footsteps of the gaolers were heard on the outer rampart. At seven o'clock they brought the King a good dinner: they allowed him burgundy from France, and yellow mead, and white bread baked in the ovens of the Abbey, although he was constrained to drink out of pewter, and plates were forbidden him. Eustace, his page, timidly offered him music. The King bade him sing the "Lay of the Sussex Lass," which begins thus:

Triumphant, oh! triumphant now she stands,
Above my Sussex, and above my sea!
She stretches out her thin ulterior hands
Across the morning . . .

But the King, to whom these memories were

portentous, called for another song and Eustace sang a stave of that ballad which was made on the Pyrenees, and which is still unfinished (for the modern world has no need of these things), telling of how Lord Raymond drank in a little tent with Charlemagne :

Enormous through the morning the tall battalions run :
 The men who fought with Charlemagne are very nearly done ;
 The wine is dark beneath the night, the stars are in the sky,
 The hammer's in the blacksmith's hand in case he wants to
 try.

We'll ride to Fontarabia, we'll storm the stubborn wall,
 And I call.

And Uriel and his Seraphim are hammering a shield ;
 And twice along the valley has the horn of Roland pealed ;
 And Cleopatra on the Nile, Iseult in Brittany,
 And Lancelot in Camelot, and Drake upon the sea ;
 And behind the young Republic are the fellows with the
 flag,

And I brag !

The King listlessly opened his eyes and said that he had no stomach for such song, and from the next door came the mutter of the drums. For on that night—which was Candlemas—Thursday, or as we should now call it “ Friday ”—the gaolers were keeping holiday, and drinking English beer brewed in Sussex ; for the beer of West England was not to their liking, as any one who has walked down the old Roman Road through Daglingworth,

Brimpsfield, and Birdlip towards Cardigan on a warm summer's day can know. For a man may tramp that road and stop and ask for drink at an inn, and receive nothing but Imperialist whisky, and drinks that annoy rather than satisfy the great thirst of a Christian.

Outside, a little breeze had crept out of the West. The morning star was paling over the Quantock Hills, and the King was mortally weary. "This day three years ago," he thought, "I was spurred and harnessed for the lists in a tunic of mail, with an emerald on my shoulder-strap, and I was tilting with my lord of Cleremont before Queen Isabella of France. The birds were singing in Touraine, and the sun was beating on the lists; and the minstrels of Val-ès-Dunes were chanting the song of the men who died for the Faith when they stormed Jerusalem. What is the lilt of that song," said the King, "which the singers of Val-ès-Dunes sang?" And Eustace pondered, for his memory was weak and he was overwrought by nights of watching and days of vigilance; but presently he touched his strings and sang:

The captains came from Normandy
 In clamorous ships across the sea;
 And from the trees in Gascony
 The masts were cloven, tall and free.
 And Turpin swung the helm and sang;

And stars like all the bells at Brie
From cloudy steeples rang.

The rotten leaves are whirling down
Dishevelled from September's crown ;
The Emperors have left the town ;
The Weald of Sussex, burnt and brown,
Is trampled by the kings.
And Harmuth gallops up the Down,
And, as he rides, he sings.

He sings of battles and of wine,
Of boats that leap the bellowing brine,
Of April eyes that smile and shine,
Of Raymond and Lord Catiline
And Carthage by the sea,
Of saints, and of the Muses Nine
That dwell in Gascony.

And to the King, as he heard this stave, came visions of his youth ; of how he had galloped from Woodstock to Stonesfield on a night of June within eleven hours, with a company of minstrels, and of how during that long feast at Arundel he made a song in the vernacular in praise of St Anselm. And he remembered that he owed a candle to that saint. For he had vowed that if the wife of Westermain should meet him after the tournament he would burn a tall candle at Canterbury before Michaelmas. But this had escaped his mind, for it had been tossed hither and thither during days of

conflict which had come later, and he was not loth to believe that the neglect of this service and the idle vow had been corner-stone of his misfortunes, and had helped to bring about his miserable plight.

While these threads of memory glimmered in his mind the small tallow rush-light which lit the dungeon flickered and went out. The chapel clock struck six. The King made a gesture which meant that the time of music was over, and Eustace went back to the canteen, where the men of the guard were playing at dice by the light of smoky rush-lights. The King lay down on his wooden pallet, whose linen was delicate and of lawn, embroidered with his own cipher and crown. The pillow, which was stuffed with scented rushes, was delicious to the cheek, and yielding.

All that night in London Queen Isabella had been waiting for the news from France. A storm was blowing across the Channel, and the ships (their pilots were Germans, and bungled in reading the stars) making for the port turned back towards Dunquerque. It was a storm such as, if you are in a small boat, turns you back from Broughty Ferry to the Goodwin Sands. The Queen, who took counsel of no one, was in two minds as to her daring deed, and her hostage trembled in an uncertain grasp. In Saxony the banished favourites talked wildly, cursing the counsels of London ;

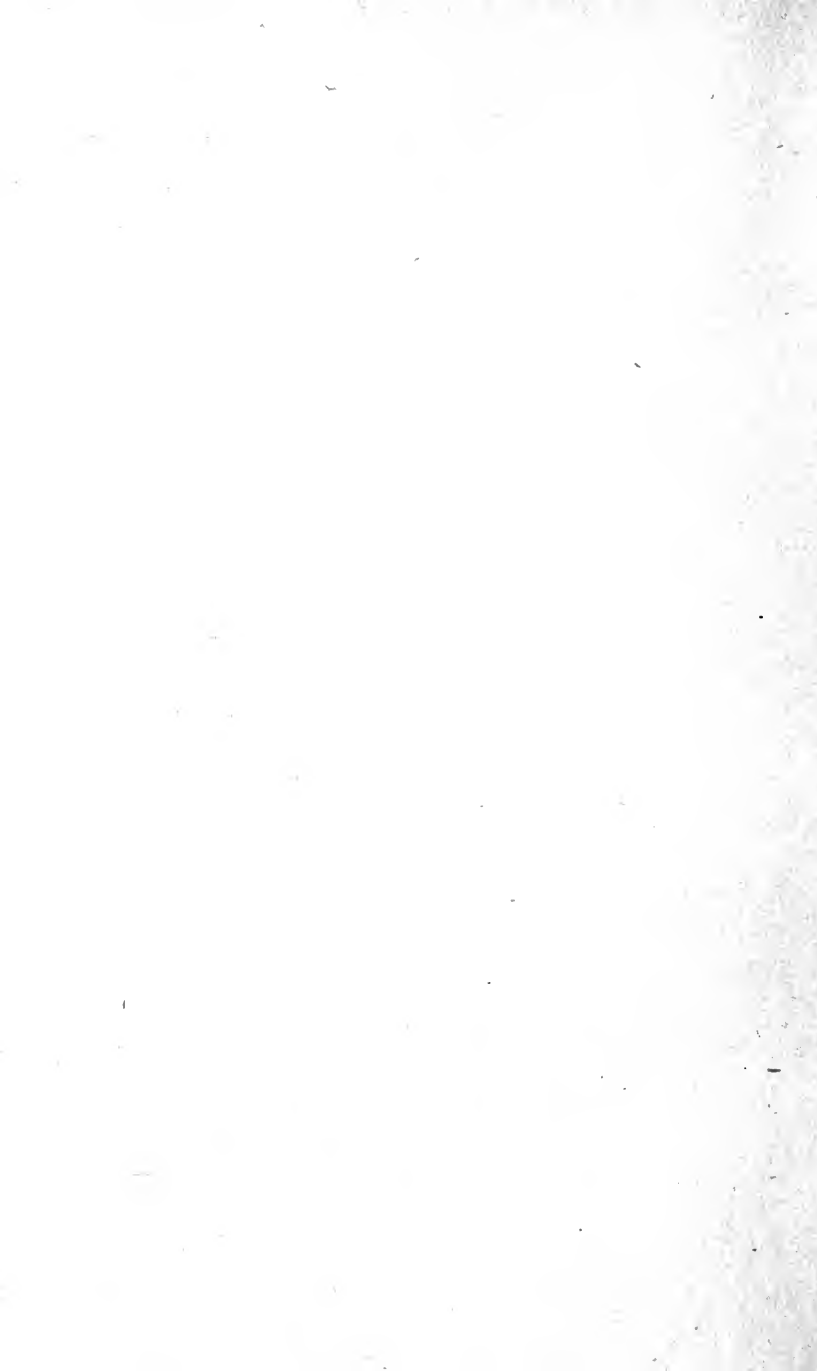
but Saxony was heedless and unmoved. And Piers Gaveston spoke heated words in vain.

The King, who was in that lethargic state of slumber, between sleep and waking, heard a shuffle of steps beyond the door; a cold sweat broke once more on his forehead, and he waved his left hand listlessly. Outside the sun had risen, and a broad daylight flooded the wet meadows and the brimming tide of the Severn, catching the sails of the boats that were heeling and trembling on the ripple of the water, which was stirred by the South wind. The King looked towards the window with weariness, expecting, as far as his lethargy allowed, the advent of another monotonous day.

The door opened. The faces he saw by the gaoler's torch were not those he expected. The King, I say, looked towards them, and his hands trembled, and the moisture on them glistened. They were dark, and one of them was concealed by a silken mask.

Three men entered the dungeon. In the hands of the foremost of the three glowed a red-hot iron, which was to be the manner of his doom.

XII
THE ISLAND



“PERHAPS we had better not land after all,” said Lewis as he was stepping into the boat ; “ we can explore this island on our way home.”

“ We had much better land now,” said Stewart ; “ we shall get to Teneriffe to-morrow in any case. Besides, an island that’s not on the chart is too exciting a thing to wait for.”

Lewis gave in to his younger companion, and the two ornithologists, who were on their way to the Canary Islands in search of eggs, were rowed to shore.

“ They had better fetch us at sunset,” said Lewis as they landed.

“ Perhaps we shall stay the night,” responded Stewart.

“ I don’t think so,” said Lewis ; but after a pause he told the sailors that if they should be more than half an hour late they were not to wait, but to come back in the morning at ten. Lewis and Stewart walked from the sandy bay up a steep basaltic cliff which sloped right down to the beach.

“ The island is volcanic,” said Stewart.

“ All the islands about here are volcanic,” said Lewis. “ We shan’t be able to climb much in this heat,” he added.

“ It will be all right when we get to the trees,” said Stewart. Presently they reached the top of the cliff. The basaltic rock ceased and an open grassy incline was before them covered with myrtle and cactus bushes ; and further off a thick wood, to the east of which rose a hill sparsely dotted with olive trees. They sat down on the grass, panting. The sun beat down on the dry rock ; there was not a cloud in the sky nor a ripple on the emerald sea. In the air there was a strange aromatic scent ; and the stillness was heavy.

“ I don’t think it can be inhabited,” said Lewis.

“ Perhaps it’s merely a volcanic island cast up by a sea disturbance,” suggested Stewart.

“ Look at those trees,” said Lewis, pointing to the wood in the distance.

“ What about them ? ” asked Stewart.

“ They are oak trees,” said Lewis. “ Do you know why I didn’t want to land ? ” he asked abruptly. “ I am not superstitious, you know, but as I got into the boat I distinctly heard a voice calling out : ‘ Don’t land ! ’ ”

Stewart laughed. “ I think it was a good thing to land,” he said. “ Let’s go on now.”

They walked towards the wood, and the nearer they got to it the more their surprise increased. It was a thick wood of large oak trees which must certainly have been a hundred years old. When they had got quite close to it they paused.

“ Before we explore the wood,” said Lewis, “ let us climb the hill and see if we can get a general view of the island.”

Stewart agreed, and they climbed the hill in silence. When they reached the top they found it was not the highest point of the island, but only one of several hills, so that they obtained only a limited view. The valleys seemed to be densely wooded, and the oak wood was larger than they had imagined. They laid down and rested and lit their pipes.

“ No birds,” remarked Lewis, gloomily.

“ I haven’t seen one—the island is extraordinarily still,” said Stewart. The further they had penetrated inland the more oppressive and sultry the air had become ; and the pungent aroma they had noticed directly was stronger. It was like that of mint, and yet it was not mint ; and although sweet it was not agreeable. The heat seemed to weigh even on Stewart’s buoyant spirits, for he sat smoking in silence, and no longer urged Lewis to continue their exploration.

“ I think the island is inhabited,” said Lewis, “ and that the houses are on the other side. There are some sheep and some goats on that hill opposite. Do you see ? ”

“ Yes,” said Stewart, “ I think they are mouflon, but I don’t think the island is inhabited all the same.” No sooner were the words out of his

mouth than he started, and rising to his feet, cried: "Look there!" and he pointed to a thin wreath of smoke which was rising from the wood. Their languor seemed to leave them, and they ran down the hill and reached the wood once more. Just as they were about to enter it Lewis stooped and pointed to a small plant with white flowers and three oval-shaped leaves rising from the root.

"What's that?" he asked Stewart, who was the better botanist of the two. The flowers were quite white, and each had six pointed petals.

"It's a kind of garlic, I think," said Stewart. Lewis bent down over it. "It doesn't smell," he said. "It's not unlike moly (*Allium flavum*), only it's white instead of yellow, and the flowers are larger. I'm going to take it with me." He began scooping away the earth with a knife so as to take out the plant by the roots. After he had been working for some minutes he exclaimed: "This is the toughest plant I've ever seen; I can't get it out." He was at last successful, but as he pulled the root he gave a cry of surprise.

"There's no bulb," he said. "Look! only a black root."

Stewart examined the plant. "I can't make it out," he said.

Lewis wrapped the plant in his handkerchief and put it in his pocket. They entered the wood. The air was still more sultry here than outside,

and the stillness even more oppressive. There were no birds and not a vestige of bird life.

“This exploration is evidently a waste of time as far as birds are concerned,” remarked Lewis. At that moment there was a rustle in the undergrowth, and five pigs crossed their path and disappeared, grunting. Lewis started, and for some reason he could not account for, shuddered; he looked at Stewart, who appeared unconcerned.

“They are not wild,” said Stewart. They walked on in silence. The place and its heavy atmosphere had again affected their spirits. When they spoke it was almost in a whisper. Lewis wished they had not landed, but he could give no reason to himself for his wish. After they had been walking for about twenty minutes they suddenly came on an open space and a low white house. They stopped and looked at each other.

“It’s got no chimney!” cried Lewis, who was the first to speak. It was a one-storeyed building, with large windows (which had no glass in them) reaching to the ground, wider at the bottom than at the top. The house was overgrown with creepers; the roof was flat. They entered in silence by the large open doorway and found themselves in a low hall. There was no furniture and the floor was mossy.

“It’s rather like an Egyptian tomb,” said Stewart, and he shivered. The hall led into a

further room, which was open in the centre to the sky, like the *impluvium* of a Roman house. It also contained a square basin of water, which was filled by water bubbling from a lion's mouth carved in stone. Beyond the *impluvium* there were two smaller rooms, in one of which there was a kind of raised stone platform. The house was completely deserted and empty. Lewis and Stewart said little; they examined the house in silent amazement.

"Look," said Lewis, pointing to one of the walls. Stewart examined the wall and noticed that there were traces on it of a faded painted decoration.

"It's like the wall paintings at Pompeii," he said.

"I think the house is modern," remarked Lewis. "It was probably built by some eccentric at the beginning of the nineteenth century, who did it up in Empire style."

"Do you know what time it is?" said Stewart, suddenly. "The sun has set and it's growing dark."

"We must go at once," said Lewis, "we'll come back here to-morrow." They walked on in silence. The wood was dim in the twilight, a fitful breeze made the trees rustle now and again, but the air was just as sultry as ever. The shapes of the trees seemed fantastic and almost threatening in the dimness, and the rustle of the leaves was like

a human moan. Once or twice they seemed to hear the grunting of pigs in the undergrowth and to catch sight of bristly backs.

"We don't seem to be getting any nearer the end," said Stewart after a time. "I think we've taken the wrong path. They stopped. "I remember that tree," said Stewart, pointing to a twisted oak; "we must go straight on from there to the left." They walked on and in ten minutes' time found themselves once more at the back of the house. It was now quite dark.

"We shall never find the way now," said Lewis. "We had better sleep in the house." They walked through the house into one of the furthest rooms and settled themselves on the mossy platform. The night was warm and starry, the house deathly still except for the splashing of the water in the basin.

"We shan't get any food," Lewis said.

"I'm not hungry," said Stewart, and Lewis knew that he could not have eaten anything to save his life. He felt utterly exhausted and yet not at all sleepy. Stewart, on the other hand, was overcome with drowsiness. He lay down on the mossy platform and fell asleep almost instantly. Lewis lit a pipe; the vague forebodings he had felt in the morning had returned to him, only increased tenfold. He felt an unaccountable physical discomfort, an inexplicable sensation of uneasiness.

Then he realised what it was. He felt there was someone in the house besides themselves, someone or something that was always behind him, moving when he moved, and watching him. He walked into the *impluvium*, but heard nothing and saw nothing. There were none of the thousand little sounds, such as the barking of a dog, or the hoot of a night-bird, which generally complete the silence of a summer night. Everything was uncannily still. He returned to the room. He would have given anything to be back on the yacht, for besides the physical sensation of discomfort and of the something watching him he also felt the unmistakable feeling of impending danger that had been with him nearly all day.

He lay down and at last fell into a doze. As he dozed he heard a subdued noise, a kind of buzzing, such as is made by a spinning wheel or a shuttle on a loom, and more strongly than ever he felt that he was being watched. Then all at once his body seemed to grow stiff with fright. He saw someone enter the room from the *impluvium*. It was a dim, veiled figure, the figure of a woman. He could not distinguish her features, but he had the impression that she was strangely beautiful; she was bearing a cup in her hands, and she walked towards Stewart and bent over him, offering him the cup.

Something in Lewis prompted him to cry out

with all his might : " Don't drink ! Don't drink ! " He heard the words echoing in the air, just as he had heard the voice in the boat ; he felt that it was imperative to call out, and yet he could not : he was paralysed ; the words would not come. He formed them with his lips, but no sound came. He tried with all his might to rise and scream, and he could not move. Then a sudden cold faintness came upon him, and he remembered no more till he woke and found the sun shining brightly. Stewart was lying with eyes closed, moaning loudly in his sleep.

Lewis tried to wake him. He opened his eyes and stared with a fixed, meaningless stare. Lewis tried to lift him from the platform, and then a horrible thing happened. Stewart struggled violently and made a snarling noise, which froze the blood in Lewis's veins. He ran out of the house with cold beads of sweat on his forehead. He ran through the wood to the shore, and there he found the boat. He rowed back to the yacht and fetched some quinine. Then, together with the skipper, the steward, and some other sailors, he returned to the ominous house. They found it empty. There was no trace of Stewart. They shouted in the wood till they were hoarse, but no answer broke the heavy stillness.

Then sending for the rest of the crew, Lewis organised a regular search over the whole island.

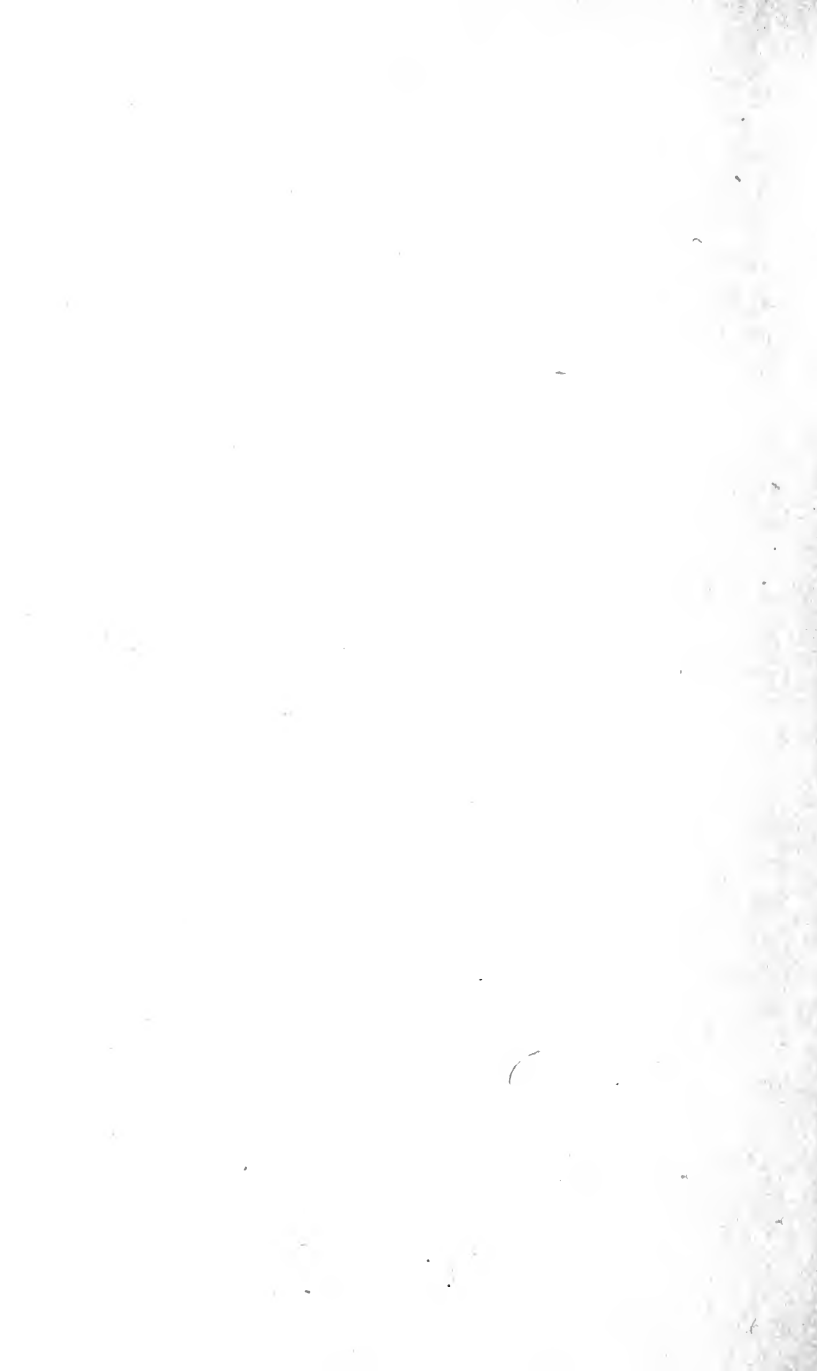
This lasted till sunset, and they returned in the evening without having found any trace of Stewart or of any other human being. In the night a high wind rose, which soon became a gale ; they were obliged to weigh anchor so as not to be dashed against the island, and for twenty-four hours they underwent a terrific' tossing. Then the storm subsided as quickly as it had come.

They made for the island once more and reached the spot where they had anchored three days before. There was no trace of the island. It had completely disappeared.

When they reached Teneriffe the next day they found that everybody was talking of the great tidal wave which had caused such great damage and destruction in the islands.

XIII
THE MAN WHO GAVE GOOD
ADVICE

To Henry Cust



WHEN he was a child his baby brother came to him one day and said that their elder brother, who was grown up, had got a beautiful small ship in his room. Should he ask him for it? The child who gave good advice said: "No, if you ask him for it he will say you are a spoilt child; but go and play in his room with it before he gets up in the morning, and he will give it you." The baby brother followed this advice, and sure enough two days afterwards he appeared triumphant in the nursery with the ship in his hands, saying: "He said I might choose, the ship or the picture-book." Now the picture-book was a coloured edition of Baron Munchausen's adventures; the boy who gave good advice had seen it and hankered for it. As his baby brother had refused it there could be no harm in asking for it, so the next time his elder brother sent him on an errand (it was to fetch a pin-cushion from his room) judging the moment to be propitious, he said to him: "May I have the picture-book that baby wouldn't have?" "I don't like little boys who ask," answered the big brother, and there the matter ended.

The child who gave good advice went to school. There was a rage for stag beetles at the school;

the boys painted them and made them run races on a chessboard. They imagined—rightly or wrongly—that some stag beetles were much faster than others. A little boy called Bell possessed the stag beetle which was the favourite for the coming races. Another boy called Mason was consumed with longing for this stag beetle; and Bell had said he would give it him in exchange for Mason's catapult, which was famous in the school for the unique straightness of its two prongs. Mason went to the boy who gave good advice and asked him for his opinion. "Don't swap it for your catty," said the boy who gave good advice, "because Bell's stag beetle may not win after all; and even if it does stag beetles won't be the rage for very long; but a catty is always a catty, and yours is the best in the school." Mason took the advice. When the races came off, the stag beetles were so erratic that no prize was awarded, and they immediately ceased to be the rage. The rage for stag beetles was succeeded by a rage for secret alphabets. One boy invented a secret alphabet made of simple hieroglyphics, which was imparted only to a select few, who spent their spare time in corresponding with each other by these cryptic signs. The boy who gave good advice was not of those initiated into the mystery of the cypher, and he longed to be. He made several overtures, but they were all rejected, the reason being that

boys of the second division could not let a "third division squat" into their secret. At last the boy who gave good advice offered to one of the initiated the whole of his stamp collection in return for the secret of the alphabet. This offer was accepted. The boy took the stamp collection, but the boy who gave good advice received in return not the true alphabet but a sham one especially manufactured for him. This he found out later; but recriminations were useless; besides which the rage for secret alphabets soon died out and was replaced by a rage for aquariums, newts, and natterjack toads.

The boy went to a public school. He was a fag. His fag-master had two fags. One morning the other fag came to the boy who gave good advice and said: "Clarke (he was the fag-master) told me three days ago to clean his football boots. He's been 'staying out' and hasn't used them, and I forgot. He'll want them to-day, and now there isn't time. I shall pretend I did clean them."

"No, don't do that," said the boy who gave good advice, "because if you say you have cleaned them he will lick you twice as much for having cleaned them badly—say you forgot." The advice was taken, and the fag-master merely said: "Don't forget again." A little later the fag-master had some friends to tea, and told the boy who gave good advice to boil him six eggs for not more than

three minutes and a half. The boy who gave good advice, while they were on the fire, took part in a rag which was going on in the passage; the result was that the eggs remained seven minutes in boiling water. They were hard. When the fag-master pointed this out and asked his fag what he meant by it, the boy who gave good advice persisted in his statement that they had been exactly three minutes and a half in the saucepan, and that he had timed them by his watch. So the fag-master caned him for telling lies.

The boy who gave good advice grew into a man and went to the university. There he made friends with a man called Crawley, who went to a neighbouring race meeting one day and lost two or three hundred pounds.

“I must raise the money from a money-lender somehow,” said Crawley to the man who gave good advice, “and on no account must the Master hear of it or he would send me down; or write home, which would be worse.”

“On the contrary,” said the man who gave good advice, “you must go straight to the Master and tell him all about it. He will like you twice as much for ever afterwards; he never minds people getting into scrapes when he happens to like them, and he likes you and believes you have a great career before you.”

Crawley went to the Master of his college and

made a clean breast of it. The Master told him he had been foolish—very foolish; but he arranged the whole matter in such a manner that it never came to the ears of Crawley's extremely violent-tempered and puritanical father.

The man who gave good advice got a "First" in Mods, and everyone felt confident he would get a first in Greats; he did brilliantly in nearly all his papers; but during the Latin unseen a temporary and sudden lapse of memory came over him and he forgot the English for *manubiæ*, which the day before he had known quite well means prize-money. In fact the word was written on the first page of his note-book. The word was in his brain, but a small shutter had closed on it for the moment and he could not recall it. He looked over his neighbour's shoulder. His neighbour had translated it "booty." He copied the word mechanically, knowing it was wrong. As he did so he was detected and accused of cribbing. He denied the charge, the matter was investigated, the papers were compared, and the man who gave good advice was disqualified. In all his other papers he had done incomparably better than anyone else.

When he left Oxford the man who gave good advice went into a Government office. He had not been in it long before he perceived that by certain simple reforms the work of the office could be done twice as effectually and half as expensively.

He embodied these reforms in a memorandum and they were not long afterwards adopted. He became private secretary to Snipe, a rising politician, and persuaded him to change his party and his politics. Snipe, owing to this advice, became a Cabinet Minister, and the man who gave good advice, having inherited some money, stood for Parliament himself. He stood as a Conservative at a General Election and spoke eloquently to enthusiastic meetings. The wire-pullers prophesied an overwhelming majority, when shortly before the poll, at one of his last meetings, he suddenly declared himself to be an Independent, and made a speech violently in favour of Home Rule and conscription. The result was that the Liberal Imperialist got in by a huge majority, and the man who gave good advice was pelted with rotten eggs.

After this the man who gave good advice abandoned politics and took to finance ; in this branch of human affairs he made the fortune of several of his friends, preventing some from putting their money in alluring South African schemes, and advising others to risk theirs on events which seemed to him certain, such as the election of a President or the short-lived nature of a revolution ; events which he foresaw with intuition amounting to second-sight. At the same time he lost nearly all his own money by investing it in a company

which professed to have discovered a manner—cheap and rapid—of transforming copper into platinum. He made the fortune of a publisher by insisting on the publication of a novel which six intelligent men had declared to be unreadable. It was called “The Conscience of John Digby,” and when published it sold by thousands and tens of thousands. But he lost the handsome reward he received for this service by publishing at his own expense, on magnificent paper, an edition of Rabelais’ works in their original tongue. He frequently spotted winners for his friends and for himself, but any money that he won at a race meeting he invariably lost coming home in the train on the Three Card Trick.

Nor did he lose touch with politicians, and this brought about the final catastrophe. A great friend of his, the eminent John Brooke, had the chance of becoming Prime Minister. Parties were at that time in a state of confusion. The question was, should his friend ally himself with or sever himself for ever from Mr Capax Nissy, the leader of the Liberal Aristocracy Party, who seemed to have a huge following? His friend, John Brooke, gave a small dinner to his most intimate friends in order to talk over the matter. The man who gave good advice was so eloquent, so cogent in his reasoning, so acute in his perception, that he persuaded Brooke to sever himself for ever from Capax Nissy.

He persuaded all who were present, with the exception of Mr Short-Sight, a pig-headed man who reasoned falsely. So annoyed did the man who gave good advice become with Short-Sight, and so excited in his vexation, that he finally lost his self-control, and hit him as hard as he could on the head—after Short-Sight had repeated a groundless assertion for the seventh time—with the poker.

Short-Sight died, and the man who gave good advice was convicted of wilful murder. He gave admirable advice to his counsel, but threw away his own case as soon as he entered the box himself, which he insisted on doing. He was hanged in gaol at Reading. Many people whom he had benefited in various ways visited him in prison, among others John Brooke, the Prime Minister. It is said that he would certainly have been re-prieved but for the intemperate and inexcusable letters he wrote to the Home Secretary from prison.

“It’s a great tragedy—he was a clever man,” said Brooke after dinner when they were discussing the misfortune at Downing Street; “a very clever man, but he had no judgment.”

“No,” said Snipe, the man whose private secretary the man who gave good advice had been, “That’s it. It’s an awful thing—but he had no judgment.”

XIV
RUSSALKA



PETER, or Petrushka, which was the name he was known by, was the carpenter's mate ; his hair was like light straw, and his eyes were mild and blue. He was good at his trade ; a quiet and sober youth ; thoughtful, too, for he knew how to read and had read several books when he was still a boy. A translation of " Monte Cristo " once fell into his hands, and this story had kindled his imagination and stirred in him the desire to travel, to see new countries and strange people. He had made up his mind to leave the village and to try his luck in one of the big towns, when, before he was eighteen, something happened to him which entirely changed the colour of his thoughts and the range of his desires. It was an ordinary experience enough : he fell in love. He fell in love with Tatiana, who worked in the starch factory. Tatiana's eyes were grey, her complexion was white, her features small and delicate, and her hair a beautiful dark brown with gold lights and black shadows in it ; her movements were quick and her glance keen ; she was like a swallow.

It happened when the snows melted and the meadows were flooded ; the first fine day in April. The larks were singing over the plains, which were

beginning to show themselves once more under the melting snow ; the sun shone on the large patches of water, and turned the flooded meadows in the valley into a fantastic vision. It was on a Sunday after church that this new thing happened. He had often seen Tatiana before : that day she was different and new to him. It was as if a bandage had been taken from his eyes, and at the same moment he realised that Tatiana was a new Tatiana. He also knew that the old world in which he had lived hitherto had crumbled to pieces ; and that a new world, far brighter and more wonderful, had been created for him. As for Tatiana, she loved him at once. There was no delay, no hesitation, no misunderstandings, no doubt : and at the first not much speech ; but first love came to them straight and swift, with the first sunshine of the spring, as it does to the birds.

All the spring and summer they kept company and walked out together in the evenings. When the snows entirely melted and the true spring came, it came with a rush ; in a fortnight's time all the trees except the ash were green, and the bees boomed round the thick clusters of pear-blossom and apple-blossom, which shone like snow against the bright azure. During that time Petrushka and Tatiana walked in the apple orchard in the evening and they talked to each other in the

divinest of all languages, the language of first love, which is no language at all but a confused medley and murmur of broken phrases, whisperings, twitterings, pauses, and silences—a language so wonderful that it cannot be put down into speech or words, although Shakespeare and the very great poets translate the spirit of it into music, and the great musicians catch the echo of it in their song. Then a fortnight later, when the woods were carpeted and thick with lilies of the valley, Petrushka and Tatiana walked in the woods and picked the last white violets, and later again they sought the alleys of the landlord's property, where the lilac bushes were a mass of blossom and fragrance, and there they listened to the nightingale, the bird of spring. Then came the summer, the fragrance of the beanfields, and the ripening of corn and the wonderful long twilights, and July, when the corn, ripe and tall and stiff, changed the plains into a vast rippling ocean of gold.

After the harvest, at the very beginning of autumn, they were to be married. There had been a slight difficulty about money. Tatiana's father had insisted that Petrushka should produce a certain not very large sum; but the difficulty had been overcome and the money had been found. There were no more obstacles, everything was smooth and settled. Petrushka no longer thought

of travels in foreign lands ; he had forgotten the old dreams which " Monte Cristo " had once kindled in him.

It was in the middle of August that the carpenter received instructions from the landowner to make some wooden steps and a small raft and to fix them up on the banks of the river for the convenience of bathers. It did not take the carpenter and Petrushka long to make these things, and one afternoon Petrushka drove down to the river to fix them in their place. The river was broad, the banks were wooded with willow trees, and the undergrowth was thick, for the woods reached to the river bank, which was flat, but which ended sheer above the water over a slope of mud and roots, so that a bather needed steps or a raft or a springboard, so as to dive or to enter and leave the water with comfort.

Petrushka put the steps in their place—which was where the wood ended—and made fast the floating raft to them. Not far from the bank the ground was marshy and the spot was suspected by some people of being haunted by malaria. It was a still, sultry day. The river was like oil, the sky clouded but not entirely overclouded, and among the high banks of grey cloud there were patches of blue.

When Petrushka had finished his job, he sat on the wooden steps, and rolling some tobacco into

a primitive cigarette, contemplated the grey, oily water and the willow trees. It was too late in the year, he thought, to make a bathing place. He dipped his hand in the water: it was cold, but not too cold. Yet in a fortnight's time it would not be pleasant to bathe. However, people had their whims, and he mused on the scheme of the universe which ordained that certain people should have whims, and that others should humour those whims whether they liked it or not. Many people—many of his fellow-workers—talked of the day when the universal levelling would take place and when all men could be equal. Petrushka did not much believe in the advent of that day; he was not quite sure whether he ardently desired it; in any case, he was very happy as he was.

At that moment he heard two sharp short sounds, less musical than a pipe and not so loud or harsh as a scream. He looked up. A kingfisher had flown across the oily water. Petrushka shouted; and the kingfisher skimmed over the water once more and disappeared in the trees on the other side of the river. Petrushka rolled and lit another cigarette. Presently he heard the two sharp sounds once more, and the kingfisher darted again across the water: a bit of fish was in its beak. It disappeared into the bank of the river on the same side on which Petrushka was sitting, only lower down.

“Its nest must be there,” thought Petrushka, and he remembered that he had heard it said that no one had ever been able to carry off a kingfisher’s nest intact. Why should he not be the first person to do so? He was skilful with his fingers, his touch was sure and light. It was evidently a carpenter’s job, and few carpenters had the leisure or opportunity to look for kingfishers’ nests. What a rare present it would be for Tatiana—a whole kingfisher’s nest with every bone in it intact.

He walked stealthily through the bushes down the bank of the river, making as little noise as possible. He thought he had marked the spot where the kingfisher had dived into the bank. As he walked, the undergrowth grew thicker and the path darker, for he had reached the wood, on the outskirts and end of which was the spot where he had made the steps. He walked on and on without thinking, oblivious of his surroundings, until he suddenly realised that he had gone too far. Moreover, he must have been walking for some time, for it was getting dark, or was it a thunder-shower? The air, too, was unbearably sultry; he stopped and wiped his forehead with a big print handkerchief. It was impossible to reach the bank from the place where he now stood, as he was separated from it by a wide ditch of stagnant water. He therefore retraced his footsteps through the wood,

It grew darker and darker ; it must be, he thought, the evening deepening and no storm.

All at once he started ; he had heard a sound, a high pipe. Was it the kingfisher ? He paused and listened. Distinctly, and not far off in the undergrowth, he heard a laugh, a woman's laugh. It flashed across his mind that it might be Tatiana, but it was not her laugh. Something rustled in the bushes to the left of him ; he followed the rustling and it led him through the bushes—he had now passed the ditch—to the river bank. The sun had set behind the woods from which he had just emerged ; the sky was as grey as the water, and there was no reflection of the sunset in the east. Except the water and the trees he saw nothing ; there was not a sound to be heard, not a ripple on the river, not a whisper from the woods.

Then all at once the stillness was broken again by quick rippling laughs immediately behind him. He turned sharply round, and saw a woman in the bushes : her eyes were large and green and sad ; her hair straggling and dishevelled ; she was dressed in reeds and leaves ; she was very pale. She stared at him fixedly and smiled, showing gleaming teeth, and when she smiled there was no light nor laughter in her eyes, which remained sad and green and glazed like those of a drowned person. She laughed again and ran into the

bushes. Petrushka ran after her, but although he was quite close to her he lost all trace of her immediately. It was as if she had vanished under the earth or into the air.

“It’s a Russalka,” thought Petrushka, and he shivered. Then he added to himself, with the pride of the new scepticism he had learnt from the factory hands: “There is no such thing; only women believe in such things. It was some drunken woman.”

Petrushka walked quickly back to the edge of the wood, where he had left his cart, and drove home. The next day was Sunday, and Tatiana noticed that he was different—moody, melancholy, and absent-minded. She asked him what was the matter; he said his head ached. Towards five o’clock he told her—they were standing outside her cottage—that he was obliged to go to the river to work.

“To-day is holiday,” she said quietly.

“I left something there yesterday: one of my tools. I must fetch it,” he explained.

Tatiana looked at him, and her intuition told her, firstly, that this was not true, and, secondly, that it was not well for Petrushka to go to the river. She begged him not to go. Petrushka laughed and said he would be back quickly. Tatiana cried, and implored him on her knees not to go. Then Petrushka grew irritable and almost

rough, and told her not to vex him with foolishness. Reluctantly and sadly she gave in at last.

Petrushka went to the river, and Tatiana watched him go with a heavy heart. She felt quite certain some disaster was about to happen.

At seven o'clock Petrushka had not yet returned, and he did not return that night. The next morning the carpenter and two others went to the river to look for him. They found his body in the shallow water, entangled in the ropes of the raft he had made. He had been drowned, no doubt, in setting the raft straight.

During all that Sunday night Tatiana had said no word, nor had she moved from her doorstep: it was only when they brought back the dripping body to the village that she stirred, and when she saw it she laughed a dreadful laugh, and the spirit went from her eyes, leaving a fixed stare.



XV
THE OLD WOMAN

THE old woman was spinning at her wheel near a fire of myrtle boughs which burnt fragrantly in the open yard. Through the stone columns the sea was visible, smooth, dark, and blue; the low sun bathed the brown hills of the coast in a golden mist. It was December. The shepherds were driving home their flocks, the work of the day was done, and a noise of light laughter and rippling talk came from the Slaves' quarter.

In the middle of the stone-flagged yard two little boys were playing at quoits. Their eyes and hair were as dark as their brown skin, which had been tanned by the sun. In one of the corners of the yard a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl was nursing a kitten and singing it to sleep. The old woman was singing too, or rather humming a tune to herself as she turned her wheel. She was very old: her hair was white and silvery, and her face was furrowed by a hundred wrinkles. Her eyes were blue as the sky, and perhaps they had once been full of fire and laughter, but all that had been quenched and washed out long ago, and Time, with his noiseless chisel, had sharpened her delicate features and hollowed out her cheeks, which were as white as ivory. But her hands as they twisted

the wool were the hands of a young woman, and seemed as though they had been fashioned by a rare craftsman, so perfect were they in shape and proportion, as firm as carved marble, as delicate as flowers.

The sun sank behind the hills of the coast, and a flood of scarlet light spread along the West just above them, melting higher up into orange, and still higher into a luminous blue, which turned to green later as the evening deepened. The air was cool and sharp, and the little boys, who had finished their game, drew near to the fire.

“Tell us a story,” said the elder of the two boys, as they curled themselves up at the feet of the old woman.

“You know all my stories,” she said.

“That doesn’t matter,” said the boy. “You can tell us an old one.”

“Well,” said the old woman, “I suppose I must. There was once upon a time a King and a Queen who had three sons and one daughter.” At the sound of these words the little girl ran up and nestled in the folds of the old woman’s long cloak.

“No, not that one,” one of the little boys interrupted, “tell us about the Queen without a heart.” So the old woman began and said :—

“There was once upon a time a King and a Queen who had one daughter, and they invited

all the gods and goddesses to the feast which they gave in honour of the birth of their child. The gods and goddesses came and gave the child every gift they could think of ; she was to be the most beautiful woman in the whole world, she was to dance like the West wind, to laugh like the stream, and to sing like the lark. Her hair should be made of sunshine, and her eyes should be as the sea in midsummer. She should excel in all things, in knowledge, in wit, and in skill ; she should be fleet of foot, a cunning harp-player, adept at all manner of woman-like crafts, and deft with the needle and the spinning-wheel, and at the loom. Zeus himself gave her stateliness and majesty, the Lord of the Sun gave a voice as of a golden flute ; Poseidon gave her the laughter of all the waves of the sea, the King of the Underworld gave her a red ruby to wear on her breast more precious than all the gems of the world. Artemis gave her swiftness and radiance, Persephone the fragrance and the freshness of all the flowers of spring ; Pallas Athene gave her curious knowledge and pleasant speech ; and, lastly, the Seaborn Goddess breathed upon her and gave her the beauty of the rose, the pearl, the dew, and the shells and the foam of the sea. But, alas ! the King and Queen had forgotten to ask one guest. The Goddess of Envy and Discord had been left out, and she came unbidden, and when all the gods and goddesses

had given their gifts, she said: 'I too have a gift to give, a gift that will be more precious to her than any. I will give her a heart that shall be proof against all the onsets of the world.' So saying the Goddess of Envy took away the child's heart and put in its place a heart of stone, hard as adamant, bright and glittering as a gem. And the Goddess of Envy went her way mocking. The King and the Queen were greatly concerned, and they asked the gods and goddesses whether their daughter would ever recover her human heart. They were told that the Goddess of Envy would be obliged to give back the child's heart to the man who loved her enough to seek and to find it, and this would surely happen; but when and how it was forbidden to them to reveal.

"The child grew up and became the wonder of the world. She was married to a powerful King, and they lived in peace and plenty until the Goddess of Envy once more troubled the child's life. For owing to her subtle planning a Prince was promised for wife the fairest woman in the world, and he took the wife of the powerful King and carried her away to Asia to the six-gated city. The King prepared a host of ships and armed men and sailed to Asia to win back his wife. And he and his army fought for ten years until the six-gated city was taken, and he brought his wife home once more. Now during all the time the

war lasted, although the whole world was filled with the fame of the King's wife and of her beauty, there was not found one man who was willing to seek for her heart and to find it, for some gave no credence to the tale, and others, believing it, reasoned that the quest might last a life-time, and that by the time they accomplished it the King's wife would be an old woman, and there would be fairer women in the world. Others, again, could not believe that in so perfect a woman there could be any fault ; they vowed her heart must be one with her matchless beauty, and they said that even if the tale were true, they preferred to worship her as she was, and they would not have her be otherwise or changed by a hair's breadth for all the world. Some, indeed, did set out upon the quest, but abandoned it soon from weariness and returned to bask in the beauty of the great Queen.

“ The years went by. The Queen journeyed to Egypt, to the mountains of the South, and the cities of the desert ; to the Pillars of Hercules and to the islands of the West. Wherever she went her fame spread like fire, and men fought and died for a glimpse of her marvellous beauty ; and wherever she passed she left behind her strife and sorrow like a burning trail. After many voyages she returned home and lived prosperously. The King her husband died, her children grew up and married

and bore children themselves, and she continued to live peacefully in her palace. Her fame and her glory brought her neither joy nor sorrow, nor did she heed the spell that she cast on the hearts of men.

“ One day a harp-player came to her palace and sang and played before her ; he made music so ravishing and so sad that all who heard him wept save the Queen, who listened and smiled, listless and indifferent. But her smile filled him with such a passion of wonder and worship that he resolved to rest no more until he had found her heart, for he knew the tale. So he sought the whole world over in vain ; and for years and years he roamed the world fruitlessly. At last one day in a far country he found a little bird in a trap and he set it free, and in return the bird promised him that he should find the Queen’s heart. All he had to do was to go home and to seek the Queen’s palace. So the harper went home to the Queen’s palace, and when he reached it he found the Queen had grown old ; her hair was grey and there were lines on her cheek. But she smiled on him, and he knelt down before her, for he loved her more than ever, and to him she was as beautiful as ever she had been. At that moment, for the first time in her life the Queen’s eyes filled with tears, for her heart had been given back to her. And that is all the story.”

“ And what happened to the harper ? ” asked one of the little boys.

“ He lived in the palace and played to the Queen till he died.”

“ And is the story true ? ” asked the other little boy.

“ Yes,” said the old woman, “ quite true.”

The boys jumped up and kissed the old woman, and the elder of them, growing pensive, said :—

“ Grandmother, were you ever young yourself ? ”

“ Yes, my child,” said the old woman, smiling, “ I was once young—a very long time ago.”

She got up, for the twilight had come and it was almost dark. She walked into the house, and as she rose she was neither bowed nor bent, but she trod the ground with a straightness which was not stiff but full of grace, and she moved royally like a goddess. As she walked past the smoking flames the children noticed that large tears were welling from her eyes and trickling down her faded cheek.

XVI

DR. FAUST'S LAST DAY

THE Doctor got up at dawn, as was his wont, and as soon as he was dressed he sat down at his desk in his library overlooking the sea, and immersed himself in the studies which were the lodestar of his existence. His hours were mapped out with rigid regularity like those of a school-boy, and his methodical life worked as though by clockwork. He rose at dawn and read without interruption until eight o'clock. He then partook of some light food (he was a strict vegetarian), after which he walked in the garden of his house, overlooking the Bay of Naples, until ten. From ten to twelve he received sick people, peasants from the village, or any visitors that needed his advice or his company. At twelve he ate a frugal meal. From one o'clock until three he enjoyed a siesta. At three he resumed his studies, which continued without interruption until six when he partook of a second meal. At seven he took another stroll in the village or by the seashore and remained out of doors until nine. He then withdrew into his study, and at midnight went to bed.

It was, perhaps, the extreme regularity of his life, combined with the strict diet which he observed, that accounted for his good health. This

day was his seventieth birthday, and his body was as vigorous and his mind as alert as they had been in his fortieth year. His thick hair and beard were scarcely grey, and the wrinkles on his white, thoughtful face were rare. Yet the Doctor, when questioned as to the secret of his youthfulness, being like many learned men fond of a paradox, used to reply that diet and regularity had nothing to do with it, and that the Southern sun and the climate of the Neapolitan coast, which he had chosen among all places to be the abode of his old age, were in reality responsible for his excellent health.

“ I lead a regular life,” he used to say, “ not in order to keep well, but in order to get through my work. Unless my hours were mapped out regularly I should be the prey of every idler in the place and I should never get any work done at all.”

On this day, as it was his seventieth birthday, the Doctor had asked a few friends to share his mid-day meal, and when he returned from his morning stroll he sent for his housekeeper to give her a few final instructions. The housekeeper, who was a voluble Italian peasant-woman, after receiving his orders, handed him a piece of paper on which a few words were scrawled in reddish-brown ink, saying it had been left by a Signore.

“ What Signore ? ” asked the Doctor, as he per-

used the document, which consisted of words in the German tongue to the effect that the writer regretted his absence from the Doctor's feast, but would call at midnight. It was not signed.

"He was a Signore, like all Signore," said the housekeeper; "he just left the letter and went away."

The Doctor was puzzled, and in spite of much cross-examination he was unable to extract anything more beyond the fact that he was a "Signore."

"Shall I lay one place less?" asked the housekeeper.

"Certainly not," said the Doctor. "All my guests will be present." And he threw the piece of paper on the table.

The housekeeper left the room, but she had not been gone many minutes before she returned and said that Maria, the wife of the late Giovanni, the baker, wished to speak to him. The Doctor nodded, and Maria burst into the room, sobbing.

When her tears had somewhat subsided she told her story in broken sentences. Her daughter, Margherita, who was seventeen years old, had been allowed to spend the summer at Sorrento with her late father's sister. There, it appeared, she had met a "Signore," who had given her jewels, made love to her, promised her marriage, and held clandestine meetings with her. Her aunt professed now to have been unaware of this; but Maria

assured the Doctor that her sister-in-law, who had the evil eye and had more than once trafficked with Satan, must have had knowledge of the business, even if she were not directly responsible, which was highly probable. In the meantime Margherita's brother Anselmo had returned from the wars in the North, and, discovering the truth, had sworn to kill the Signore unless he married Margherita.

"And what do you wish me to do?" asked the Doctor, after he had listened to the story.

"Anything, anything," she answered, "only calm my son Anselmo or else there will be a disaster."

"Who is the Signore?" asked the Doctor.

"The Conte Guido da Siena," she answered.

The Doctor reflected a moment, and then said: "I will see what can be done. The matter can be arranged. Send your son to me later." And then, after scolding Maria for not having taken proper care of her daughter, he sent her away.

As he did so he caught sight of the dirty piece of paper on his table. For one second he had the impression that the letters on it were written in blood, and he shivered, but the momentary hallucination and sense of discomfort passed immediately.

At mid-day the guests arrived. They consisted of Dr Cornelius, Vienna's most learned scholar; Taddeo Mainardi, the painter; a Danish student

from the University of Wittenberg; a young English nobleman, who was travelling in Italy; and Guido da Siena, philosopher and poet, who was said to be the handsomest man in Italy. The Doctor set before his guests a precious wine from Cyprus, in which he toasted them, although as a rule he drank only water. The meal was served in the cool loggia overlooking the bay, and the talk, which was of the men and books of many climes, flowed like a rippling stream on which the sunshine of laughter lightly played.

The student asked the Doctor whether in Italy men of taste took any interest in the recent experiments of a French Huguenot, who professed to be able to send people into a trance. Moreover, the patient when in the trance, so it was alleged, was able to act as a bridge between the material and the spiritual worlds, and the dead could be summoned and made to speak through the unconscious patient.

“We take no thought of such things here,” said the Doctor. “In my youth, when I studied in the North, experiments of that nature exercised a powerful sway over my mind. I dabbled in alchemy; I tried and indeed considered that I succeeded in raising spirits and visions; but two things are necessary for such a study: youth, and the mists of the Northern country. Here the generous sun kills such phantasies. There are no

phantoms here. Moreover, I am convinced that in all such experiments success depends on the state of mind of the inquirer, which not only persuades, but indeed compels itself by a strange magnetic quality to see the vision it desires. In my youth I considered that I had evoked visions of Satan and Helen of Troy, and what not—such things are fit for the young. We greybeards have more serious things to occupy us, and when a man has one foot in the grave, he has no time to waste.”

“To my mind,” said the painter, “this world has sufficient beauty and mystery to satisfy the most ardent inquirer.”

“But,” said the Englishman, “is not this world a phantom and a dream as insubstantial as the visions of the ardent mind?”

“Men and women are the only study fit for a man,” interrupted Guido, “and as for the philosopher’s stone I have found it. I found it some months ago in a garden at Sorrento. It is a pearl radiant with all the hues of the rainbow.”

“With regard to that matter,” said the Doctor, “we will have some talk later. The wench’s brother has returned from the war. We must find her a husband.”

“You misunderstand me,” said Guido. “You do not think I am going to throw my precious pearl to the swine? I have sworn to wed Margherita, and wed her I shall, and that swiftly.”

“Such an act of folly would only lead,” said the Doctor, “to your unhappiness and to hers. It is the selfish act of a fool. You must not think of it.”

“Ah!” said Guido, “you are young at seventy, Doctor, but you were old at twenty-five, and you cannot know what these things mean.”

“I was young in my day,” said the Doctor, “and I found many such pearls; believe me, they are all very well in their native shell. To move them is to destroy their beauty.”

“You do not understand,” said Guido. “I have loved countless times; but she is different. You never felt the revelation of the real, true thing that is different from all the rest and transforms a man’s life.”

“No,” said the Doctor, “I confess that to me it was always the same thing.” And for the second time that day the Doctor shivered, he knew not why.

Soon after the meal was over the guests departed, and although the Doctor detained Guido and endeavoured to persuade him to listen to the voice of reason and commonsense, his efforts were in vain. Guido had determined to wed Margherita.

“Besides which, if I left her now, I should bring shame and ruin on her,” he said.

The Doctor started—a familiar voice seemed to whisper in his ear: “She is not the first one.” A strange shudder passed through him, and he dis-

tinctly heard a mocking voice laughing. "Go your way," he said, "but do not come and complain to me if you bring unhappiness on yourself and her."

Guido departed and the Doctor retired to enjoy his siesta.

For the first time during all the years he had lived at Naples the Doctor was not able to sleep. "This and the hallucinations I have suffered from to-day come from drinking that Cyprus wine," he said to himself.

He lay in the darkened room tossing uneasily on his bed and sleep would not come to time. Stranger still, before his eyes fiery letters seemed to dance before him in the air. At seven o'clock he went out into the garden. Never had he beheld a more glorious evening. He strolled down towards the seashore and watched the sunset. Mount Vesuvius seemed to have dissolved into a rosy haze; the waves of the sea were phosphorescent. A fisherman was singing in his boat. The sky was an apocalypse of glory and peace.

The Doctor sighed and watched the pageant of light until it faded and the stars lit up the magical blue darkness. Then out of the night came another song—a song which seemed familiar to the Doctor, although for the moment he could not place it, about a King in the Northern Country

who was faithful to the grave and to whom his dying mistress a golden beaker gave.

“Strange,” thought the Doctor, “it must come from some Northern fishing smack,” and he went home.

He sat reading in his study until midnight, and for the first time in thirty years he could not fix his mind on his book. For the vision of the sunset and the song of the Northern fisherman, which in some unaccountable way brought back to him the days of his youth, kept on surging up in his mind.

Twelve o'clock struck. He rose to go to bed, and as he did so he heard a loud knock at the door.

“Come in,” said the Doctor, but his voice faltered (“the Cyprus wine again!” he thought), and his heart beat loudly.

The door opened and an icy draught blew into the room. The visitor beckoned, but spoke no word, and Doctor Faust rose and followed him into the outer darkness.



XVII

THE FLUTE-PLAYER'S STORY



I

THERE is a village in the South of England not far from the sea, which possesses a curious inn called "The Green Tower." Why it is called thus, nobody knows. This inn must in days gone by have been the dwelling of some well-to-do squire, but nothing now remains of its former prosperity, except the square grey tower, partially covered with ivy, from which it takes its name. The inn stands on the roadside, on the brow of a hill, and at the top of the tower there is a room with four large windows, whence you can see all over the wooded country. The ex-Prime Minister of a foreign state, who had been driven from office and home by a revolution, happening to pass the night in the inn and being of an eccentric disposition, was so much struck with this room that he secured it, together with two bedrooms, permanently for himself. He determined to spend the rest of his life here, and as he was within certain limits not unsociable, he invited his friends to come and stay with him on any Saturday they pleased, without giving him notice.

Thus it happened that of a Saturday and Sunday there was nearly always a mixed gathering of men

at "The Green Tower," and after they had dined they would sit in the tower room and drink old Southern wines from the ex-Prime Minister's country, and talk, or tell each other stories. But the ex-Prime Minister made it a stringent rule that at least one guest should tell one story during his stay, for while he had been Prime Minister a Court official had been in his service whose only duty it was to tell him a story every evening, and this was the only thing he regretted of all his former privileges.

On this particular Sunday, besides myself, the clerk, the flute-player, the wine merchant (the friends of the ex-Prime Minister were exceedingly various), and the scholar were present. They were smoking in the tower room. It was summer, and the windows were wide open. Every inch of wall which was not occupied by the windows was crowded with books. The clerk was turning over the leaves of the ex-Prime Minister's stamp collection (which was magnificent), the flute-player was reading the score of Handel's flute sonatas (which was rare), the scholar was reading a translation in Latin hexameters of the "Ring and the Book" (which the ex-Prime Minister has written in his spare moments), and the wine merchant was drinking generously of a curious red wine, which was very old.

"I think," said the ex-Prime Minister, "that the flute-player has never yet told us a story."

The guests knew that this hint was imperative, and so putting away his score, the flute-player said: "My story is called, 'The Fiddler.' And he began:—

"This happened a long time ago in one of the German-speaking countries of the Holy Roman Empire. There was a Count who lived in a large castle. He was rich, powerful, and the owner of large lands. He had a wife, and one daughter, who was dazzlingly beautiful, and she was betrothed to the eldest son of a neighbouring lord. When I say betrothed, I mean that her parents had arranged the marriage. She herself—her name was *Elisinde*—had had no voice in the matter, and she disliked, or rather loathed, her future husband, who was boorish, sullen, and ill-tempered; he cared for nothing except hunting and deep drinking, and had nothing to recommend him but his ducats and his land. But it was quite useless for *Elisinde* to cry or protest. Her parents had settled the marriage and it was to be. She understood this herself very well.

"All the necessary preparations for the wedding, which was to be held on a splendid scale, were made. There was to be a whole week of feasting; and tumblers and musicians came from distant parts of the country to take part in the festivities and merry-making. In the village, which was close to the castle, a fair was held, and the musicians,

tumblers, and mountebanks, who had thronged to it, performed in front of the castle walls for the amusement of the Count's guests.

“ Among these strolling vagabonds was a fiddler who far excelled all the others in skill. He drew the most ravishing tones from his instrument, which seemed to speak in trills as liquid as those of the nightingale, and in accents as plaintive as those of a human voice. And one of the inmates of the castle was so much struck by the performance of this fiddler that he told the Count of it, and the fiddler was commanded to come and play at the Castle, after the banquet which was to be held on the eve of the wedding. The banquet took place in great pomp and solemnity, and lasted for many hours. When it was over the fiddler was summoned to the large hall and bidden to play before the Lords and Ladies.

“ The fiddler was a strange looking, tall fellow with unkempt fair hair, and eyes that glittered like gold ; but as he was dressed in tattered uncouth rags (and they were his best too) he cut an extraordinary and almost ridiculous figure amongst that splendid jewelled gathering. The guests tittered when they saw him. But as soon as he began to play, their tittering ceased, for never had they heard such music.

“ He played—in view of the festive occasion—a joyous melody. And, as he played, the air

seemed full of sunlight, and the smell of wine vats and the hum of bees round ripe fruit. The guests could not keep still in their places, and at last the Count gave orders for a general dance. The hall was cleared, and soon all the guests were breathlessly dancing to the divine lilt of the fiddler's melody. All except Elisinde who, when her betrothed came forward to lead her to the dance, pleaded fatigue, and remained seated in her chair, pale and distraught, and staring at the fiddler. This did not, to tell the truth, displease her betrothed, who was a clumsy dancer and had no ear for music. Breathless at last with exhaustion the guests begged the untiring fiddler to pause while they rested for a moment to get their breath.

“ And while they were resting the fiddler played another tune. This time it was a sad tune : a low, soft tune, liquid and lovely as a human voice. A great hush came on the company. It seemed as if after the heat and splendour of a summer's day the calm of evening had fallen ; the quiet of the dusk, when the moon rises in the sky, still faintly yellow in the west with the ebb of sunset, and pours on the stiff cornfields its cool, silvery frost ; and the trees quiver, as though they felt the freshness and were relieved, and a breeze comes, almost imperceptible and not strong enough to shake the boughs, from the sea ; and a bird, hidden somewhere in the leaves, sings a throbbing song.

“ Everyone was spellbound, but none so much as Elisinde. The music seemed to be speaking straight to her, to pierce the very core of her heart. It was an inarticulate language which she understood better than any words. She heard a lonely spirit crying out to her, that it understood her sorrow and shared her pain. And large tears poured down her cheeks.

“ The fiddler stopped playing, and for a moment or two no one spoke. At last Elisinde's betrothed gave a great yawn, and the spell was broken.

“ ‘ You play very well—very well, indeed,’ said the Count.

“ ‘ But that sad music is, I think, rather out of place to-day,’ said the Countess.

“ ‘ Yes, let us have another cheerful tune,’ said the Count.

“ The fiddler struck up once more and played another dance. This time there was an almost elfish magic in his melody. It took you captive ; it was irresistible ; it called and commanded and compelled ; you longed to follow, follow, anywhere, over the hills, over the sea, to the end of the world.

“ Elisinde rose from her chair as though the spirit of the music beckoned her, but looking round she saw no partner to her taste. She sat down again and stared at the fiddler. His eyes were fixed on her, and as she looked at him his squalor and rags seemed to fade away and his blue eyes that glittered

like gold seemed to grow larger, and his hair to grow brighter till it shone like fire. And he seemed to be caught in a rosy cloud of light : tall, splendid, young, and glowing like a god.

“ After this dance was over the Count rose, and he and his guests retired to rest. The fiddler was given a purse full of money, and the Count gave orders that he should be served refreshment in the kitchen.

“ Elsinde went up to her bedroom, which overlooked the garden. She threw the window wide open and looked out into the starry darkness. It was a breathless summer night. The air was full of warm scents. Lights still twinkled in the village ; now and again a dog barked, otherwise everything was still. She leant out of the window, and cried bitterly because her lot was loathsome to her, and she had not a friend in the world to whom she could confide her sorrow.

“ While she was thus sobbing she heard a rustling in the bushes beneath ; she looked down and she saw a face looking up towards her, a beautiful face, glistening in the moonlight. It was the fiddler.

“ ‘ Elsinde,’ he called to her in a low voice, ‘ if you want to escape I have the means. Come with me ; I love you, and I will save you from your doom.’

“ ‘ I would come with you to the end of the world,’ she said, ‘ but how can I get away from this castle ? ’

“ He threw a rope ladder up to her. ‘ Make it fast to the bar,’ he said, ‘ and let yourself down.’

“ She let herself down into the garden. ‘ We can easily climb the wall with this,’ he said ; ‘ but before you come I must tell you that if you will be my bride your life will be hard and full of misery. Think before you come.’

“ ‘ Rather all the misery in the world,’ she said, ‘ than the awful doom which awaits me here. Besides which I love you, and we shall be very happy.’

“ They scaled the wall, and on the other side of it the fiddler had two horses, waiting tied to the gate. They galloped through many villages, and by the dawn they had reached a village far beyond the Count’s lands. Here they stopped at an inn, and they were married by the priest that day. But they did not stop in this village ; they sought a further country, beyond reach of all pursuit. They settled in a village, and the fiddler earned his bread by his fiddling, and Elisinde kept their cottage neat and clean. For awhile they were as happy as the day was long ; the fiddler found favour everywhere by his fiddling, and Elisinde ingratiated herself by her gentle ways. But one day when Elisinde was lying in bed and the fiddler had lulled her to sleep with his music, some neighbours, attracted by the sound, passed the cottage and looked in at the window. And to their astonish-

ment they saw the fiddler sitting by a bed on which lay what seemed to them to be a sleeping princess ; and the whole cottage was full of dazzling light, and the fiddler's face shone, and his hair and his eyes glittered like gold. They went away much frightened, and told the whole village the news.

“ Now there were already not a few of the villagers who looked askance on the fiddler ; and this incident set all the evil and envious tongues wagging. When the fiddler went to play the next day at the inn men turned away from him, and a child in the street threw a stone at him. Presently he was warned that he had better swiftly fly or else he would be drowned as a sorcerer.

“ So he and Elisinde fled in the night to a neighbouring village. But soon the dark rumours followed them, and they were forced to flee once more. This happened again and again, till at last in the whole country there was not a village which would receive them, and one night they were obliged to take refuge in a barn, for Elisinde was expecting the birth of her child. That night their child was born, a beautiful little boy, and an hour afterwards Elisinde smiled and died.

“ All that night the villagers heard from afar a piteous wailing music, infinitely sad and beautiful, and those that heard it shuddered and crossed themselves.

“ The next day the villagers sought the barn,

for they had resolved to drown the sorcerer ; but he was not there. All they found was the dead body of Elisinde, and a little baby lying on some straw. The body of Elisinde was covered with roses. And this was strange, for it was midwinter. The fiddler had disappeared and was never heard of again, and an old wood-cutter, who was too old to know any better, took charge of the baby.

“ I will tell you what happened to it another day.”

II

“ We wish to hear the end of your story,” said the ex-Prime Minister to the flute-player.

“ Yes,” said the scholar, “ and I want to know who the fiddler was.”

This conversation took place at the Green Tower two weeks after the gathering I have already described. The same people were present ; but there was another guest, namely, the musician, who, unlike the flute-player, was not an amateur.

“ The child of Elisinde and the fiddler,” began the flute-player, “ was, as I have already told you, a boy. The woodcutter who took pity on him was old and childless. He brought the baby to his hut, and gave it over to the care of his wife. At first she pretended to be angry, and said that nothing would persuade her to have anything to do

with the child, and that it was all they could do to feed themselves without picking up waifs in the gutter ; but she ended by looking after the baby with the utmost tenderness and care, and by loving it as much as if it had been her own child. The baby was christened Franz. As soon as he was able to walk and talk there were two things about him which were remarkable. The first was his hair, which glittered like sunlight ; the second was his fondness for all musical sounds. When he was four years old he had made himself a flute out of a reed, and on this he played all day, imitating the song of the birds. He was in his sixth year when an event happened which changed his life. He was sitting in front of the woodcutter's cottage one day, when a bright cavalcade passed him. It was a nobleman from a neighbouring castle, who was travelling to the city with his retainers. Among these was a Kapellmeister, who organised the music of this nobleman's household. The moment he caught sight of Franz and heard his piping, he stopped, and asked who he was.

“ The woodcutter's wife told him the story of the finding of the waif, to which both the nobleman and himself listened with great interest. The Kapellmeister said that they should take the child with them ; that he should be attached to the nobleman's household and trained as a member of his choir or his string band, according to his capacities.

The nobleman, who was passionately fond of music, and extremely particular with regard to the manner of its performance, was delighted with the idea. The offer was made to the woodcutter and his wife, and although she cried a good deal they were both forced to recognise that they had no right to interfere with the child's good fortune. Moreover, the gift of a purse full of gold (which the nobleman gave them) did not make the matter more distasteful.

“ Finally it was settled that the child should go with the nobleman then and there ; and Franz took leave of his adopted parents, not without many and bitter tears being shed on both sides.

“ Franz travelled with the nobleman to a large city, and he became a member—the youngest—of the nobleman's household. He was taught his letters, which he learnt with ease, and the rudiments of music, which he absorbed with such astounding rapidity, that the Kapellmeister said that it seemed as if he already knew everything that was taught him. When he was seven years old, he could not only play several instruments, but he composed fugues and sonatas. When the nobleman invited the magnates of the place to listen to his musicians, Franz, the prodigy, was the centre of interest, and very soon he became the talk of the town. At the age of ten he was an accomplished

organ player, and he played with skill on the flute and the clavichord.

“ He grew up a tall and handsome lad, with clear, dreamy eyes, and hair that continued to glitter like sunlight. He was happy in the nobleman's household, for the nobleman and his wife were kind people ; like the woodcutter they were childless and came to look upon him as their own child. He was a quiet youth, and so deeply engrossed in his music and his studies that he seemed to be quite unaware of the outside world and its inhabitants and its doings. But although he led a retired, studious life, his fame had got abroad and had even reached the Emperor's ears.

“ When Franz was seventeen years old it happened that the Court was in need of an organist. The Emperor's curiosity had been aroused by what he had heard of Franz, and one fine day the youth was summoned to Court to play before his Majesty. This he did with such success that he was appointed organist of the Court on the spot.

“ He was sad at leaving the nobleman, but there was nothing to be done. The Emperor's wish was law. He became the Court organist and he played the organ in the Imperial chapel during Mass on Sundays. As before, he spent all his leisure time in composing music.

“ Now the Emperor had a daughter called Kunigmunde, who was beautiful and wildly roman-

tic. She was immediately spellbound by Franz's music, and he became the lodestar of her dreams. Often in the afternoon she would steal up to the organ loft, where he was playing alone, and sit for hours listening to his improvisations. They did not speak to each other much, but ever since Franz had set eyes on her something new had entered into his soul and spoke in his music, something tremulous and strange and wonderful.

“For a year Franz's life ran placidly and smoothly. He was made much of, praised and petted ; but now, as before, he seemed quite unaware of the outside world and its doings, and he moved in a world of his own, only he was no longer alone in his secret habitation, it was inhabited by another shape, the beautiful, dark-haired Princess Kunigmunde, and in her honour he composed songs, minuets, sonatas, hymns, and triumphal marches. As was only natural, there were not wanting at Court persons who were envious of Franz, his talent, and his good fortune. And among them there was a musician, a tenor in the Imperial choir, called Albrecht, who hated Franz with his whole heart. He was a dark-eyed, dark-haired creature, slightly deformed ; he limped, and he had a sinister look as though of a satyr. Nevertheless he was highly gifted and composed music of his own which, although it was not radiant like that of Franz, was full of brilliance and not

without a certain compelling power. Albrecht revolved in his mind how he might ruin Franz. He tried to excite the envy of the courtiers against him, but Franz was such a modest fellow, so kindly and good-natured, that it was not easy to make people dislike him. Nevertheless there were many who were tired of hearing him praised, and many who were secretly tired of the perpetual beauty and radiance of Franz's music, and wished for something new even though it should be ugly.

“An opportunity soon presented itself for Albrecht to carry out his evil and envious designs. The Court Kapellmeister died, and not long after this event a great feast was to be held at Court to celebrate Princess Kunigmunde's birthday. The Emperor had offered a prize, a wreath of gilt laurels, as well as the post of Court Kapellmeister to him who should compose the most beautiful piece of music in his daughter's honour. Franz seemed so certain of success that nobody even dared to compete with him except Albrecht.

“When the hour of the contest came—it took place in the great throne-room before the Emperor, the Empress, their sons, their daughter, and the whole Court after the banquet—Franz was the first to display his work. He sat down at the clavichord and sang what he had composed in honour of the Princess. He had made three little songs for her. Franz had not much voice, but it had a

peculiar wail in it, and he sang, like the born and trained musician that he was, with that absolute mastery over his means, that certain perfection of utterance, that power of conveying, to the shade of a shade, the inmost spirit and meaning of the music which only belong to those great and rare artists whose perfect art is alive with the inspiration that cannot be learnt.

“ The first song he sang was the call of a home-going shepherd to his flock on the hills at sunset, and when he sang it he brought the largeness of the dying evening and the solemn hills into the elegant throne-room. The second song was the cry of a lonely fisherman on the river at midnight, and as he sang it he brought the mystery of broad starlit waters into the taper-lit, gilded hall. The third song was the song of the happy lover in the orchard at dawn. And when he sang it he brought the smell of dewy leaves and grass, the soaring radiance of spring and early morning, to that powdered and silken assembly. The Court applauded him, but they were astonished and slightly disappointed, for they had expected something grand and complicated, and not three simple tunes. But the nobleman who had educated Franz, and his Kapellmeister, who were among the guests, wept tears in silence.

“ Albrecht followed him. The swarthy singer sat down to the instrument and struck a ringing

chord. He had a pure and infinitely powerful tenor voice, clear as crystal, loud as a clarion, strong, rich, and rippling. He sang a love-song he had composed himself. He called it 'The Homage of King Pan to the Princess.' It was voluptuous and vehement and sweet as honey, full of bold conceits and audacious turns and trills, which startled the audience and took their breath away. He sang his song with almost devilish skill and power ; and his warm, captivating voice rang through the room and shook the tall window-panes, and finally died away like the vibrations of a great bell. The whole Court shouted, delirious with applause, and unanimously declared him to be the victor. A witty courtier said that Marsyas had avenged himself on Apollo ; but the nobleman and his Kapellmeister snorted and sniffed and said nothing. Albrecht was given the prize and appointed Kapellmeister to the Court without further discussion.

“ When the ceremony was over, Franz, who was indifferent to his defeat, went to the chapel of the palace, and lighting a candle, walked up into the organ loft. There he played to himself another song, a hymn he had composed in honour of Princess Kunigunde. It was filled with rapture and a breathless wonder, and in it his inmost soul spoke its unuttered love. He had not sung this song in public, it was too sacred. As he played and sang

to himself in a low voice he was aware of a soft footstep. He started and looked round, and there was the Princess, bright in silk and jewels, with a pink rose in her powdered hair. She took this rose and laid it lightly on the black keys.

“ ‘That is the prize,’ she said. ‘You won it, and I want to thank you. I never knew music could be so beautiful.’

“ Franz looked at her, and said ‘Thank you.’ He had risen from his seat and was about to go, but the light of his candle caught Princess Kunigunde’s brown eyes (which were wet with tears), and something rose like fire in his breast and made him forget his bashfulness, his respect, and his sense of decorum.

“ ‘Come with me,’ he said, in a broken voice. ‘Let us fly from this Court to the hills and be happy.’

“ But the Princess shook her head sadly, and said: ‘Alas! It is impossible. I am betrothed to the King of the Two Sicilies.’

“ Then Franz mastered himself once more, and said: ‘Of course, it is impossible. I was mad.’

“ The Princess kissed her hand to him and fled.

“ At that moment Franz heard a noise in the nave of the chapel; he looked over the gallery of the organ loft, and saw sidling away in the darkness the dim figure of a deformed man.

“ That night Princess Kunigunde had a strange

dream. She thought she was transported into a beautiful southern country where the azure sky seemed to scintillate with the dust of myriads and myriads of diamonds, and to sparkle with sunlight like a dancing wine. The low blue hills were bare and sparsely clothed with delicate trees, and the fields, sprinkled with innumerable red, yellow, white and purple flowers, were bright as fabulous Persian carpets. On a grassy knoll before her the rosy columns of a temple shone in the gleaming dust of the atmosphere. Beside her there was a running stream, on the bank of which grew a bay-tree. There was a chirping of grasshoppers in the air, a noise of bees, and a delicious warm smell of burnt grass and thyme and mint.

“Near the stream a man was standing ; he was an ordinary man, and yet he seemed to tower above the landscape without being unusually tall ; his hair was bright as gold, and his eyes, more lustrous still, reflected the silvery blue sky and shone like opals. In his hands he held a golden lyre, and around him a warm golden cloud seemed to rise, on a transparent aura of light, like the glow of the sunset. In front of him there stood a creature of the woods, a satyr, with pointed ears, cloven hoofs, and human eyes, in his hairy hands holding a flute made out of a reed.

“Presently the satyr breathed on his flute and a wonderful note trembled in the air, soft, low, and

liquid. The note was followed by others, and a stillness fell upon Nature ; the birds ceased to sing, the grasshoppers were still, the bees paused. All Nature was listening, and the Princess was conscious in her dream that there were others besides herself listening, unseen shapes and sightless phantoms ; a crowd, a multitude of attentive ghosts, that were hidden from her sight. The melody rose and swelled in the stillness ; it was melting and ravishing and bold with a human audacity. As she listened it reminded her of something ; she felt she had heard such sounds before, though she could not remember where and when. But suddenly it flashed across her that the music resembled Albrecht's song ; it was Albrecht's song, only transfigured as it were, and a thousand times more beautiful in her dream than in the reality. More beautiful, and at the same time as though it belonged to days of youth and spring which Albrecht had never known. The satyr ceased playing and the pleasant noises of the world began once more. The shining figure who stood before him looked on the satyr with divine scorn and smiled a radiant, merciless smile. Then he struck his lyre and Nature once more was dumb.

“ But this time the magic was of another kind and a thousand times more mighty ; a song rose into the air which leapt and soared like a flame, imperious as the flashing of a sword, triumphant

as the waving of a banner, wonderful as the dawn and fresh as the laughing sea. And once more Princess Kunigunde was aware that the music was familiar to her. She had heard something like it, a pale reflection of it, before, and she had heard it in the chapel that evening, when in the darkness Franz had played and sung the hymn that he had composed in her honour. Only now it was more than human, unearthly and divine. As soon as he ceased an eclipse seemed to darken the world, a thick cloud of rolling darkness ; there was a crash of thunder, a flash of lightning, and out of the blackness came a piteous, human cry, the cry of a creature in anguish, and then a faint moaning.

“ Presently all was still, but the dark cloud remained, and she heard a mocking laugh and the accents of a clear, scornful voice (she recognised the voice, it was the voice of Albrecht), and the voice said : ‘ Thou hast conquered, Apollo, and cruelly hast thou used thy victory ; and cruelly hast thou punished me for daring to challenge thy divine skill. It was mad indeed to compete with a god ; and yet shall I avenge my wrong and thy harshness shall recoil on thee. For not even gods can be unjust with impunity, and the Fates are above us all. And I shall be avenged ; for all thy sons shall suffer what I have suffered ; and there is not one of them that shall escape the doom and not share the fate of Marsyas the Satyr, whom

thou didst cruelly slay. The music and the skill which shall be their inheritance shall be the cause to them of sorrow and grief unending and pitiless pain and misery. Their life shall be as bitter to them as my death has been to me. Their music shall fill the world with sweetness and ravish the ears of listening nations, but to them it shall bring no joy ; for life like a cruel blade shall flay and lay bare their hearts, and sorrow like a searching wind shall play upon their souls and make them tremble, even as the scabbard of my body trembled in the breeze ; and just as from that trembling husk of what was once myself there came forth sweet sounds, so shall it be with their souls, shivering and trembling in the cold wind of life. Music shall come from them, but this music shall be born of agony ; nor shall they utter a single note that is not begotten of sorrow or pain. And so shall the children of Apollo suffer and share the pain of Marsyas.

“ The voice died away, and a pitiful wail was heard as of a wind blowing through the reeds of a river. And the Princess awoke, trembling with fear of some unknown and impending disaster.

“ The next morning Franz, as he walked into the chapel to practice on the organ, was met by two soldiers, who bade him follow them, and he was shut up in the prison of the palace. No word of explanation was given him ; nor had he any idea

what the crime might be of which he was accused, or of his ultimate fate. But in the evening, when the gaoler's daughter brought him his food, she made him a sign, and he found in his loaf of bread a rose, a file, and a tiny scroll, on which the following words were written : ' Albrecht denounced you. Fly for your life. K.' Later, when the gaolers had gone to sleep, the gaoler's daughter stole to his cell. She brought him a rope, and a purse full of silver. He filed the bars and let himself down into a narrow street of the city.

" By the time the sun rose he had left the city far behind him. He journeyed on and on till he passed the frontier of the Emperor's dominions and reached a neighbouring State. By the time he came to a city he had spent his money, and he was in rags and tatters ; nevertheless, he managed to earn his bread by making music in the streets, and after a time a well-to-do citizen who noticed him took him into his house and entrusted him with the task of teaching music to his sons and of playing him to sleep in the evening. Franz spent his leisure hours in composing an opera called " The Death of Adonis," into which he poured all the music of his soul, all his love, his sorrow, and his infinite desire. He lived for this only, and during all the hours he spent when he was not working at his opera he was like a man in a dream, unconscious of the realities around him. In a year

his opera was finished. He took it to the Intendant of the Ducal Theatre in the city and played it to him, and the Intendant, greatly pleased, determined to have it performed without delay. The best singers were allotted parts in it, and it was performed before the Arch-Duke and his Court, and a multitude of people.

“The music told the story of Franz’s love ; it was bright with all his dreams, and sorrowful with his great despair. Never had such music been heard ; so sweet, so sunlit in its joys, so radiant in its sadness. But the Arch-Duke and his Court, startled by the new accent of this music, and influenced by the local and established musicians, who were envious of this newcomer, listened in frigid silence, so that the common people in the gallery dared not show signs of their delight. In fact, the opera was a complete failure. Public opinion followed the Court, and found no words, bad or strong enough to condemn what they called the new-fangled rubbish. Among those who blamed the new work there was none so bitter as the citizen whose children Franz had been teaching. For this man considered himself to be a genius, and was inordinately vain, and his ignorance was equal to his conceit. He dismissed Franz from his service. All doors were now closed to him, and being on the verge of starvation he was reduced to earning his bread in the streets by playing his pipe. This also

proved unsuccessful, and it was with difficulty that he earned a few pence every day.

“ At last he burnt all his manuscripts, and went into the hills ; the hill people welcomed him, but their kindness came too late ; his heart was broken, and when sickness came to him with the winter snow, he had no longer any strength to resist it. The peasants found him one day lying cold and stiff in his hut. They buried him on the hill-side. The night of his funeral a strange fiddler with a shining face was seen standing beside his grave and playing the most lovely tunes on a violin. .

“ The name of Franz was soon forgotten, but although he died obscure and penniless he left a rich legacy. For he taught the hill-people three songs, the songs he had sung at Court in honour of Princess Kunigmunde, and they never died. They spread from the hills to the plains, from the plains to the river, from the river to the woods, and indeed you can still hear them on the hills of the north, on the great broad rivers of the east, and in the orchards of the south.”

XVIII
A CHINAMAN ON OXFORD



“YES, I am a student,” said the Chinaman,
“and I came here to study the English
manners and customs.”

We were seated on the top of the electric tram
which goes to Hampton Court. It was a bitterly
cold spring day. The suburbs of London were not
looking their best.

“I spent three days at Oxford last week,” he
said.

“It’s a beautiful place, is it not ?” I remarked.

The Chinaman smiled. “The country which
you see from the windows of the railway carriages,”
he said, “on the way from Oxford to London strikes
me as being beautiful. It reminded me of the
Chinese Plain, only it is prettier. But the houses
at Oxford are hideous : there is no symmetry about
them. The houses in this country are like blots
on the landscape. In China the houses are made
to harmonise with the landscape just as trees
do.”

“What did you see at Oxford ?” I asked.

“I saw boat races,” he said, “and a great many
ignorant old men.”

“What did you think of that ?”

“I think,” he said, “the young people seemed

to enjoy it, and if they enjoy it they are quite right to do it. But the way the older men talk about these things struck me as being foolish. They talk as if these games and these sports were a solemn affair, a moral or religious question ; they said the virtues and the prowess of the English race were founded on these things. They said that competition was the mainspring of life ; they seemed to think exercise was the goal of existence. A man whom I saw there and who, I learnt, had been chosen to teach the young on account of his wisdom, told me that competition trained the man to sharpen his faculties ; and that the tension which it provoked is in itself a useful training. I do not believe this. A cat or a boa constrictor will lie absolutely idle until it perceives an object worthy of its appetite ; it will then catch it and swallow it, and once more relapse into repose without thinking of keeping itself ' in training.' But it will lie dormant and rise to the occasion when it occurs. These people who talked of games seem to me to undervalue repose. They forget that repose is the mother of action, and exercise only a frittering away of the same."

" What did you think," I asked, " of the education that the students at Oxford receive ? "

" I think," said the Chinaman, " that inasmuch as the young men waste their time in idleness they do well ; for the wise men who are chosen to in-

struct the young at your places of learning, are not always wise. I visited a professor of Oriental languages. His servant asked me to wait, and after I had waited three quarters of an hour, he sent word to say that he had tried everywhere to find the professor in the University who spoke French, but that he had not been able to find him. And so he asked me to call another day. I had dinner in a college hall. I found that the professors talked of many things in such a way as would be impossible to children of five and six in our country. They are quite ignorant of the manners and customs of the people of other European countries. They pronounce Greek and Latin and even French in the same way as English. I mentioned to one of them that I had been employed for some time in the Chinese Legation ; he asked me if I had had much work to do. I said yes, the work had been heavy. ' But,' he observed, ' I suppose a great deal of the work is carried on directly between the Governments and not through the Ambassadors.' I cannot conceive what he meant or how such a thing could be possible, or what he considered the use and function of Embassies and Legations to be. They most of them seemed to take for granted that I could not speak English : some of them addressed me in a kind of baby language ; one of them spoke French. The professor who spoke to me in this language told me that the French possessed no

poetical literature, and he said the reason of this was that the French language was a bastard language; that it was, in fact, a kind of pigeon Latin. He said when a Frenchman says a girl is 'beaucoup belle,' he is using pigeon Latin. The courtesy due to a host prevented me from suggesting that if a Frenchman said 'beaucoup belle' he would be talking pigeon French.

"Another professor said to me that China would soon develop if she adopted a large Imperial ideal, and that in time the Chinese might attain to a great position in the world, such as the English now held. He said the best means of bringing this about would be to introduce cricket and football into China. I told him that I thought this was improbable, because if the Chinese play games, they do not care who is the winner; the fun of the game is to us the improvisation of it as opposed to the organisation which appeals to the people here. Upon which he said that cricket was like a symphony of music. In a symphony every instrument plays its part in obedience to one central will, not for its individual advantage but in order to make a beautiful whole. 'So it is with our games,' he said, 'every man plays his part not for the sake of personal advantage, but so that his side may win; and thus the citizen is taught to sink his own interests in those of the community.' I told him the Chinese did not like symphonies, and Western

music was intolerable to them for this very reason. Western musicians seem to us to take a musical idea which is only worthy of a penny whistle (and would be very good indeed if played on a penny whistle !) ; and they sit down and make a score of it twenty yards broad, and set a hundred highly-trained and highly-paid musicians to play it. It is the contrast between the tremendous apparatus and waste of energy on one side, and the light and playful character of the business itself on the other, which makes me, a Chinaman, as incapable of appreciating your complicated games as I am of appreciating the complicated symphonies of the Germans or the elaborate rules which their students make with regard to the drinking of beer. We like a man for taking his fun and not missing a joke when he finds it by chance on his way, but we cannot understand his going out of his way to prepare a joke and to make arrangements for having some fun at a certain fixed date. That is why we consider a wayside song, a tune that is heard wandering in the summer darkness, to be better than twenty concerts."

"What did the professor say ? " I asked.

"He said that if I were to stay long enough in England and go to a course of concerts at the Chelsea Town Hall, I would soon learn to think differently. And that if cricket and football were introduced into China, the Chinese would soon

emerge out of their backwardness and barbarism and take a high place among the enlightened nations of the world. I thought to myself as he said this that your games are no doubt an excellent substitute for drill, but if we were to submit to so complicated an organisation it would be with a purpose : in order to turn the Europeans out of China, for instance ; but that organisation without a purpose would always seem to us to be stupid, and we should no more dream of organising our play than of organising a stroll in the twilight to see the Evening Star, or the chase of a butterfly in the spring. If we were to decide on drill it would be drill with a vengeance and with a definite aim ; but we should not therefore and thereby destroy our play. Play cannot exist for us without fun, and for us the open air, the fields, and the meadows are like wine : if we feel inclined, we roam and jump about in them, but we should never submit to standing to attention for hours lest a ball should escape us. Besides which, we invented the foundations of all your games many thousand of years ago. We invented and played at 'Diabolo' when the Britons were painted blue and lived in the woods. The English knew how to play once, in the days of Queen Elizabeth ; then they had masques and madrigals and Morris dances and music. A gentleman was ashamed if he did not speak six or seven languages, handle the sword with a deadly

dexterity, play chess, and write good sonnets. Men were broken on the wheel for an idea: they were brave, cultivated, and gay; they fought, they played, and they wrote excellent verse. Now they organise games and lay claim to a special morality and to a special mission; they send out missionaries to civilise us savages; and if our people resent having an alien creed stuffed down their throats, they take our land and burn our homes in the name of Charity, Progress, and Civilisation. They seek but one thing—gold; they preach competition, but competition for what? For this: who shall possess the most, who shall most successfully 'do' his neighbour. These ideals and aims do not tempt us. The quality of the life is to us more important than the quantity of what is done and achieved. We live, as we play, for the sake of living. I did not say this to the professors because we have a proverb that when you are in a man's country you should not speak ill of it. I say it to you because I see you have an inquiring mind, and you would feel it more insulting to be served with meaningless phrases and empty civilities than with the truth, however bitter. For those who have once looked the truth in the face cannot afterwards be put off with false semblances."

"You speak true words," I said, "but what do you like best in England?"

"The gardens," he answered, "and the little

yellow flowers that are sprinkled like stars on your green grass."

"And what do you like least in England?"

"The horrible smells," he said.

"Have you no smells in China?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied, "we have natural smells, but not the smell of gas and smoke and coal which sickens me here. It is strange to me that people can find the smell of human beings disgusting and be able to stand the foul stench of a London street. This very road along which we are now travelling (we were passing through one of the less beautiful portions of the tramway line) makes me homesick for my country. I long to see a Chinese village once more built of mud and fenced with mud, muddy-roaded and muddy-baked, with a muddy little stream to be waded across or passed by stepping on stones; with a delicate one-storeyed temple on the water-eaten bank, and green poppy fields round it; and the women in dark blue standing at the doorways, smoking their pipes; and the children, with three small budding pigtailed on the head of each, clinging to them; and the river fringed with a thousand masts: the boats, the houseboats, the barges and the ships in the calm, wide estuaries, each with a pair of huge eyes painted on the front bow. And the people: the men working at their looms and whistling a happy tune out of the gladness of their hearts. And

everywhere the sense of leisure, the absence of hurry and bustle and confusion ; the dignity of manners and the grace of expression and of address. And, above all, the smell of life everywhere."

" I admit," I said, " that our streets smell horribly of smoke and coal, but surely our people are clean ? "

" Yes," he said, " no doubt ; but you forget that to us there is nothing so intolerably nasty as the smell of a clean white man ! "

XIX
VENUS

I

JOHAN FLETCHER was an overworked minor official in a Government office. He lived a lonely life, and had done so ever since he had been a boy. At school he had mixed little with his fellow school-boys, and he took no interest in the things that interested them, that is to say, games. On the other hand, although he was what is called "good at work," and did his lessons with facility and ease, he was not a literary boy, and did not care for books. He was drawn towards machinery of all kinds, and spent his spare time in dabbling in scientific experiments or in watching trains go by on the Great Western line. Once he blew off his eyebrows while making some experiment with explosive chemicals; his hands were always smudged with dark, mysterious stains, and his room was like that of a mediæval alchemist, littered with retorts, bottles, and test-glasses. Before leaving school he invented a flying machine (heavier than air), and an unsuccessful attempt to start it on the high road caused him to be the victim of much chaff and ridicule.

When he left school he went to Oxford. His life

there was as lonely as it had been at school. The dirty, untidy, ink-stained, and chemical-stained little boy grew up into a tall, lank, slovenly-dressed man, who kept entirely to himself, not because he cherished any dislike or disdain for his fellow-creatures, but because he seemed to be entirely absorbed in his own thoughts and isolated from the world by a barrier of dreams.

He did well at Oxford, and when he went down he passed high into the Civil Service and became a clerk in a Government office. There he kept as much to himself as ever. He did his work rapidly and well, for this man, who seemed so slovenly in his person, had an accurate mind, and was what was called a good clerk, although his incurable absent-mindedness once or twice caused him to forget certain matters of importance.

His fellow clerks treated him as a crank and as a joke, but none of them, try as they would, could get to know him or win his confidence. They used to wonder what Fletcher did with his spare time, what were his pursuits, what were his hobbies, if he had any. They suspected that Fletcher had some hobby of an engrossing kind, since in everyday life he conveyed the impression of a man who is walking in his sleep, who acts mechanically and automatically. Somewhere else, they thought, in some other circumstances, he must surely wake up

and take a living interest in somebody or in something.

Yet had they followed him home to his small room in Canterbury-mansions they would have been astonished. For when he returned from the office after a hard day's work he would do nothing more engrossing than slowly to turn over the leaves of a book in which there were elaborate drawings and diagrams of locomotives and other kinds of engines. And on Sunday he would take a train to one of the large junctions and spend the whole day in watching express trains go past, and in the evening would return again to London.

One day after he had returned from the office somewhat earlier than usual, he was telephoned for. He had no telephone in his own room, but he could use a public telephone which was attached to the building. He went into the small box, but found on reaching the telephone that he had been cut off by the exchange. He imagined that he had been rung up by the office, so he asked to be given their number. As he did so his eye caught an advertisement which was hung just over the telephone. It was an elaborate design in black and white, pointing out the merits of a particular kind of soap called the Venus: a classical lady, holding a looking-glass in one hand and a cake of this invaluable soap in the other, was standing in a sphere surrounded by pointed rays, which was no

doubt intended to represent the most brilliant of the planets.

Fletcher sat down on the stool and took the receiver in his hand. As he did so he had for one second the impression that the floor underneath him gave way and that he was falling down a precipice. But before he had time to realise what was happening the sensation of falling left him ; he shook himself as though he had been asleep, and for one moment a faint recollection as though of the dreams of the night twinkled in his mind, and vanished beyond all possibility of recall. He said to himself that he had had a long and curious dream, and he knew that it was too late to remember what it had been about. Then he opened his eyes wide and looked round him.

He was standing on the slope of a hill. At his feet there was a kind of green moss, very soft to tread on. It was sprinkled here and there with light red, wax-like flowers such as he had never seen before. He was standing in an open space ; beneath him there was a plain covered with what seemed to be gigantic mushrooms, much taller than a man. Above him rose a mass of vegetation, and over all this was a dense, heavy, streaming cloud faintly glimmering with a white, silvery light which seemed to be beyond it.

He walked towards the vegetation, and soon found himself in the middle of a wood, or rather

of a jungle. Tangled plants grew on every side ; large hanging creepers with great blue flowers hung downwards. There was a profound stillness in this wood ; there were no birds singing and he heard not the slightest rustle in the rich undergrowth. It was oppressively hot and the air was full of a pungent, aromatic sweetness. He felt as though he were in a hot-house full of gardenias and stephanotis. At the same time the atmosphere of the place was pleasant to him. It was neither strange nor disagreeable. He felt at home in this green, shimmering jungle and in this hot, aromatic twilight, as though he had lived there all his life.

He walked mechanically onwards as if he were going to a definite spot of which he knew. He walked fast, but in spite of the oppressive atmosphere and the thickness of the growth he grew neither hot nor out of breath ; on the contrary, he took pleasure in the motion, and the stifling, sweet air seemed to invigorate him. He walked steadily on for over three hours, choosing his way nicely, avoiding certain places and seeking others, following a definite path and making for a definite goal. During all this time the stillness continued unbroken, nor did he meet a single living thing, either bird or beast.

After he had been walking for what seemed to him several hours, the vegetation grew thinner, the jungle less dense, and from a more or less open space in it he seemed to discern what might have been

a mountain entirely submerged in a multitude of heavy grey clouds. He sat down on the green stuff which was like grass and yet was not grass, at the edge of the open space whence he got this view, and quite naturally he picked from the boughs of an overhanging tree a large red, juicy fruit, and eat it. Then he said to himself, he knew not why, that he must not waste time, but must be moving on.

He took a path to the right of him and descended the sloping jungle with big, buoyant strides, almost running ; he knew the way as though he had been down that path a thousand times. He knew that in a few moments he would reach a whole hanging garden of red flowers, and he knew that when he had reached this he must again turn to the right. It was as he thought : the red flowers soon came to view. He turned sharply, and then through the thinning greenery he caught sight of an open plain where more mushrooms grew. But the plain was as yet a great way off, and the mushrooms seemed quite small.

“ I shall get there in time,” he said to himself, and walked steadily on, looking neither to the right nor to the left. It was evening by the time he reached the edge of the plain : everything was growing dark. The endless vapours and the high banks of cloud in which the whole of this world was sunk grew dimmer and dimmer. In front of

him was an empty level space, and about two miles further on the huge mushrooms stood out, tall and wide like the monuments of some prehistoric age. And underneath them on the soft carpet there seemed to move a myriad vague and shadowy forms.

“I shall get there in time,” he thought. He walked on for another half hour, and by this time the tall mushrooms were quite close to him, and he could see moving underneath them, distinctly now, green, living creatures like huge caterpillars, with glowing eyes. They moved slowly and did not seem to interfere with each other in any way. Further off, and beyond them, there was a broad and endless plain of high green stalks like ears of green wheat or millet, only taller and thinner.

He ran on, and now at his very feet, right in front of him, the green caterpillars were moving. They were as big as leopards. As he drew nearer they seemed to make way for him, and to gather themselves into groups under the thick stems of the mushrooms. He walked along the pathway they made for him, under the shadow of the broad, sunshade-like roofs of these gigantic growths. It was almost dark now, yet he had no doubt or difficulty as to finding his way. He was making for the green plain beyond. The ground was dense with caterpillars; they were as plentiful as ants in an ant's nest, and yet they never seemed to

interfere with each other or with him ; they instinctively made way for him, nor did they appear to notice him in any way. He felt neither surprise nor wonder at their presence.

It grew quite dark ; the only lights which were in this world came from the twinkling eyes of the moving figures, which shone like little stars. The night was no whit cooler than the day. The atmosphere was as steamy, as dense and as aromatic as before. He walked on and on, feeling no trace of fatigue or hunger, and every now and then he said to himself : " I shall be there in time." The plain was flat and level, and covered the whole way with the mushrooms, whose roofs met and shut out from him the sight of the dark sky.

At last he came to the end of the plain of mushrooms and reached the high green stalks he had been making for. Beyond the dark clouds a silver glimmer had begun once more to show itself. " I am just in time," he said to himself, " the night is over, the sun is rising."

At that moment there was a great whirr in the air, and from out of the green stalks rose a flight of millions and millions of enormous broad-winged butterflies of every hue and description—silver, gold, purple, brown and blue. Some with dark and velvety wings like the Purple Emperor, or the Red Admiral, others diaphanous and iridescent as dragon-flies. Others again like vast soft and silvery

moths. They rose from every part of that green plain of stalks, they filled the sky, and then soared upwards and disappeared into the silvery cloudland.

Fletcher was about to leap forward when he heard a voice in his ear saying—

“Are you 6493 Victoria? You are talking to the Home Office.”

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II

As soon as Fletcher heard the voice of the office messenger through the telephone he instantly realised his surroundings, and the strange experience he had just gone through, which had seemed so long and which in reality had been so brief, left little more impression on him than that which remains with a man who has been immersed in a brown study or who has been staring at something, say a poster in the street, and has not noticed the passage of time.

The next day he returned to his work at the office, and his fellow-clerks, during the whole of the next week, noticed that he was more zealous and more painstaking than ever. On the other hand, his periodical fits of abstraction grew more frequent and more pronounced. On one occasion he took a paper to the head of the department for signature, and after it had been signed, instead of removing

it from the table, he remained staring in front of him, and it was not until the head of the department had called him three times loudly by name that he took any notice and regained possession of his faculties. As these fits of absent-mindedness grew to be somewhat severely commented on, he consulted a doctor, who told him that what he needed was change of air, and advised him to spend his Sundays at Brighton or at some other bracing and exhilarating spot. Fletcher did not take the doctor's advice, but continued spending his spare time as he did before, that is to say, in going to some big junction and watching the express trains go by all day long.

One day while he was thus employed—it was Sunday, in August of 19—, when the Egyptian Exhibition was attracting great crowds of visitors—and sitting, as was his habit, on a bench on the centre platform of Slough Station, he noticed an Indian pacing up and down the platform, who every now and then stopped and regarded him with peculiar interest, hesitating as though he wished to speak to him. Presently the Indian came and sat down on the same bench, and after having sat there in silence for some minutes he at last made a remark about the heat.

“Yes,” said Fletcher, “it is trying, especially for people like myself, who have to remain in London during these months.”

“ You are in an office, no doubt,” said the Indian.

“ Yes,” said Fletcher.

“ And you are no doubt hard worked.”

“ Our hours are not long,” Fletcher replied, “ and I should not complain of overwork if I did not happen to suffer from—well, I don’t know what it is, but I suppose they would call it nerves.”

“ Yes,” said the Indian, “ I could see that by your eyes.”

“ I am a prey to sudden fits of abstraction,” said Fletcher, “ they are growing upon me. Sometimes in the office I forget where I am altogether for a space of about two or three minutes ; people are beginning to notice it and to talk about it. I have been to a doctor, and he said I needed change of air. I shall have my leave in about a month’s time, and then perhaps I shall get some change of air, but I doubt if it will do me any good. But these fits are annoying, and once something quite uncanny seemed to happen to me.”

The Indian showed great interest and asked for further details concerning this strange experience, and Fletcher told him all that he could recall—for the memory of it was already dimmed—of what had happened when he had telephoned that night.

The Indian was thoughtful for a while after hearing this tale. At last he said : “ I am not a doctor, I am not even what you call a quack doctor—I am a mere conjurer, and I gain my

living by conjuring tricks and fortune-telling at the Exhibition which is going on in London. But although I am a poor man and an ignorant man, I have an inkling, a few sparks in me of ancient knowledge, and I know what is the matter with you."

"What is it?" asked Fletcher.

"You have the power, or something has the power," said the Indian, "of detaching you from your actual body, and your astral body has been into another planet. By your description I think it must be the planet Venus. It may happen to you again, and for a longer period—for a very much longer period."

"Is there anything I can do to prevent it?" asked Fletcher.

"Nothing," said the Indian. "You can try change of air if you like, but," he said with a smile, "I do not think it will do you much good."

At that moment a train came in, and the Indian said good-bye and jumped into it.

On the next day, which was Monday, when Fletcher got to the office it was necessary for him to use the telephone with regard to some business. No sooner had he taken the receiver off the telephone than he vividly recalled the minute details of the evening he had telephoned, when the strange experience had come to him. The advertisement of Venus Soap that had hung in the telephone box

in his house appeared distinctly before him, and as he thought of that he once more experienced a falling sensation which lasted only a fraction of a second, and rubbing his eyes he awoke to find himself in the tepid atmosphere of a green and humid world.

This time he was not near the wood, but on the sea-shore. In front of him was a grey sea, smooth as oil and clouded with steaming vapours, and behind him the wide green plain stretched into a cloudy distance. He could discern, faint on the far-off horizon, the shadowy forms of the gigantic mushrooms which he knew, and on the level plain, which reached the sea beach, but not so far off as the mushrooms, he could plainly see the huge green caterpillars moving slowly and lazily in an endless herd. The sea was breaking on the sand with a faint moan. But almost at once he became aware of another sound, which came he knew not whence, and which was familiar to him. It was a low whistling noise, and it seemed to come from the sky.

At that moment Fletcher was seized by an unaccountable panic. He was afraid of something ; he did not know what it was, but he knew, he felt absolutely certain, that some danger, no vague calamity, no distant misfortune, but some definite physical danger was hanging over him and quite close to him—something from which it would be

necessary to run away, and to run fast in order to save his life. And yet there was no sign of danger visible, for in front of him was the motionless oily sea, and behind him was the empty and silent plain. It was then he noticed that the caterpillars were fast disappearing, as if into the earth : he was too far off to make out how.

He began to run along the coast. He ran as fast as he could, but he dared not look round. He ran back from the coast along the plain, from which a white mist was rising. By this time every single caterpillar had disappeared. The whistling noise continued and grew louder.

At last he reached the wood and bounded on, trampling down long trailing grasses and tangled weeds through the thick, muggy gloom of those endless aisles of jungle. He came to a somewhat open space where there was the trunk of a tree larger than the others ; it stood by itself and disappeared into the tangle of creepers above. He thought he would climb the tree, but the trunk was too wide, and his efforts failed. He stood by the tree trembling and panting with fear. He could not hear a sound, but he felt that the danger, whatever it was, was at hand.

It grew darker and darker. It was night in the forest. He stood paralysed with terror ; he felt as though bound hand and foot, but there was nothing to be done except to wait until his in-

visible enemy should choose to inflict his will on him and achieve his doom. And yet the agony of this suspense was so terrible that he felt that if it lasted much longer something must inevitably break inside him . . . and just as he was thinking that eternity could not be so long as the moments he was passing through, a blessed unconsciousness came over him. He woke from this state to find himself face to face with one of the office messengers, who said to him that he had been given his number two or three times but had taken no notice of it.

Fletcher executed his commission and then went uptairs to his office. His fellow-clerks at once asked what had happened to him, for he was looking white. He said that he had a headache and was not feeling quite himself, but made no further explanation.

This last experience changed the whole tenor of his life. When fits of abstraction had occurred to him before he had not troubled about them, and after his first strange experience he had felt only vaguely interested ; but now it was a different matter. He was consumed with dread lest the thing should occur again. He did not want to get back to that green world and that oily sea ; he did not want to hear the whistling noise, and to be pursued by an invisible enemy. So much did the dread of this weigh on him that he refused to go to the telephone lest the act of telephoning should

set alight in his mind the train of associations and bring his thoughts back to his dreadful experience.

Shortly after this he went for leave, and following the doctor's advice he spent it by the sea. During all this time he was perfectly well, and was not once troubled by his curious fits. He returned to London in the autumn refreshed and well.

On the first day that he went to the office a friend of his telephoned to him. When he was told that the line was being held for him he hesitated, but at last he went down to the telephone office.

He remained away twenty minutes. Finally his prolonged absence was noticed, and he was sent for. He was found in the telephone room stiff and unconscious, having fallen forward on the telephone desk. His face was quite white, and his eyes wide open and glazed with an expression of piteous and harrowing terror. When they tried to revive him their efforts were in vain. A doctor was sent for, and he said that Fletcher had died of heart disease.

XX
THE FIRE



BEFORE the bell had time to sound the alarm a huge pillar of smoke and flame, leaping high in the breathless August night, told the whole village the news of the fire. Men, women, and children hurried to the burning place. The firemen galloped down the rutty road with their barrels of water and hand-pumps, yelling. The bell rang, with hurried, throbbing beats. The fire, which was further off than it seemed to be at first sight, was in the middle of the village. Two houses were burning—a house built of bricks and a wooden cottage. The flame was prodigious: it soared into the sky like the eruption of a volcano, and the wooden cottage, with its flat logs and blazing roof, looked like a sacrificial pyre consuming the body of some warrior or Viking. In the light of the flames the soft sky, which was starless and flooded with stillness by the large full moon, had turned from blue to green. A dense crowd had gathered round the burning houses.

The firemen, working like bees, were doing what they could to extinguish the flames and to prevent the fire spreading. Volunteers from the crowd helped them. One man climbed up on the edge of the wooden house, where the flames had been

overcome, and shovelled earth from the roof on the little flames, which were leaping like earth spirits from the ground. His wife stood below and called on him in forcible language to descend from such a dangerous place. The crowd jeered at her fears, and she spoke her mind to them in frank and unvarnished terms. It was St John the Baptist's Day. Some of the men had been celebrating the feast by drinking. One of them, out of the fulness of his heart, cried out: "Oh, how happy I am! I'm drunk, and there's a fire, and all at the same time!" But most of the crowd—they looked like black shadows against the glare—looked on quietly, every now and then making comments on the situation. One of the peasants tried to knock down the burning house with an axe. He failed. Someone not far off was playing an accordion and singing a monotonous rhythmical song.

Amidst the shifting crowd of shadows I noticed a strange figure, who beckoned to me. "I see you are short-sighted," he said, "let me lend you a glass." His voice sounded thin and distant, and he handed me a piece of glass which seemed to be more opaque than transparent. I looked through it and I noticed a difference in things:

The cottages had disappeared; in their place were great high buildings with lofty porticos, broad columns and carved friezes, but flames were

leaping round them, intenser and greater than before, and the noise of the fire had increased. In front of me was an open court, in the centre of which was an altar, and to the right of this altar stood an old bay tree. An old man and a grey-haired woman were clinging to this altar; it was drenched with blood, and on the steps of it lay several bodies of young men clothed in armour, but squalid with dust and blood.

I had scarcely become aware of the scene before a great cloud of smoke passed through the court, and when it rose I saw there had been another change: in that few moments' space the fire seemed to have wrought incredible havoc. Nothing was left of all the tall pillared buildings, the friezes and the porticos, the altar, the bay-tree and the bodies—nothing but the pile of logs which vomited a rolling cloud of flame and smoke into the sky. The moon was still shining calmly, and the sky was softer and greener. On the ground there were hundreds of dead and dying men; the dying were groaning in their agony. Far away on the horizon there was a thin line of light, a faint trembling thread as though of foam, and I seemed to hear the moaning of the sea.

All at once a woman walked in front of the burning pile. She was tall, and silken folds clothed the perfect lines of her body and fell straight to the ground. She walked royally, and when she moved

her gestures were like the rhythm of majestic music. The firelight shone on her hair, which was bound with a narrow golden band. Her hair was like a cloud of spun sunshine, and it seemed brighter than the flames. She was walking with downcast eyes, but presently she looked up. Her face was calm, and faultless as skilfully-hewn marble, and it seemed to be made of some substance different from the clay which goes to the making of men and women. It was not an angel's face; it was not a divine face; neither was it a wicked face, nor had it anything cruel, nor anything of the siren or the witch. Love and pleasure seemed to have moulded the flower-like lips; but an infinite carelessness shone in the still blue eyes. They seemed like two seas that had never known what winds and tempests mean, but which bask for ever under unruffled skies lulled by a slumber-scented breeze.

She looked up at the fire and smiled, and at that smile one thought the heavens must open and the stars break into song, so marvellous was its loveliness, so infinitely radiant the glory of it. She was a woman, and yet more than a woman, a creature of the earth, yet fashioned of pearls and dew and the petals of flowers: delicate as a gossamer, and yet radiant with the flush of life, soft as the twilight, and glowing with the blood of the ruby; and, above all things, serene, calm, aloof, and unruffled like the silver moon. When the dying men saw her

smile they raised their eyes towards her, and one could see that there shone in them a strange and wonderful happiness. And when they had looked they fell back and died.

Then a cloud of smoke blinded me. When it rose the full moon was still shining in a sky even bluer and softer than it had yet been. The fire was further off, but it had spread. The whole village was on fire ; but the village had grown ; it seemed endless, and covered several hills. Right in front of me was a grove of cypresses, dark against the intense glow of the flames, which leapt all round in the distance : a huge circle of light, a chain of fiery tongues and dancing lightnings.

We were on the top of a hill, and we looked down into a place where tall buildings and temples stood, where the fire had not penetrated. This place was crowded with men, women and children. It was the same shifting crowd of shadows : some shouting, some gesticulating, some looking on indifferent. And straight in front of me was a short, dark, and rather fat man with a low forehead, deep-set eyes, and a heavy jaw. He was crowned with a golden wreath, and he was twanging a kind of harp. In the distance suddenly the cypress trees became alive with huge flaring torches, which lit the garden like Bengal lights. The man threw down his harp and clapped his hands in ecstasy at the bright

fireworks. Again a cloud of smoke obscured everything.

When it lifted I was in the village once more, and once more it was different. It was on fire, and it seemed infinitely larger and more straggling than when I had arrived. The moon was still in the sky, but the air had a chilly touch. Instead of one church there was an infinite number of churches, for in the glare countless minarets and small cupolas were visible. There was no crowd, no voices, and no shouting; only a long line of low, blazing wooden houses. The place was deserted and silent save for the crackling blaze. Then down the street a short, fat man on horseback rode towards us. He was riding a white horse. He wore a grey overcoat and a cocked hat. I became aware of a rhythmical tramping: a noise of hundreds and hundreds of hoofs, a champing of bits, and the tramp of innumerable feet and the rumble of guns. In the distance there was a hill with crenelated battlements round it; it was crowned with the domes and minarets of several churches, taller and greater than all the other churches in sight. These minarets shone out clear-cut and distinct against the ruddy sky.

The short man on horseback looked back for a moment at this hill. He took a pinch of snuff.

XXI
THE CONQUEROR



WHEN the ancient gods were turned out of Olympus, and the groan of dying Pan shook the world like an earthquake, none of all the fallen deities was so disconsolate as Proserpine. She wandered across the world, assuming now this shape and now that, but nowhere could she find a resting-place or a home. In the Southern country which she regarded as her own, whatever shape or disguise she assumed, whether that of a gleaner or of an old woman begging for alms, the country people would scent something uncanny about her and chase her from the place. Thus it was that she left the Southern country, which she loved; she said farewell to the azure skies, the hills covered with corn and fringed everywhere with rose bushes, the white oxen, the cypress, the olive, the vine, the croaking frogs, and the million fireflies; and she sought the green pastures and the woods of a Northern country.

One evening, not long after her arrival (it was Midsummer Eve), as she was wandering in a thick wood, she noticed that the trees and the undergrowth were twinkling with a myriad soft flames which reminded her of the fireflies of her own country, and presently she perceived that these

flames were stars which, soft as dew and bright as moonbeams, formed the diadems crowning the hair of unearthly shapes. These shapes were like those of men and maidens, transfigured and rendered strange and delicate, as light as foam, and radiant as dragonflies hovering over a pool. They were rimmed with rainbow-coloured films, and sometimes they flew and sometimes they danced, but they rarely seemed to touch the ground. And as Proserpine approached them, in the sad majesty of her fallen divinity, they gathered round her in a circle and bowed down before her. And one of them, taller than the rest, advanced towards her and said :—

“ We are the Fairies, and for a long time we have been mournful, for we have lost our Queen, our beautiful Queen. She loved a mortal, and on this account she was banished from Fairyland, nor may she ever revisit the haunt and the kingdom that were hers. But Merlin, the oldest and the wisest of the wizards, told us we should find another Queen, and that we should know her by the poppies in her hair, the whiteness of her brow, and the stillness of her eyes, and with or without such tokens we should know, as soon as we set eyes on her, that it was she and no other who was to be our Queen. And now we know that it was you and no other. Therefore shall you be our Queen and rule over us until he comes who, Merlin said, shall

conquer your kingdom and deliver its secrets to the mortal world. Then shall you abandon the kingdom of the Fairies—the everlasting Limbo shall receive you.”

Thus it came about that Proserpine became Queen of the Fairies, and she ruled them well, and the mortals in their farms and their cottages blessed her because she took care that the goblins did their work properly and earned the cream-bowl which was set for them by the housewife.

It was one summer's day a long time ago, many and many years after Proserpine had become Queen of the Fairies, that a butcher's apprentice called William was enjoying a holiday, and strolling in the woods with no other purpose than to stroll and enjoy the fresh air and the cool leaves and the song of the birds. William loved the sights and sounds of the country; unlike many boys of his age, he was not deeply versed in the habits of birds and beasts, but devoted his spare time to reading such books as he could borrow from the village schoolmaster whose school he had lately left to go into trade, or to taking part in the games of his companions, for he loved humdrum fellowship and the talk and laughter of his fellow-creatures.

The day was hot—it was Midsummer Day—and William, having stumbled on a convenient mound, fell asleep. And he dreamt a curious dream.

He thought he saw a beautiful maiden walking towards him. She was tall, and clothed in dark draperies, and her hair was bound with a coronal of scarlet flowers, her face was pale and lustrous, and he could not see her eyes because they were veiled. She approached him and said :—

“ You are he who has been chosen to try to conquer my kingdom, which is faery, and to possess it : if, indeed, you are able to endure the fierce ordeal and to perform the three dreadful tasks which have been appointed. If he who sets out to conquer my kingdom should fail in any one of the three tasks he dies, and the world hears of him no more. Many have tried and failed.”

And William said he would try with all his might to conquer the faery kingdom, and he asked what the three tasks might be.

The maiden, who was none other than Proserpine, Queen of the Fairies, told him that the first task was to pluck the crystal apple from the laughing tree, and second to pluck the blood-red rose from the fiery rose tree, and the third to cull the white poppy from the quiet fields. William asked her how he was to set about these tasks. Proserpine told him that he had but to accept the quest and all would be made clear. So he accepted the quest without further talk.

Immediately Proserpine vanished, and William found himself in a large green garden of fruit trees,

and in the distance he heard the noise of rippling laughter. He walked along many paths to the place whence he thought the laughter came, until he found a large fruit tree which grew by itself. It was laden with fruit, and from one of its boughs hung a crystal apple which shone with all the colours of the rainbow.

But the tree was guarded by a hideous old hag, covered with sores and leprous scales, loathsome to behold. And a laughing voice came from the tree, saying: "He who would pluck the crystal apple must embrace its guardian." And William looked at her and felt no loathing but rather a deep pity, so that tears welled in his eyes and dropped on her, and he took her face in his hands to embrace her, and as he did so she changed into a beautiful maiden with veiled eyes, who plucked the crystal apple from the tree and gave it to him and vanished.

Then the garden changed its semblance, and all around him there seemed to be a hedge of smoking thorns and before him a fiery tree on which blood-red roses shone like rubies. The tree was guarded by a maiden with long grey eyes and flowing hair, as of spun moonshine, beautiful exceedingly, and a moaning voice came from the tree, saying: "He who would pluck the rose must slay its guardian." On the grass beneath the tree lay an unsheathed sword. William took the sword in

his hands, but the maiden looked at him piteously and wept, so that he hesitated ; then, hardening himself, he plunged the sword into her heart and a great moan was heard, and the fire disappeared, and only a withered rose-tree stood before him. Then he heard the voice say that he must pierce his own heart with a thorn from the tree and let the blood fall upon its roots. This he did, and as he did so he felt the sharpness of Death, as though the last dreadful moment had come ; but as the drops of blood fell on the roots the beautiful maiden with veiled eyes whom he had seen before stood before him and gave him the blood-red rose, and she touched his wound and straightway it was healed.

Then the garden vanished altogether, and he stood before a dark porch and a gate beyond which he caught a pale glimmer. And by the porch stood a terrible shape : a hooded skeleton bearing a scythe, with white sockets of fire which had no eyes in them but which were so terrible that no mortal could look on them and live. And here he heard a voice saying : “ He who would cull the white poppy must look into the eyes of its guardian and take the scythe from the bony hands.” And William seized the scythe and an icy darkness descended upon him, and he felt dizzy and faint ; yet he persisted and wrestled with the skeleton, although the darkness seemed to be overwhelming

him. He tore the hood from the bony head and looked boldly into the fiery sockets.

Then with a crash of thunder the skeleton vanished, and the maiden with veiled eyes led him through the gate into the quiet fields, and there he culled the white poppy. Then the maiden turned to him and unveiled herself, and it was Proserpine, the Queen of the Fairies.

“ You have conquered,” she said, “ and the faery kingdom is yours for ever, and you shall visit it and dwell in it whenever you desire, and reveal its sounds and its sights to the mortals of the world ; and in my kingdom you shall see, as though in a mirror, the pageant of mankind, the scroll of history, and the story of man which is writ in brave, golden and glowing letters, of blood and tears and fire. And there is nothing in the soul of man that shall be hid from you ; and you shall speak the secrets of my kingdom to mortal men with a voice of gold and of honey. And when you grow weary of life you shall withdraw for ever into the island of faery voices which lies in the heart of my kingdom. And as for me I go to the everlasting Limbo.”

Then Proserpine vanished, and William awoke from his dream, and went home to his butcher's shop.

Soon after this he left his native village

and went to London, where he became well known; although how his surname should be spelt is a matter of dispute, some spelling it Shakespeare, some Shakespere, and some Shaksper.

XXII
THE IKON



FERROL was an intellectual, and he prided himself on the fact. At Cambridge he had narrowly missed being a Senior Wrangler, and his principal study there had been Lunar Theory. But when he went down from Cambridge for good, being a man of some means, he travelled. For a year he was an honorary Attaché at one of the big Embassies. He finally settled in London with a vague idea of some day writing a *magnum opus* about the stupidity of mankind ; for he had come to the conclusion by the age of twenty-five that all men were stupid, irreclaimably, irredeemably stupid ; that everything was wrong ; that all literature was really bad, all art much overrated, and all music tedious in the long run.

The years slipped by and he never began his *magnum opus* ; he joined a literary club instead and discussed the current topics of the day. Sometimes he wrote a short article ; never in the daily Press, which he despised, nor in the reviews (for he never wrote anything as long as a magazine article), but in a literary weekly he would express in weary and polished phrases the unemphatic boredom or the mitigated approval with which the works of his fellow-men inspired him. He was the

kind of man who had nothing in him you could positively dislike, but to whom you could not talk for five minutes without having a vague sensation of blight. Things seemed to shrivel up in his presence as though they had been touched by an insidious east wind, a subtle frost, a secret chill. He never praised anything, though he sometimes condescended to approve. The faint puffs of blame in which he more generally indulged were never sharp or heavy, but were like the smoke rings of a cigarette which a man indolently smoking blows from time to time up to the ceiling.

He lived in rooms in the Temple. They were comfortably, not luxuriously furnished; a great many French books—French was the only modern language worth reading he used to say—a few modern German etchings, a low Turkish divan, and some Egyptian antiquities, made up the furniture of his two sitting-rooms. Above all things he despised Greek art; it was, he said, decadent. The Egyptians and the Germans were, in his opinion, the only people who knew anything about the plastic arts, whereas the only music he could endure was that of the modern French School. Over his chimney-piece there was a large German landscape in oils, called "Im Walde"; it represented a wood at twilight in the autumn, and if you looked at it carefully and for a long time you saw that the objects depicted were meant to

be trees from which the leaves were falling ; but if you looked at the picture carelessly and from a distance, it looked like a man-of-war on a rough sea, for which it was frequently taken, much to Ferrol's annoyance.

One day an artist friend of his presented him with a small Chinese god made of crystal ; he put this on his chimney-piece. It was on the evening of the day on which he received this gift that he dined, together with a friend named Sledge who had travelled much in Eastern countries, at his club. After dinner they went to Ferrol's rooms to smoke and to talk. He wanted to show Sledge his antiquities, which consisted of three large Egyptian statuettes, a small green Egyptian god, and the Chinese idol which he had lately been given. Sledge, who was a middle-aged, bearded man, frank and unconventional, examined the antiquities with care, pronounced them to be genuine, and singled out for special praise the crystal god.

"Your things are good," he said, "very good. But don't you really mind having all these things about you ?"

"Why should I mind ?" asked Ferrol.

"Well, you have travelled a good deal, haven't you ?"

"Yes," said Ferrol, "I have travelled ; I have been as far east as Nijni-Novgorod to see the Fair, and as far west as Lisbon."

“ I suppose,” said Sledge, “ you were a long time in Greece and Italy ? ”

“ No,” said Ferrol, “ I have never been to Greece. Greek art distresses me. All classical art is a mistake and a superstition.”

“ Talking of superstition,” said Sledge, “ you have never been to the Far East, have you ? ”

“ No,” Ferrol answered, “ Egypt is Eastern enough for me, and cannot be bettered.”

“ Well,” said Sledge, “ I have been in the Far East. I have lived there many years. I am not a superstitious man ; but there is one thing I would not do in any circumstances whatsoever, and that is to keep in my sitting-room the things you have got there.”

“ But why ? ” asked Ferrol.

“ Well,” said Sledge, “ nearly all of them have come from tombs of the dead, and some of them are gods. Such things may have attached to them heaven knows what spooks and spirits.”

Ferrol shut his eyes and smiled, a faint, seraphic smile. “ My dear boy,” he said, “ you forget. This is the Twentieth Century.”

“ And you,” answered Sledge, “ forget that the things you have here were made before the Twentieth Century, B.C.”

“ You don’t seriously mean,” said Ferrol, “ that you attach any importance to these—” he hesitated.

"Children's stories?" suggested Sledge.

Ferrol nodded.

"I have lived long enough in the East," said Sledge, "to know that the sooner you learn to believe children's stories the better."

"I am afraid, then," said Ferrol, with civil tolerance, "that our points of view are too different for us to discuss the matter." And they talked of other things until late into the night.

Just as Sledge was leaving Ferrol's rooms and had said "Good-night," he paused a moment by the chimney-piece, and, pointing to a tiny Ikon which was lying on it, asked: "What is that?"

"Oh, that's nothing," said Ferrol, "only a small Ikon I bought for twopence at the Fair of Nijni-Novgorod."

Sledge said "Good-night" again, but when he was on the stairs he called back: "In any case remember one thing, that East is East and West is West. Don't mix your deities."

Ferrol had not the slightest idea what he was alluding to, nor did he care. He dismissed the matter from his mind.

The next day he spent in the country, returning to London late in the evening. As he entered his rooms the first thing which met his eye was that his great picture, "Im Walde," which he considered to be one of the few products of modern art that a man who respected himself could look at without

positive pain in the eyes, had fallen from its place over the chimney-piece to the floor in front of the fender, and the glass was shattered into a thousand fragments. He was much vexed. He sought the cause of the accident. The nail was a strong one, and it was still in its place. The picture had been hung by a wire ; the wire seemed strong also and was not broken. He concluded that the picture must have been badly balanced and that a sudden shock such as a door banging had thrown it over. He had no servant in his rooms, and when he had gone out that morning he had locked the door, so no one could have entered his rooms during his absence.

Next morning he sent for a frame-maker and told him to mend the frame as soon as possible, to make the wire strong, and to see that the picture was firmly fixed on the wall. In two or three days' time the picture returned and was once more hung on the wall over the chimney-piece immediately above the little crystal Chinese god. Ferrol supervised the hanging of the picture in person. He saw that the nail was strong, and firmly fixed in the wall ; he took care that the wire left nothing to be desired and was properly attached to the rings of the picture.

The picture was hung early one morning. That day he went to play golf. He returned at five o'clock, and again the first thing which met his eye

was the picture. It had again fallen down, and this time it had brought with it in its fall the small Chinese god, which was broken in two. The glass had again been shattered to bits, and the picture itself was somewhat damaged. Everything else on the chimney-piece, that is to say, a few matchboxes and two candle-sticks, had also been thrown to the ground—everything with the exception of the little Ikon he had bought at Nijni-Novgorod, a small object about two inches square on which two Saints were pictured. This still rested in its place against the wall.

Ferrol investigated the disaster. The nail was in its place in the wall; the wire at the back of the picture was not broken or damaged in any way. The accident seemed to him quite inexplicable. He was greatly annoyed. The Chinese god was a valuable thing. He stood in front of the chimney-piece contemplating the damage with a sense of great irritation.

“To think that everything should have been broken except this beastly little Ikon!” he said to himself. “I wonder whether that was what Sledge meant when he said I should not mix my deities.”

Next morning he sent again for the framemaker, and abused him roundly. The framemaker said he could not understand how the accident had happened. The nail was an excellent nail, the

picture, Mr Ferrol must admit, had been hung with great care before his very eyes and under his own direct and personal supervision. What more could be done ? ”

“ It’s something to do with the balance,” said Ferrol. “ I told you that before. The picture is half spoiled now.”

The framemaker said the damage would not show once the glass was repaired, and took the picture away again to mend it. A few days later it was brought back. Two men came to fix it this time ; steps were brought and the hanging lasted about twenty minutes. Nails were put under the picture ; it was hung by a double wire. All accidents in the future seemed guarded against.

The following morning Ferrol telephoned to Sledge and asked him to dine with him. Sledge was engaged to dine out that evening, but said that he would look in at the Temple late after dinner.

Ferrol dined alone at the Club ; he reached his rooms about half-past nine ; he made up a blazing fire and drew an armchair near it. He lit a cigarette made some Turkish coffee, and took down a French novel. Every now and then he looked up at his picture. No damage was visible ; it looked, he thought, as well as ever. In the place of the Chinese idol he had put his little green Egyptian god on the chimney-piece. The candlesticks and the Ikon were still in their places.

“After all,” thought Ferrol, “I did wrong to have any Chinese art in the place at all. Egyptian things are the only things worth having. It is a lesson to me not to dabble with things out of my period.”

After he had read for about a quarter of an hour he fell into a doze.

Sledge arrived at the rooms about half-past ten, and an ugly sight met his eyes. There had been an accident. The picture over the chimney-piece had fallen down right on Ferrol. His face was badly cut. He was unconscious. Sledge telephoned for a doctor. They put Ferrol to bed, and his wounds were seen to and everything that was necessary was done. A nurse was sent for to look after him, and Sledge decided to stay in the house all night. After all the arrangements had been made, the doctor, before he went away, said to Sledge: “He will recover all right, he is not in the slightest danger; but I don’t know who is to break the news to him.”

“What is that?” asked Sledge.

“He will be quite blind,” said the doctor.

Then the doctor went away, and Sledge sat down in front of the fire. The broken glass had been swept up. The picture had been placed on the Oriental divan, and as Sledge looked at the chimney-piece he noticed that the little Ikon was

still in its place. Something caught his eye just under the low fender in front of the fireplace. He bent forward and picked up the object.

It was Ferrol's green Egyptian god, which had been broken into two pieces.

XXIII
THE THIEF

To Jack Gordon

HART MINOR and Smith were behind-hand with their sums. It was Hart Minor's first term: Smith had already been one term at school. They were in the fourth division at St James's. A certain number of sums in short division had to be finished. Hart Minor and Smith got up early to finish these sums before breakfast, which was at half-past seven. Hart Minor divided slowly, and Smith reckoned quickly. Smith finished his sums with ease. When half-past seven struck, Hart Minor had finished four of them and there was still a fifth left: 3888 had to be divided by 36; short division had to be employed. Hart Minor was busily trying to divide 3888 by 4 and by 9; he had got as far as saying, "Four's into 38 will go six times and two over; four's into twenty-eight go seven times; four's into eight go twice." He was beginning to divide 672 by 9, an impossible task, when the breakfast bell rang, and Smith said to him: "Come on!"

"I can't," said Hart Minor, "I haven't finished my sum."

Smith glanced at his page and said: "Oh that's all right, don't you see? The answer's 108."

Hart Minor wrote down 108 and put a large R next to the sum, which meant Right.

The boys went in to breakfast. After breakfast they returned to the fourth division schoolroom, where they were to be instructed in arithmetic for an hour by Mr Whitehead. Mr Whitehead called for the sums. He glanced through Smith's and found them correct, and then through Hart Minor's. His attention was arrested by the last division.

"What's this?" he demanded. "Four's into thirty-eight don't go six times. You've got the right answer and the wrong working. What does this mean?" And Mr Whitehead bit his knuckles savagely. "Somebody," he said, "has been helping you."

Hart Minor owned that he had received help from Smith. Mr Whitehead shook him violently, and said: "Do you know what this means?"

Hart Minor had no sort of idea as to the inner significance of his act, except that he had finished his sums.

"It means," said Mr Whitehead, "that you're a cheat and a thief: you've been stealing marks. For the present you can stand on the stool of penitence and I'll see what is to be done with you later."

The stool of penitence was a high, three-cornered stool, very narrow at the top. When boys in this division misbehaved themselves they had to stand

on it during the rest of the lesson in the middle of the room.

Hart Minor fetched the stool of penitence and climbed up on it. It wobbled horribly.

After the lesson, which was punctuated throughout by Mr Whitehead with bitter comments on the enormity of theft, the boys went to chapel. Smith and Hart were in the choir: they wore white surplices which were put on in the vestry. Hart Minor, who knew that he was in for a terrific row of some kind, thought he observed something unusual in the conduct of the masters who were assembled in the vestry. They were all tittering. Mr Whitehead seemed to be convulsed with uncontrollable laughter. The choir walked up the aisle. Hart Minor noticed that all the boys in the school, and the servants who sat behind them, and the master's wife who sat in front, and the organist who played the harmonium, were all staring at him with unwonted interest; the boys were nudging each other: he could not understand why.

When the service, which lasted twenty minutes, was over, and the boys came out of chapel, Hart Minor was the centre of a jeering crowd of boys. He asked Smith what the cause of this was, and Smith confessed to him that before going into chapel Mr Whitehead had pinned on his back a large sheet of paper with " Cheat " written on it, and had only removed it just before the procession

walked up the aisle, hence the interest aroused. But, contrary to his expectation, nothing further occurred ; none of the masters alluded to his misdemeanour, and Hart Minor almost thought that the incident was closed—almost, and yet really not at all ; he tried to delude himself into thinking the affair would blow over, but all the while at the bottom of his heart sat a horrible misgiving.

Every Monday there was in this school what was called “ reading over.” The boys all assembled in the library and the Head Master, standing in front of his tall desk, summoned each division before him in turn. The marks of the week were read out and the boys took places, moving either up or down according to their marks ; so that a boy who was at the top of his division one week might find himself at the bottom the next week, and vice versâ.

On the Sunday after the incident recorded, the boys of the fourth division were sitting in their schoolroom before luncheon, in order to write their weekly letter home. This was the rule of the school. Mr Whitehead sat at his desk and talked in a friendly manner to the boys. He was writing his weekly report in the large black report book that was used for reading over. Mr Whitehead was talking in a chaffing way as to who was his favourite boy.

“ You can tell your people,” he said to Hart Minor, “ that my favourite is old Polly.” Polly

was Hart Minor's nickname, which was given to him owing to his resemblance to a parrot. Hart Minor was much pleased at this friendly attitude, and began to think that the unpleasant incident of the week had been really forgotten and that the misgiving which haunted him night and day was a foolish delusion.

"We shall soon be writing the half-term reports," said Mr Whitehead. "You've all been doing well, especially old Polly: you can put that in your letter," he said to Hart Minor. "I'm very much pleased with you," and he chuckled.

On Monday morning at eleven o'clock was reading over. When the fourth division were called up, the Head Master paused, looked down the page, then at the boys, then at the book once more; then he frowned. There was a second pause, then he read out in icy tones:—

"I'm sorry to say that Smith and Hart Minor have been found guilty of gross dishonesty; they combined—in fact they entered into a conspiracy, to cheat, to steal marks and obtain by unfair means, a higher place and an advantage which was not due to them."

The Head Master paused. "Hart Minor and Smith," he continued, "go to the bottom of the division. Smith," he added, "I'm astounded at you. Your conduct in this affair is inexplicable. If it were not for your previous record and good

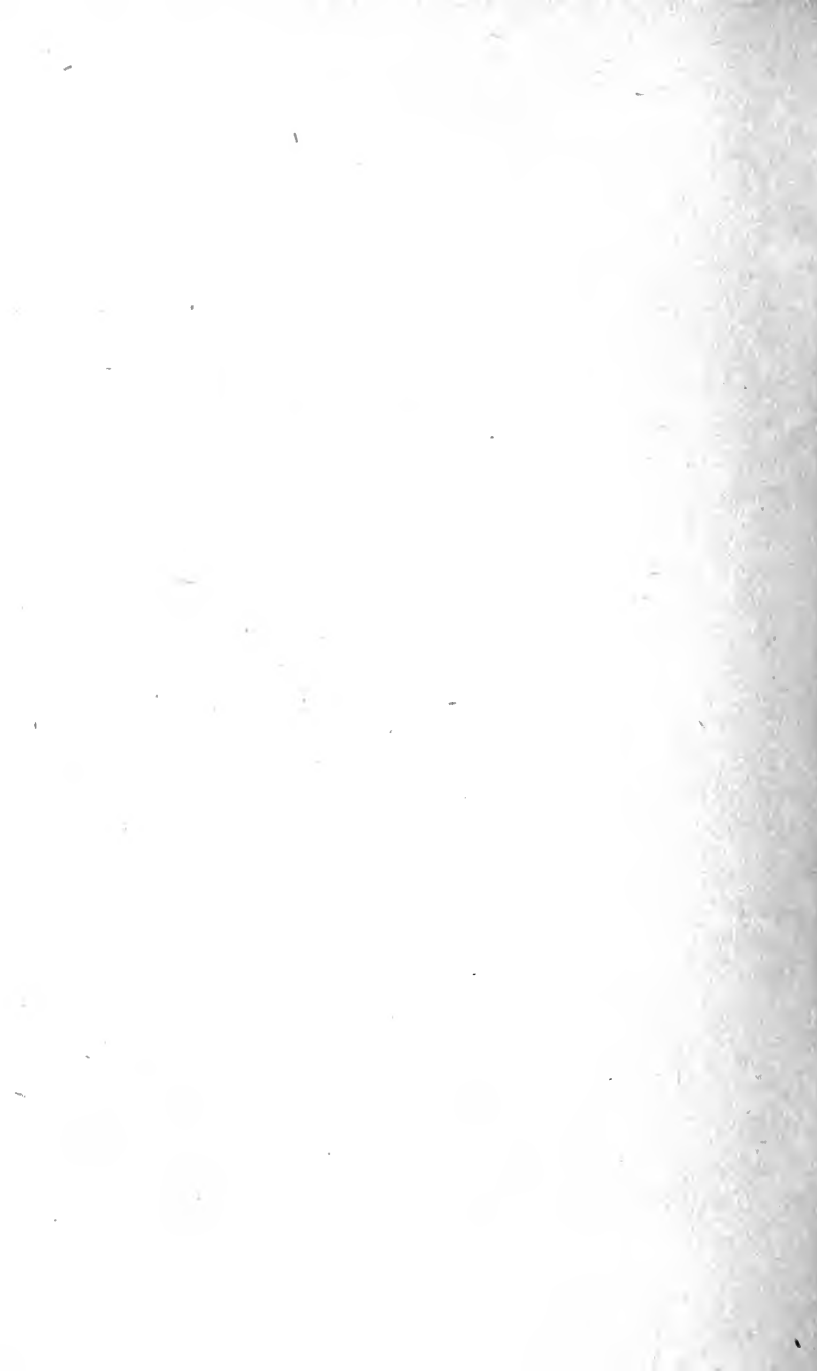
conduct, I should have you severely flogged ; and if Hart Minor were not a new boy, I should treat him in the same way and have him turned out of the choir. (The choir had special privileges.) As it is, you shall lose, each of you, 200 marks, and I shall report the whole matter in detail to your parents in your half-term report, and if anything of the sort ever occurs again, you shall be severely punished. You have been guilty of an act for which, were you not schoolboys, but grown up, you would be put in prison. It is this kind of thing that leads people to penal servitude."

After the reading over was finished and the lessons that followed immediately on it, and the boys went out to wash their hands for luncheon, the boys of the second division crowded round Hart Minor and asked him how he could have perpetrated such a horrible and daring crime. The matter, however, was soon forgotten by the boys, but Hart Minor had not heard the last of it. On the following Sunday in chapel, at the evening service, the Head Master preached a sermon. He chose as his text "Thou shalt not steal!" The eyes of the whole school were fixed on Smith and Hart Minor. The Head Master pointed out in his discourse that one might think at first sight that boys at a school might not have the opportunity to violate the tremendous Commandments ; but, he said, this was not so. The Commandments were as much

a living actuality in school life as they were in the larger world. Coming events cast their shadows before them ; the child was the father of the man ; what a boy was at school, such would he be in after life. Theft, the boys perhaps thought, was not a sin which immediately concerned them. But there were things which were morally the same if not worse than the actual theft of material and tangible objects—dishonesty in the matter of marks, for instance, and cheating in order to gain an undue advantage over one's fellow-schoolboys. A boy who was guilty of such an act at school would probably end by being a criminal when he went out into the larger world. The seeds of depravity were already sown ; the tree whose early shoots were thus blemished would probably be found to be rotten when it grew up ; and for such trees and for such noxious growths there could only be one fate—to be cut down and cast into the unquenchable fire !

In Hart Minor's half-term report, which was sent home to his parents, it was stated that he had been found guilty of the meanest and grossest dishonesty, and that should it occur again he would be first punished and finally expelled.

XXIV
THE STAR



HE had long ago retired from public life, and in his Tuscan villa, where he now lived quite alone, seldom seeing his friends, he never regretted the strenuous days of his activity. He had done his work well ; he had been more than a competent public servant ; as Pro-Consul he proved a pillar of strength to the State, a man whose name at one time was on men's lips as having left plenty where he had found dearth, and order and justice where corruption, oppression, and anarchy, had once run riot. His retirement had been somewhat of a surprise to his friends, for although he was ripe in years, his mental powers were undiminished and his body was active and vigorous. But his withdrawal from public life was due not so much to fatigue or to a longing for leisure as to a lack of sympathy, which he felt to be growing stronger and stronger as the years went by, with the manners and customs, the mode of thought, and the manner of living of the new world and the new generation which was growing up around him. Nurtured as he had been in the old school and the strong traditions which taught an austere simplicity of life, a contempt for luxury and show, he was bewildered and saddened by the rapid growth of riches, the

shameless worship of wealth, the unrestrained passion for amusement at all costs, the thirst for new sensations, and the ostentatious airs of the youth of the day, who seemed to be born disillusioned and whose palates were jaded before they knew the taste of food. He found much to console him in literature, not only in the literature of the past but in the literature of his day, but here again he was beset with misgivings and haunted by forebodings. He felt that the State had reached its zenith both in material prosperity and intellectual achievement, and that all the future held in reserve was decline and decay. This thought was ever present with him ; in the vast extension of empire he foresaw the inevitable disintegration, and he wondered in a melancholy fashion what would be the fate of mankind when the Empire, dismembered and rotten, should become the prey of the Barbarians.

It was in the winter of the second year after his retirement that his melancholy increased to a pitch of almost intolerable heaviness. That winter was an extraordinarily mild one, and even during the coldest month he strolled every evening after he had supped on the terrace walk which was before the portico. He was strolling one night on the terrace pondering on the fate of mankind, and more especially on the life—if there was such a thing—beyond the grave. He was not a superstitious man,

but, saturated with tradition, he was a scrupulous observer of religious feast, custom, and ritual. He had lately been disturbed by what he considered to be an ill-favoured omen. One night—it was twelve nights ago he reckoned—the statues of Pan and Apollo, standing in his dining-room, which was at the end of the portico, had fallen to the ground without any apparent cause and had been shattered into fragments. And it had seemed to him that the crash of this accident was immediately followed by a low and prolonged wail, which appeared to come from nowhere in particular and yet to fill the world ; the noise of the moan had seemed to be quite close to him, and as it died away its echo had seemed to be miles and miles distant. He thought it had been a hallucination, but that same night a still stranger thing happened. After the accident, which had wakened the whole household, he had been unable to go to sleep again, and he had gone from his sleeping chamber into an adjoining room, and, lighting a lamp, had taken down and read out of the “Iliad” of Homer. After he had been reading for about half an hour he heard a voice calling him very distinctly by his name, but as soon as the sound had ceased he was not quite certain whether he had heard it or not. At that moment one of his slaves, who had been born in the East, entered the room and asked him what he required, saying that he had heard

his master calling loudly. What these signs and portents signified he had no idea ; perhaps, he mused, they mean my own death, which is of no consequence ; or perhaps—which may the Fates forbend—some disaster to an absent friend or even to the State. But so far—and twelve days had passed since he had seen these strange manifestations—he had received no news which confirmed his fears.

As he was thus musing he looked up at the sky, and he noticed the presence of a new and unfamiliar star, which he had never seen before. He was a close observer of the heavens and learned in astronomy, and he felt quite certain that he had never seen this star before. It was a star of peculiar radiance, large and white—almost blue in its whiteness—it shone in the East, and seemed to put all the other stars to shame by its overwhelming radiance and purity. While he was thus gazing at the star it seemed to him as though a great darkness had come upon the world. He heard a low muttering sound as of a distant earthquake, and this was quickly followed by the tramping of innumerable armies. He knew that the end had come. It is the Barbarians, he thought, who have already conquered the world. Rome has fallen never to rise again ; Rome has shared the fate of Troy and Carthage, of Babylon, and Memphis ; Rome is a name in an old wife's tale ; and little

savage children shall be given our holy trophies for playthings, and shall use our ruined temples and our overthrown palaces as their playground. And so sharp was the vividness of his vision that he wondered what would happen to his villa, and whether or no the Barbarians would destroy the image of Ceres on the terrace, which he especially cherished, not for its beauty but because it had belonged to his father and to his grandfather before him.

An eternity seemed to pass, and the tramp, tramp, tramp of the armies of those untrained hordes which were coming from the North and overrunning the world seemed to get nearer and nearer. He wondered what they would do with him; he had no place for fear in his heart, but he remembered that on the portico in the morning his freedman's child had been playing with the pieces of a broken jar, a copper coin, and a dog made of terra-cotta. He remembered the child's brown eyes and curly hair, its smile, its laughter, and lisping talk—it was a piece of earth and sun—and he thought of the spears of the Barbarians, and then shifted his thoughts because they sickened him.

Then, just when he thought the heavy footsteps had reached the approach of his villa, the vision changed. The noise of tramping ceased, and through the thick darkness there pierced the radiance of the star: the strange star he had seen that

night. The world seemed to awake from a dark slumber. The ruins rose from the dust and took once more a stately shape, even lordlier than before. Rome had risen from the dead, and once more she dominated the world like a starry diadem. Before him he seemed to see the pillars and the portals of a huge temple, more splendid and gorgeous than the Temples of Cæsar. The gates were wide open, and from within came a blare of trumpets. He saw a kneeling multitude; and soldiers with shining breastplates, far taller than the legionaries of Cæsar, were keeping a way through the dense crowd, while the figure of an aged man—was it the Pontifex Maximus, he wondered?—was borne aloft in a chair over their heads.

Then once more the vision changed. At least the temple seemed to grow wider, higher, and lighter; the crowd vanished; it seemed to him as though a long corridor of light was opening on some ultimate and mysterious doorway. At last this doorway was opened, and he saw distinctly before him a dark and low manger where oxen and asses were stalled. It was littered with straw. He could hear the peaceful beasts munching their food.

In the corner lay a woman, and in her arms was a child and his face shone like the sun and lit up the whole place, in which there were neither torches nor lamp. The door of the manger was ajar, and

through it he saw the sky and the strange star still shining brightly. He heard a voice, the same voice which he had heard twelve nights before ; but the voice was not calling him, it was singing a song, and the song was as it were a part of a larger music, a symphony of clear voices, more joyous and different from anything he had ever heard.

The vision vanished altogether ; he was standing once more under the portico amongst the surroundings which were familiar to him. The strange star was still shining in the sky. He went back through the folding-doors of the piazza into the dining-room. His gloom and his perplexity had been lifted from him ; he felt quite happy ; he could not have explained why. He called his slave and told him to get plenty of provisions on the morrow, for he expected friends to dinner. He added that he wanted nothing further and that the slaves could go to bed.

XXV
CHUN WA

To Henry de C. Ward



HIS name was Chun Wa ; possibly there was some more of it, but that is all I can remember. He was about four or five years old, and I made his acquaintance the day we arrived at the temple. It was at the end of September. We had left Mukden in order to take part in what they said was going to be a great battle. I don't know what the village was called at which we arrived on the second day of our march. I can only remember that it was a beautiful and deliciously quiet spot, and that we established ourselves in a temple ; that is to say not actually in the temple itself, but in the house of the priest. He was a Buddhist who looked after the deities of the place, which were made of carved and painted wood, and lived in a small pagoda. The building consisted of three quadrangles surrounded by a high stone wall. The first of these quadrangles, which you entered from the road, reminded me of the yard in front of any farm. There was a good deal of straw lying about, some broken ploughshares, buckets, wooden bowls, spades, and other implements of toil. A few hens hurried about searching for grains here and there ; a dog was sleeping in the sun. At the further end of the yard a yellow

cat seemed to have set aside a space for its exclusive use. This farmyard was separated from the next quadrangle by the house of the priest, which occupied the whole of the second enclosure ; that is to say the living rooms extended right round the quadrangle, leaving a square and open space in the centre. The part of the house which separated the second quadrangle from the next consisted solely of a roof supported by pillars, making an open verandah, through which from the second enclosure you saw into the third. The third enclosure was a garden, consisting of a square grass plot and some cypress trees. At the further end of the garden was the temple itself.

We arrived in the afternoon. We were met by an elderly man, the priest, who put the place at our disposal and established us in the rooms situated in the second quadrangle to the east and west. He himself and his family lived in the part of the house which lay between the farmyard and the second enclosure. The Cossacks of the battery with which I was living encamped in a field on the other side of the farmyard, but the treasure chest was placed in the farmyard itself, and a sentry stood near it with a drawn sword.

The owner of the house had two sons. One of them, aged about thirteen, had something to do with the temple services, and wore a kind of tunic made of white silk. The second was Chun Wa.

It was when the sentry went on guard that we first made the acquaintance of Chun Wa. His cheeks were round and fat, and his face seemed to bulge out towards the base. His little eyes were soft and brown and twinkled like onyxes. His tiny little hands were most beautifully shaped, and this child moved about the farmyard with the dignity of an Emperor and the serenity of a great Pontiff. Gravely and without a smile he watched the Cossacks unharnessing their horses, lighting a fire and arranging the officers' kit.

He walked up to the sentry who was standing near the treasure chest, a big, grey-eyed Cossack with a great tuft of fair hair, and the expression of a faithful retriever, and in a tone of indescribable contempt, Chun Wa said, "Ping!" "Ping" in Chinese means soldier-man, and if you wish to express your contempt for a man there is no word in the whole of the Chinese language which expresses it so fully and so emphatically as the word "Ping."

The Cossack smiled on Chun Wa and called him by a long list of endearing diminutives, but Chun Wa took no notice, and retired into the inner part of the house as if he had determined to pay no more attention to the barbarous intruders. The next day, however, curiosity got the better of him, and he could not resist inspecting the yard, and observing the doings of the foreign devils. And one of the Cossacks—his name was Lieskov and he looked

after my mule—made friends with Chun Wa. He made friends with him by playing with the dog. The dog, like most Chinese dogs, was dirty, distrustful, and not used to being played with; he slunk away if you called him, and if you took any notice of him he evidently expected to be beaten, kicked, or to have stones thrown at him. He was too thin to be eaten. But Lieskov tamed the dog and taught him how to play, and the big Cossack used to roll on the ground while the dog pretended to bite him, until Chun Wa forgot his dignity, his contempt, and his superior culture, and smiled. I remember coming home that very afternoon from a short stroll with one of the officers, and we found Lieskov lying fast asleep in the farmyard right across the steps of the door through which we wanted to go, and Chun Wa and the dog were sitting beside him. We woke him up and the officer asked him why he had gone to sleep.

“I was playing with the dog, your honour,” he said, “and I played so hard that I was exhausted and fell asleep.”

After that Chun Wa made friends with everybody, officers and men, and he ruled the battery like an autocrat. He ruled by charm and a thousand winning ways. But his special friend was Lieskov, who carried the child about on his back, performed many droll antics to amuse him, and taught him words of pidgin Russian. Among other things he

made him a kite—a large and beautiful kite—out of an old piece of yellow silk, shaped like a butterfly. And Chun Wa's brother flew this kite with wonderful skill, so that it looked like a glittering golden bird hovering in the air.

I forget how long we stayed at this temple, whether it was three days or four days ; possibly it was not so long, but it seemed like many months, or rather it seemed at the same time very long and very short, like a pleasant dream. The weather was so soft and so fine, the sunshine so bright, the air so still, that had not the nights been chilly we should never have dreamt that it was autumn. It seemed rather as though the spring had been unburied and had returned to the earth by mistake. And all this time fighting was going on to the east of us. The battle of Sha-Ho had begun, but we were in the reserve, in what they called the deepest reserve, and we heard no sound of firing, neither did we receive any news of it. We seemed to be sheltered from the world in an island of dreamy lotus-eating ; and the only noise that reached us was the sound of the tinkling gongs of the temple. We lived a life of absolute indolence, getting up with the sun, eating, playing cards, strolling about on the plains where the millet had now been reaped, eating again and going to bed about nine o'clock in the evening. Our chief amusement was to talk with Chun Wa and to watch the way in which he

treated the Cossacks, who had become his humble slaves. I am sure there was not one of the men who would not have died gladly for Chun Wa.

One afternoon, just as we were finishing our midday meal, we received orders to start. We were no longer in the reserve; we were needed further on. Everything was packed up in a hurry, and by half-past two the whole battery was on the march, and we left the lovely calm temple, the cypress trees, the chiming gongs, and Chun Wa. The idyll was over, the reality was about to begin. As we left the place Chun Wa stood by the gate, dignified, and grave as usual. In one hand he held his kite, and in the other a paper flower, and he gave this flower to Lieskov.

Next day we arrived at another village, and from there we were sent still further on, to a place whence, from the hills, all the fighting that was going on in the centre of that big battle was visible. From half-past six in the morning until sunset the noise of the artillery never ceased, and all night long there was a rattle of rifle firing. The troops which were in front drew each day nearer to us. Another two days passed; the battery took part in the action, some of the men were killed, and some of the men and the officers were wounded, and we retreated to the River Sha-Ho. Then just as we thought a final retreat was about to take place, a retreat right back to Mukden, we recrossed the

river, took part in another action, and then a great stillness came. The battle was practically over. The advance of the enemy had ceased, and we were ordered to go to a certain place.

We started, and on our way we passed through the village where we had lived before the battle began. The place was scarcely recognisable. It was quite deserted ; some of the houses looked like empty shells or husks, as though the place had suffered from earthquake. A dead horse lay across the road just outside the farmyard.

One of the officers and myself had the curiosity to go into the temple buildings where we had enjoyed such pleasant days. They were deserted. Part of the inner courtyard was all scorched and crumbled as if there had been a fire. The straw was still lying about in the yard, and the implements of toil. The actual temple itself at the end of the grassy plot remained untouched, and the grinning gods inside it were intact ; but the dwelling rooms of our host were destroyed, and the rooms where we had lived ourselves were a mass of broken fragments, rubbish, and dust. The place had evidently been heavily shelled. There was not a trace of any human being, save that in the only room which remained undestroyed, on the matting of the hard *Khang*—that is the divan which stretches like a platform across three-quarters of every Chinese room—lay the dead body of a Chinese

coolie. The dog, the cat, and the hens had all gone.

We only remained a moment or two in the place, and as we left it the officer pulled my sleeve and pointed to a heap of rubbish near the gate. There, amidst some broken furniture, a mass of refuse, burned and splintered wood, lay the tattered remains of a golden kite.

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